

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 6, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 7 to 80, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 81 to 86, inclusive, answered orally.

Northern Ireland Issues

87. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when he last met the British Prime Minister, David Cameron; the extent to which he made him aware of the destabilising impact of marches and violence in Northern Ireland; if the British Prime Minister and his Cabinet issued any response to these problems. [41829/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I am in regular contact with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Theresa Villiers MP about the overall situation in Northern Ireland including contentious marches and the threat of violence. Over recent weeks, I met with all of the party leaders in the Executive and with the British Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg MP as well as with the Independent Chair of the Panel of Parties, Dr. Richard Haass, to discuss ways forward. I have also visited the interface areas in Ardoyne, Carrick Hill and Short Strand and was briefed by the Apprentice Boys and the PSNI in Derry about their assessment of the situation. As the Deputy will know from his recent visit to Belfast, the threats posed by dissident groups are undoubtedly serious. Since 2009, a series of violent attacks by these dissident groups have taken place, resulting in injuries and in the deaths of two British Army personnel, two PSNI officers and a member of the Northern Ireland Prison Service, David Black, in a brutal attack just a year ago. I know that all members of this House unreservedly condemn these acts and support the Garda Síochána and the PSNI in their efforts to overcome the dissident threat.

Over the last year there have been serious public order disturbances in Belfast. Some reputational damage was certainly caused by extensive international media coverage of the violence in Belfast following the 12th of July parades and the so called anti-internment march organised by dissidents in August. I condemn all such violence and the disregard for the rule of law which has been shown. The Police Service of Northern Ireland Northern Ireland has our highest admiration for the professionalism they have shown in the face of provocation from dissident loyalism and dissident republicanism marching on the street of Belfast over the summer.

The Parades Commission has worked hard to find solutions to contentious parades and their legally binding decisions should command respect from the political leadership of Northern Ireland as well as in the community. Anything less than wholehearted support for the rule of

law and for the Police Service of Northern Ireland damages peace and stability and is a matter of the most serious concern to the Irish government.

As co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, the Irish and British Governments urge the political parties in Northern Ireland to grasp the opportunity offered by the Haas talks. Political leadership is essential if we are to prevent further damage to community relations and to build support for the rule of law, the PSNI and to secure stability and economic prosperity in Northern Ireland.

Questions Nos. 88 and 89 answered orally.

Passport Services

90. Deputy Joe McHugh asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his Department will consider establishing a passport office service in the north west, in view of the distance of that region from Dublin. [48805/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Passport Service provides a comprehensive range of options for citizens to apply for passports. Applications may be made by Passport Express through some 1,000 post offices across the country and some 70 post offices in Northern Ireland. This means that no Irish citizen in the State, including in the Deputy's constituency has any significant distance to travel. Furthermore, as I have informed the House on a number of previous occasions an appointment service has been in operation at the Molesworth Street Passport Office for almost a year. The service allows customers to book a guaranteed time slot between 9:00 and 17:00, Monday to Friday. The service removes the necessity for any citizen to queue and provides certainty as to the duration of time customers will wait to be seen at the public counter.

In relation to the Passport Express services, customers are given a commitment by the Passport Service that ten days from the date of receipt by the Passport Service of properly completed applications a passport will be issued. The attraction and popularity of this service is reflected in the fact that last year over 428,000 Irish citizens applied for their passports through Passport Express. This means that over 83% of all persons applying for their passports in the State use Passport Express. Demand for the service has increased by a further 5% so far in 2013.

I am satisfied that the range of service options meets the current demands of passport applicants. Moreover, given the current financial pressures on the Department's resources, I do not believe there is a value for money basis to justify the opening of any additional regional passport office at this time.

Military Aircraft Landings

91. Deputy Seán Crowe asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade in view of the landing of a US military plane in Shannon Airport with a fixed weapon, his plans to curtail and stop the movement of military aircraft through Irish airports and airspace. [48955/13]

124. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has any concerns at the use of Shannon Airport by United States military aircraft; the reason an aircraft armed with a fixed weapon landed in Shannon Airport in September; his views on whether there is a need for inspections of US military aircraft as they pass through Shannon

Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48996/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 91 and 124 together.

As I have stated in this House previously, I am aware that one US military aircraft recently landed in Shannon Airport armed with a fixed weapon. The aircraft therefore did not comply with Ireland's policy conditions, which require that military aircraft are unarmed, carry no arms, ammunition or explosives, do not engage in intelligence gathering, and that the flights in question do not form any part of military exercises or operations.

The Government views any breaches of these conditions with the utmost concern, and, as the Deputy will be aware, the case in question was raised at the highest possible level with the US Embassy. The Embassy official expressed regret at this isolated incident, explained that it was due to an administrative error and provided assurances that steps have been taken by the US authorities to ensure that there is no recurrence.

A system for dealing with requests for landing by military aircraft at Shannon already exists and is being fully implemented. It is also kept under regular review to ensure that compliance with all relevant provisions of Irish legislation is maintained. The introduction of a system to inspect military aircraft passing through Shannon is not under consideration.

Arrangements for the overflight and landing of US military aircraft at Shannon Airport have been in place continuously under successive Governments for over fifty years. I am satisfied that these arrangements are fully consistent with Ireland's policies and legal requirements, including our traditional policy of military neutrality. There are no plans to curtail or to stop the movement of military aircraft through Irish airports and airspace which takes place in accordance with these conditions.

Middle East Issues

92. Deputy Seán Crowe asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a cross-party delegation of MEPs, which included two Irish MEPs, were recently refused access to visit Gaza during an official visit to the region, and if he has discussed it with representatives of the Israeli Government or its embassy in Dublin. [48957/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Israel has maintained for some time a policy of not enabling access to Gaza for official visitors, other than for Ministers with directly pertinent responsibilities, notably Foreign Ministers and Development Ministers. The rationale given is that continual visits by official delegations give tacit recognition to and support of the Hamas authorities in Gaza, and ignore the fact that the Palestinian Authority is effectively excluded from the Strip. Indeed this concern has also been expressed from time to time on the Palestinian side. I consider that visits to Gaza are important to show policymakers what are the real conditions there, and to convey to the local population that they have not been forgotten. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Israel does not want the effects of its policies in Gaza to be seen by a wider audience. I was of course aware of the recent refusal to allow a delegation from the European Parliament to enter Gaza, in keeping with this policy. My Department contacted the Israeli authorities, both via their Embassy in Dublin and through our own Embassy in Tel Aviv with the Foreign Ministry in Israel, to seek to have this decision reversed, and subsequently to express our disappointment that this was not granted. I have also been in direct contact myself with the two Irish MEPs concerned.

93. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the EU member states collectively or individually have evaluated the economic, social and political effects of the possibility of Britain's withdrawal from the European Union; the extent to which each member state is aware of the potential consequences; if specific provision is likely to be made across the European Union in the event of such a happening; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48937/13]

96. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has formed a view on the implications of the referendum, which has been proposed by the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, on the question of whether the United Kingdom should exit the European Union. [47730/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 93 and 96 together.

Prime Minister Cameron stated in a speech on 23 January 2013 that the Conservative party manifesto for the next parliamentary elections expected in 2015 will seek a mandate for a Conservative Government to negotiate a new settlement with EU partners, and that if a Conservative Government is elected, it will put such a settlement to a referendum in the first half of the next Parliament – i.e. by the end of 2017. However, as other political parties have not made equivalent commitments, the outcome of the next British Parliamentary elections may be a key factor in whether and when a referendum will take place.

In his speech, the Prime Minister set out a strong case regarding the importance of the UK's continuing and active membership of the Union. I welcome that strong commitment. I note also that the leaders of the other main political parties in Britain also support the case for continued membership.

In terms of the Irish position on the current debate in the UK, I firmly believe that the UK is better off within the European Union, and that the Union is stronger by having the UK within it. The UK is Ireland's nearest neighbour and largest trading partner. For this and many other reasons, it is in Ireland's interest for the UK to remain in the European Union. I have stated this clearly on a number of occasions, most recently on my visit to London last week where I met Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg. My colleague Minister of State Donohoe met with his counterpart in London earlier this month. Contacts between Dublin and London will continue on an ongoing basis.

The question of the British relationship with the European Union is, in the first instance, a matter for Britain itself. We know that other Member States are also watching this debate closely and I can confirm that the UK membership issue has arisen in bilateral contacts we have had during the year. However, there has been no collective evaluation of the implications of a potential British withdrawal. Such an evaluation, at this stage and in view of the uncertainty regarding the possible outcome, would be seen by many to be premature.

The UK remains a key partner for us in the European Union. Ireland's prosperity will always be closely linked with deepening and enhancing the economic relationship with the UK, which remains our largest trading partner. Along with the UK and other Member States, we have a shared interest in making sure that the Union is properly equipped to meet the challenges of the future.

94. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which it has been found possible unilaterally and through the aegis of the EU to co-ordinate a comprehensive aid programme for the Philippines in the wake of the recent natural disaster; the extent to which it has been found possible to meet requests for vital emergency supplies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48936/13]

136. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the global community has put in place pre-arranged plans to assist in the event of major natural disasters such as the typhoon in the Philippines; if through the aegis of the EU and UN, it has been found possible to put in place a pre-arranged and co-ordinated sequence of measures to deal with such events; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49531/13]

137. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the degree to which international aid has been made available to the disaster struck areas in the Philippines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49532/13]

138. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he in conjunction with his EU and UN colleagues has succeeded in focusing attention on the situation in the Philippines in the aftermath of the recent disaster with a view to ensuring that the maximum potential for aid distribution is achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49533/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): I propose to take Questions Nos. 94 and 136 to 138, inclusive, together.

Current estimates indicate that Typhoon Haiyan has affected 13 million people across 41 provinces (representing over 10% of the country's population), with up to 4 million people displaced. Official estimates indicate that at least 3,600 lives have been lost. However, it is likely that the full picture of the human cost of this disaster will only emerge in the coming days as relief teams get to remote areas, which are without power and communication following one of the most powerful storms ever recorded.

For our part, Ireland was one of the first countries to respond to this disaster and, on the basis of pledges announced to date, our contribution currently stands as one of the highest amounts provided by a bilateral donor. On Sunday, 10 November, the Government announced emergency funding from Ireland of €1 million towards the relief effort for Typhoon Haiyan. One week later, as the magnitude of this disaster became apparent, this sum was increased to €2.25 million. A separate dispatch of over 100 tonnes of essential shelter items for distribution to families worst affected by the disaster, to the value of €510,000, was also authorised and arrived in Cebu on Wednesday, 13 November. Irish Aid is preparing for a further airlift of essential shelter items in the coming days.

My officials are in daily contact with UNOCHA, UNICEF and WFP on requirements for deployment of technical experts from the Irish Rapid Response Corps. An Irish Captain and engineer in the Defence Forces was deployed on 17th November to support WFP's operations in the Philippines and an Information Management Specialist was deployed on the same day to support UNICEF's operations. We expect further deployments in the coming days. In addition, we have authorised the release of €425,000 in funding which had been pre-positioned with trusted NGO partners for sudden-onset emergencies such as this. This brings the total sum of Ireland's contributions to date to over €3 million.

My officials are also in regular contact with the European Commission's Directorate for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO) and, in particular, the EU Emergency Response

Centre. The EU has made available €10 million in emergency funding to support the immediate relief efforts in the areas worst affected by the Typhoon and has pledged a further US\$40 million in longer-term development assistance to assist with the Philippines' efforts to recover from this devastating disaster.

Despite the many logistical challenges to the relief effort, the response of the international community has been rapid, with a large UN Disaster Coordination (UNDAC) team and a team of experts from ECHO being deployed to assist the national authorities to assess the impact of the disaster as early as Friday, 8 November.

On the basis of these co-ordinated assessments, a UN Flash Appeal was jointly launched by the UN and the Government of the Philippines on Tuesday, 12 November. This appeal calls for funding of just over US \$300 million to cover immediate emergency relief, and continued support to the affected populations over the coming six months. To date, US\$ 78 million, 26 % of the funds requested under this appeal, has been received. Ireland will examine the potential for further contributions, within our means, to the relief programmes identified within this appeal.

The international community has learned many lessons from previous crises, such as the 2004 Tsunami and the 2010 Haiti earthquake. Under the leadership of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), reform of the humanitarian system has led to clear plans being put in place to strengthen preparedness and ensure the most effective, efficient and rapid delivery of aid possible. Ireland has supported these reform efforts and will continue to ensure that our response is timely, effective and meets the most critical, immediate needs of affected populations.

Human Rights Issues

95. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has had any discussions at multilateral or bilateral levels in relation to the imprisonment of Huber Ballesteros and the recent murder of Caesar Garcia in Colombia; the actions he has taken to address the staggering levels of political violence in Colombia, directed in particular against trade unionists; the way in which he can recommend that these Houses ratify an EU trade agreement which has been shown to lack the mechanisms required to enforce its human rights clauses (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48868/13]

101. Deputy Seán Crowe asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the recent negative developments in Colombia, with increased attacks on civil society organisers; and if he shares the widespread concern that they will impact negatively on the peace talks being held in Havana, Cuba. [48959/13]

111. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will contact the Colombian authorities as a matter of urgency and demand an independent and rigorous investigation into the assassination of Cesar Garcia, a farmer and environmental activist opposed to the La Colosa gold mining project and demand that the safety and security of community activists who oppose this project are guaranteed. [48802/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 95, 101 and 111 together.

I am aware of the arrest of Huber Ballesteros in August and of the recent killing of Cesar Garcia. I have asked my officials to follow closely developments in the judicial proceedings involving Mr Ballesteros, as well as the investigation into the killing of Mr Garcia.

When I met earlier this year with President Santos of Colombia, I raised human rights in Colombia, including my concerns regarding the situation of trade unionists. Ireland's views were also raised at the Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review of Colombia last April.

Ireland, and the European Union, is following closely the situation of a number of trade union officials, including Mr Ballesteros. Respect for human rights, including the freedom of expression and of assembly, remain at the centre of the EU-Colombia dialogue. It is important that people in Colombia who engage peacefully in the political and social developments of their society can do so without fear of risks to their personal liberty or security. It is also important that all parties operate within the rule of law. In the interests of fostering conditions which support peace and sustainable development, I urge all involved to address issues of insecurity and to investigate fully serious incidents such as the killing of Mr Garcia.

President Santos and I also discussed the Colombian peace process. I welcome progress reached earlier this month on the issue of political participation. I wish the parties success in their discussions on the other important items on their agenda so that a final comprehensive peace agreement can be secured and an end brought to the long conflict in Colombia.

My colleague, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, noted in a reply to a Parliamentary Question on 5th November last that the trade agreement between the European Union and its Member States and Colombia and Peru was signed in June 2012 and has been provisionally applied with Colombia since 1st August 2013. Free trade agreements such as these are important in helping our ambitious and innovative exporters to build new markets. The trade agreement with Colombia and Peru can also contribute in a significant way to economic developments in those countries. Leveraging the most from this potential can best be done by supporting economic growth that is made sustainable through good governance in the form of respect for labour as well as environmental standards, and the full promotion and protection of human rights. The inclusion of significant clauses covering human rights, the environment, labour principles and rights, and sustainable development in the trade agreement with Colombia and Peru provide an important framework within which we can seek the best possible outcome from the interaction between trade, social and environmental standards.

Guided by our commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights, Ireland will continue to work closely with our EU partners to support peace in Colombia and to promote the progressive improvement of human rights standards.

Question No. 96 answered with Question No. 93.

International Terrorism

97. Deputy Mick Wallace asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he accepts the destabilising effect of the use of armed drones; and if Ireland will take an international position on campaigning to end the use of armed drones. [48970/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Ireland has consistently taken the view that combating terrorism must be conducted in full respect of international law, in particular the law of armed conflict and human rights law. In line with the UN Global Strategy on Counter Terrorism, effective counter terrorism and the protection and promotion of human rights are mutually reinforcing and not competing goals. This means that human rights law must apply, including the prohibition on extrajudicial killings, outside of an armed conflict situation where international humanitarian law is applicable.

Ireland welcomes the recent reports of UN Special Rapporteurs, Professor Christof Heyns

and Ben Emerson, which looked at the use of armed drones from the perspective of the use of lethal force and their impact on civilians. Ireland accepts the findings of these reports which include the view that the established international legal framework for the use of force – international human rights law, international humanitarian law and inter-State force – constitutes an adequate framework for regulating the use of drones.

Any indiscriminate use of armed drones would clearly be contrary to international law. Every effort must be made to avoid civilian casualties and I am deeply concerned by instances where civilians have been killed by attacks using armed drones. However, an international agreement to prohibit the use of armed drones is unlikely. The President of the International Committee of the Red Cross has recently stated that under international humanitarian law, “drones are not expressly prohibited, nor are they considered to be inherently indiscriminate or perfidious. In this respect, they are no different from weapons launched from manned aircraft such as helicopters or other combat aircraft.”

Surveillance Issues

98. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has sought assurances from the Government of the United Kingdom and the US Administration that no surveillance has been conducted in this State by those authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48976/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Following allegations of US surveillance of European Union institutions earlier this year, the EU has engaged regularly with the US authorities in both Washington and Brussels to seek clarification on the issues raised. An EU-US High Level Expert Group on data protection has been established, where this and related matters are discussed. The EU is represented on this working group by the European Commission, the Presidency of the Council and the European External Action Service (EEAS), and the work of the group is ongoing. A number of meetings have already taken place in Brussels and in Washington, most recently on 6 November in Brussels. Following this work, the Commission and the Presidency are expected to issue a public, factual report which will be followed by an assessment and recommendations before the end of the year.

As regards the allegations of spying on EU delegations, High Representative Catherine Ashton raised EU concerns directly with US Secretary of State John Kerry and National Security Advisor Susan Rice on several occasions. I understand that more contacts at various levels have been established since to further discuss the allegations and obtain clarifications on the surveillance activities undertaken by the US with regard to EU delegations.

At their European Council meeting of 24/25 October last, EU Heads of State and Government issued a statement on the more recent developments concerning possible intelligence issues and the deep concerns that these events have raised among European citizens. They underlined the close relationship between Europe and the United States and the value of that partnership. They expressed their conviction that the partnership must be based on respect and trust, including as regards the work and cooperation of secret services.

For our part, and as I have outlined in a reply to a previous parliamentary question, the Government’s concerns have been conveyed bilaterally in contacts with the US Embassy in Dublin. While the House will appreciate that it is not the practice to comment in detail on surveillance and security issues and that the Minister for Justice and Equality has primary responsibility in this area, we do not have any information that would indicate that surveillance took place here

in Ireland. It has been made clear to the US Embassy however that any such surveillance here would be unacceptable to us.

There are no allegations as regards surveillance by the UK authorities.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

99. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his most recent efforts to promote political support in the US House of Representatives for the Immigration Reform Bill 2013. [48806/13]

118. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his efforts to promote support in the US House of Representatives for the Immigration Reform Bill; and his priorities for the upcoming 12 months in respect of engagement with the United States regarding American immigration reform, US-EU trade and US-Irish trade. [44106/13]

132. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions he held regarding legislative reforms to assist the undocumented Irish; the current status of plans for an E3 visa; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49407/13]

133. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress made to date on the introduction of an E3 visa in the US; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49408/13]

151. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress towards addressing the issue of the undocumented Irish in the United States with particular reference to the progress of the relevant immigration legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49546/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 99, 118, 132, 133 and 151 together.

This is an issue to which I accord very high priority, being conscious of the acute difficulties experienced by Irish undocumented in the United States, many of whom I have met on my visits there.

I have maintained contact, both directly and through our Embassy in Washington, with many key players in Congress including Republican Congressman Paul Ryan, Chair of the House Budgetary Committee and former Vice-Presidential nominee; Republican Congressman Bob Goodlatte, Chair of the House Judiciary Committee; leading Republican members of the House Judiciary Committee, Congressmen Mark Amodei, Spencer Bachus and Doug Collins; Minority House Leader Nancy Pelosi; Chair of the Congressional Friends of Ireland, Pete King; and the offices of House Speaker John Boehner and of House Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy. I have also maintained contact with key figures in the US Administration and with Irish-American community representatives.

I have reiterated throughout all these contacts the Government's interest in all aspects of immigration reform and in particular our interest in seeing an overall agreement reached which provides relief for currently undocumented Irish migrants and a facility for future flows of legal migration between Ireland and the US.

In this context, we very much welcomed the US Senate's approval of the Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Bill by a 68-32 margin on 27 June last.

The comprehensive draft legislation, which was drafted over several months by a bipartisan group of eight US Senators, provides for extensive reform of the US immigration system. It includes provisions that would legalise the status of undocumented Irish people and provide a path to permanent residency. It also provides for future flows of legal migration between Ireland and the US via the proposed E-3 visa. The focus has since shifted to the House of Representatives for its consideration of the issues and a key factor here remains convincing the Republican House Majority of the importance of making progress. It remains to be seen whether a consolidated Bill can be agreed between the Senate and the House of Representatives. It is generally accepted that securing overall agreement will remain a complex and challenging process, particularly at a time when Congress has been preoccupied by budgetary and debt issues. This was clear from my most recent contacts and I believe the challenge to secure agreement has become even greater in recent times. I am determined to continue to deploy all necessary resources at political, diplomatic and Irish community level to make progress on this vital issue. In support of this ongoing effort, a delegation of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade visited Washington DC last month for a programme arranged by our Embassy during which they met with key members of Congress and with Irish-American community representatives.

The Embassy in Washington continues our intensive follow-up work with all of our contacts on Capitol Hill and particularly with the Republican House leadership. It also continues to co-ordinate our lobbying efforts with our Irish-American community representatives. I wish to acknowledge the critically important role being played by these community organisations, including the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Chicago Celts for Immigration Reform and the Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform.

Northern Ireland Issues

100. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide an update on his discussions with Secretary of State Villiers and Minister Ford on prisoner rights in Northern Ireland jails; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48870/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Minister for Justice David Ford MLA and I have regular discussions about the situation in Northern Ireland. Since the 2010 agreement at Hillsborough, Minister Ford has responsibility for policing and criminal justice policy in Northern Ireland. In the post Hillsborough period, co-operation on Justice issues has gone from strength to strength and co-operation between the PSNI and an Garda Síochána is outstanding. The Government's focus is to ensure that policing and justice systems which are in place in Northern Ireland are robust and consistent with the principles and values of the Good Friday Agreement and the other agreements for which we are co-guarantors.

Prisons policy, including the issue of prisoner rights, forms a central part of Minister's Ford's remit. An executive agency, namely the Northern Ireland Prison Service, implements prison policy and a Prisoner Ombudsman operates completely independently of the Northern Ireland Prison Service with full authority to investigate complaints from prisoners and visitors to prisoners in Northern Ireland as well as deaths in custody.

I agree with Minister Ford's recent analysis that delivery of a reformed justice system, including the prison service, has a major part to play in building and protecting a more positive future for Northern Ireland. We believe that the full implementation of the 40 key recommendations made in a major report into prison reform by Dame Anne Owers is the best way to en-

sure that the rights of all prisoners are protected and that prison conditions are of an acceptable standard.

As the Deputy will be aware, I continue to raise with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Theresa Villiers, a small number of prisoner cases which have arisen from the exercise of certain non-devolved security powers. My officials in the British Irish Intergovernmental Secretariat keep me updated on developments related to such cases on an ongoing basis. In this context, I fully appreciate the ongoing contact between the Deputy and other members of the Oireachtas, who have a genuine interest in prison reform in Northern Ireland, with the relevant officials in my Department.

Question No. 101 answered with Question No. 95.

Diplomatic Representation Expenditure

102. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the efforts he has made to combine the use of embassies, Enterprise Ireland and Industrial Development Authority offices in order to reduce rent, staff costs and increase cross collaboration between the different parts; the locations where this has been rolled out already; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48972/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): In 1987, the Government formulated a policy to bring together, where feasible, our diplomatic and consular missions abroad and the offices of state agencies in a single location, designated as Ireland House. The precise model for implementing such an arrangement would, of course, vary and have to reflect local conditions and other factors. In all cases, the arrangement is one designed to increase the impact of Ireland's presence abroad, to improve coordination among all parties, and to maximise cost-efficiencies. There are a number of types of Ireland House currently operating overseas. The largest is in New York and comprises the Consulate General, Enterprise Ireland and the IDA in addition to other agencies including Tourism Ireland, Bord Bia, the American Ireland Fund and CIE Tours. Missions at Boston, Brussels, Budapest, Kuala Lumpur, Prague, Riyadh and Warsaw share premises with Enterprise Ireland. Our missions at Moscow, Seoul, Singapore, Sydney and Tokyo accommodate both Enterprise Ireland and IDA offices. The Consulate General in Shanghai shares premises with Enterprise Ireland and the IDA, and also Bord Bia and an agent for Tourism Ireland; the Ireland House in Madrid includes offices from Bord Bia, Enterprise Ireland and Tourism Ireland, together with the Embassy. Other configurations prevail elsewhere including at Embassy Beijing which shares premises with the IDA; Embassy Stockholm which shares space with Bord Bia; Embassy New Delhi which operates from shared premises with Bord Bia and Enterprise Ireland; and Ireland's Consulate General in Atlanta which operates from the same location as the IDA. In addition, there are a number of other locations where state agencies share facilities with each other in the form of an Ireland House, which does not include the Irish mission to that particular country. For example, in Paris, the IDA, Bord Bia, Tourism Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and BIM operate an Ireland House.

The Ireland House concept has been put in place where possible and the potential for expanding the current network of Ireland Houses is kept under review, for instance in situations where new missions or agencies are opening or moving to new locations.

Diplomatic Representation

103. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the outcome of the consular visit to a person (details supplied) who is facing a capital murder trial in Florida, USA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48815/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Consul General of Ireland to Atlanta visited the citizen referred to by the Deputy at the Land O'Lakes County Jail in Florida on 24th October 2013. Unfortunately, I cannot disclose further information to the Deputy as Consular visits are by their nature private and it would not be appropriate for me to make public any details of such a visit. I can assure the Deputy that the Consul General will continue to offer all appropriate consular assistance to the citizen concerned and that the Consular Assistance Section of my Department will continue to monitor this case very closely.

Human Rights Issues

104. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to recent reports which provide further evidence of war crimes and human rights abuses carried out by the Sri Lankan Government during the recent war with the Tamil Tigers; if he supports demands that these crimes be fully investigated; and if he will raise the issue with his European counterparts and at international fora. [48958/13]

135. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has seen the documentary entitled "No Fire Zone: The Killing Fields of Sri Lanka"; if the Irish Government has plans to take action on the issue of alleged atrocities in Sri Lanka in 2009 by government and Tamil forces; if the matter will be raised with our neighbours in the UK Government in view of the fact that Sri Lanka is a Commonwealth state; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49500/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 104 and 135 together.

The Government of Ireland monitors the human rights situation in Sri Lanka closely. All allegations of human rights abuses reported by international organisations, non-governmental organizations, and through the media are taken seriously. I am deeply concerned by the accounts of human rights abuses in connection with the conflict in Sri Lanka

Ireland regularly expresses its position on human rights situations of concern globally, in particular at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and in other relevant multi-lateral fora. Ireland also contributes actively to the formulation of European Union policy on human rights issues and cooperates and exchanges views with partners, such as the UK among others, on an ongoing basis.

Most recently, at the 24th session of the UNHRC, which took place from 9–27 September 2013, Ireland intervened in the General Debate on human rights situations requiring the Council's attention and expressed its concerns in relation to human rights in Sri Lanka. Ireland expressed its serious concern at abuses in that country, including in relation to the treatment of prisoners incarcerated in connection with the conflict, enforced disappearances, torture, and other human rights violations. Ireland further noted that genuine reconciliation among all groups and communities in Sri Lanka is essential, and requires justice and accountability.

At the same session, the EU also expressed strong concerns regarding the situation of human rights in Sri Lanka. On 9 September, in the General Debate on the annual report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the EU urged the Government of Sri Lanka to

implement effectively the recommendations of the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission and to conduct independent and credible investigations into allegations of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. The EU further encouraged the Government of Sri Lanka to fully cooperate with the UN human rights mechanisms and to allow access for all UN special procedures mandate holders. Finally, the EU expressed its dismay at the reported reprisals against individuals who met with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navanethem Pillay, during her visit to the country in August 2013.

In a subsequent statement on 25 September in a General Debate also addressing country situations, reacting to the latest information, the EU reiterated its concerns and in particular registered its deep concern at reports that government officials and other commentators in Sri Lanka appeared to be coordinating a campaign of disinformation in an attempt to discredit the High Commissioner and to distract from the core messages of her visit.

In a statement I delivered on behalf of the EU at the twenty-second session of the UN Human Rights Council on 27 February 2013, I highlighted concerns regarding the current human rights situation in Sri Lanka, and, in particular, the need for accountability and reconciliation. My attention was drawn to the documentary referred to by the deputy following its screening at that session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Ireland, together with our partners in the EU and UN, will continue to urge the Government of Sri Lanka to adhere to its international obligations and respect the human rights of all its citizens, through our accredited embassy in New Delhi and the relevant multilateral channels.

Northern Ireland Issues

105. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has raised with the Northern Ireland Secretary of State the serious issues relating to collusion outlined in the recent publication, Lethal Allies: British Collusion in Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48977/13]

122. Deputy Finian McGrath asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the issue of collusion was ever raised with the British Government over the past two years. [48875/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 105 and 122 together.

In recent weeks there have been several sharp reminders of the devastation that the conflict in Northern Ireland had on families and communities. The allegations of collusion and the murders described in Anne Cadwallader's book Lethal Allies, and the BBC and RTÉ documentary on "The Disappeared" this week, remind us that dealing with the past remains a central issue for society. They also remind us that thousands of people lost their lives, tens of thousands of people were injured and very few communities are untouched by the violence, trauma and bitter legacy of the period.

Allegations of collusion, investigations and calls for public inquiries into such allegations have featured in our discussions with the British authorities since the 1970s. Most recently, following the report by Sir Desmond Da Silva into Pat Finucane's murder, the British Prime Minister David Cameron said the degree of collusion exposed between elements of the security forces and loyalist paramilitaries was "unacceptable".

Anne Cadwallader personally briefed my officials on the main conclusions of her book

shortly in advance of publication. On 9 November in Armagh, I had the opportunity to meet with Denise Fox. She is the daughter of Denis Mullen, an SDLP Councillor who was murdered at his home near Moy on September 1, 1975. I was moved to hear firsthand about the impact her father's murder, and the attempted murder of her mother, has had on her life. Like many families in NI her search for truth is not yet complete. Many murders in that area highlighted by Ms. Cadwallader were raised by the Irish Government with British counterparts over the years, following representations from politicians and clergy in the area about the conduct of the security forces and UDR personnel. We are now examining the new text in detail and will consider further action in light of that examination. I raised these issues when I met the British Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, in London last week.

The Government supports the work of the Panel of Parties established by the First Minister and deputy First Minister to look at dealing with the past, with parades and with flags and emblems. When I last met with the Independent Chair of the Panel Dr. Haass in Dublin we discussed how best to deal with the legacy of the past. There is much in the Eames Bradley Report that is of relevance. That is a point I made to Dr. Richard Haass when I met him in Dublin and offered whatever support possible from the Irish Government to help him in his work. I will continue to emphasise this as those talks reach their conclusion.

Overseas Development Aid

106. Deputy Patrick O'Donovan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his Department has examined the level of reduction in the overseas aid budget of other EU-IMF programme countries; his views on whether the current percentage of expenditure is sustainable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48804/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): The Government is strongly committed to Ireland's overseas aid programme and to its place at the heart of Irish foreign policy. The programme reflects the values and generosity of spirit of the Irish people and is a concrete expression of our determination to help those less fortunate than ourselves. Our new policy on international development - *One World, One Future* - maintains the Government's focus on assisting some of the world's poorest countries and communities, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa. It also takes account of Ireland's future economic and trading interests, as developing countries grow their economies and generate their own revenues, while we continue to enhance our ties with them. It also reconfirms the Government's commitment to achieving the UN target of contributing 0.7% of GNP in Official Development Assistance (ODA) when economic circumstances permit.

Over the past few years, despite the very difficult economic circumstances facing the country and the unprecedented demands on the exchequer, this Government has managed to largely stabilise our ODA budget. In all the circumstances, this is a very significant achievement and a clear demonstration of the Government's commitment to the programme. Ireland's total ODA budget for next year is expected to be set at some €602 million, compared with €622 million in 2013. This is slightly less than 50 cent in every €100 of our national income.

The most recent data published by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) relates to 2012 and confirms that the ODA budgets of many donor countries, including Ireland, have been reduced as a result of the financial crisis. Details of donor ODA spending in 2013 will be published by the DAC in the spring of next year.

Overseas Development Aid

107. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the way Irish humanitarian aid to Syria has been utilised; if any aid committed to date has been used to battle the current polio endemic in that country; if he will provide an update on his engagement in the Syrian crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48975/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): The protracted and tragic crisis in Syria and in neighbouring countries has resulted in unprecedented levels of humanitarian need, requiring a sustained and urgent response from the international community. As the number of fatalities moves towards 120,000, there are now approximately 9 million people who are in need of immediate life saving support. In addition to more than 6.5 million people who are displaced within Syria, there are currently 2.2 million Syrians who have fled the violence to take refuge in neighbouring countries. Ireland has been doing all it can to help alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people and is one of the most generous contributors to the humanitarian response on a per capita basis, having provided almost €14 million in assistance since the crisis began. Ireland has focused our humanitarian aid through trusted NGO partners, as well as to key UN partners and the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement - agencies capable of delivering impartial assistance to large numbers of beneficiaries. These agencies also play a key role in supporting the host governments in neighbouring countries to provide assistance to the refugee populations. This funding has supported the provision of water, food, shelter and vital medicines to internally displaced persons within Syria and also to refugees and host communities in neighbouring countries, particularly Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon. We have worked closely with all agencies that receive Irish Aid support to ensure that the necessary systems are in place to monitor and evaluate the use and impact of Ireland's assistance, and to ensure aid is delivered in accordance with the fundamental humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

Recently confirmed cases of polio in the highly-contested north-east Deir-ez-Zor province of Syria are an extremely worrying development. These cases mark the first polio outbreak in Syria in 14 years. Our partners UNICEF and the World Health Organization have mobilized a campaign to contain the confirmed polio outbreak and have launched a national immunization strategy, targeting 1.6 million children. In light of the particularly worrying conditions for Syrian children, Ireland has to date provided €1 million to support UNICEF's efforts to enhance access to essential health services for children and we have provided an additional €300,000 to the World Health Organization in direct response to the crisis.

In order to assess the situation on the ground, I travelled to the region in early October. While there, I witnessed the deteriorating humanitarian situation and emphasised Ireland's support for the generous efforts of Syria's neighbouring countries to provide shelter and basic services for Syrian refugees. During my visit, I announced an additional contribution of 3 million Euros for operations in Syria and neighbouring countries, thereby demonstrating Ireland's continued leadership and commitment to respond to one of the most complex humanitarian contexts in the world today.

Ireland has matched its material humanitarian support with concrete efforts to find a sustainable political solution to the crisis and to advocate for safe and unimpeded humanitarian access. We have consistently called for all parties to the conflict to fully respect international humanitarian law and to refrain from the targeting of civilians. In view of the immense needs in Syria and neighbouring countries hosting Syrian refugees, Ireland will continue to provide assistance, within our means and as the situation evolves, to the humanitarian response.

Question No. 108 answered with Question No. 89.

Human Rights Issues

109. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has had any discussion with the Spanish authorities in relation to human rights issues affecting Basque prisoners, especially in relation to alleged torture and in relation to those prisoners who are extremely ill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48872/13]

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

Overseas Development Aid

110. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will make decent work a priority of his Department in the post-2015 development agenda; his views on the remarks made by Mr. Colin Wrafter at the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade recently that decent work is a human right (UD, Article 23); if he supports the new Asia floor wage; and if he will promote this right in Africa, as the focus of so much of Ireland's aid and trade policies, where there is both accelerating industrialisation and intensive agriculture; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48871/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): Under Ireland's new policy for International Development – One World, One Future, the Government is committed to ensuring that economic development is compatible with human rights, including the right to decent work and our engagement in this area will be informed by, among other international standards, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Ireland has been a consistent and strong supporter of the decent work agenda globally. And we have funded programmes related to this agenda in Asia and Africa for years. Since 2001 Ireland has had a partnership programme with the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Irish Aid support to the ILO has focused on providing greater opportunities for people in developing countries to secure decent employment and incomes. This programme has contributed substantially to livelihood improvement and poverty reduction, knowledge sharing and capacity development as well as influencing the development of workplace and employment policy. The programme has yielded encouraging results in a number of Irish Aid Key Partner Countries in Africa, such as building the capacity of National Labour Inspectorates, which has been supported through the programme in Zambia.

The right to decent work is among the key challenges which are informing on-going discussions on the Post-2015 Development Framework. Ireland has been and it will continue to be actively engaged in driving the post-2015 agenda, including through our participation in the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, where there have been very constructive discussions to date on the challenge of creating decent jobs to employ all those seeking work in developed and developing countries.

At the September UN High Level Event MDG Review, which the Tánaiste and I attended, global leaders launched a process of intergovernmental negotiations which will lead to the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda. Ireland will continue to engage actively in the

process with a major focus on addressing issues of equality, social inclusion, decent work and the challenges of environmental sustainability and poverty eradication.

Question No. 111 answered with Question No. 95.

Constitutional Convention Expenditure

112. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide details of the costs involved in financing the Constitutional Convention to date; and if he will further provide a breakdown of the costs incurred at each location where the convention has met since it was first convened. [48502/13]

The Taoiseach: The total expenditure on the Convention on the Constitution to date is €908,000.

The Convention was first convened in Dublin Castle on 1 December, 2012 and all of its plenary meetings have been held in the Grand Hotel, Malahide, which was selected following a competitive tendering process.

A breakdown of the costs involved in running the plenary meetings up to and including September, 2013, is set out in the following table:

Category	Cost
Conference/catering & accommodation	€200,953.32
Broadcasting services	€70,417.50
Simultaneous translation services	€13,284.00
Reimbursement of travel expenses	€25,743.46
Facilitation & note-taking services	€22,795.00

*Costs associated with the November plenary meeting are not yet available.

Departmental Offices

113. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide the total euro amount paid out from the Office of the Chief State Solicitor and the Attorney General's office to companies (details supplied) for each year from 2004 to date in 2013; the total euro amount paid out from the Office of the Chief State Solicitor and the Attorney General's office to senior counsel from 2004 to date in 2013; the total euro amount paid out from the Office of the Chief State Solicitor and the Attorney General's office to companies (details supplied) for non-audit services from 2004 to date. [49315/13]

The Taoiseach: The following table sets out the total amount paid by the Offices of the Attorney General and the Chief State Solicitor to the specified companies for each year from 2004 to date.

Amounts marked with an asterisk (*) are in respect of expert evidence relating to litigation against the State.

Questions - Written Answers

Year	Arthur Cox	Matheson	A&L Goodbody	McCann Fitzgerald	William Fry	Mason, Hayes, Curran
2004	-	-	-	-	-	€100.00*
2005	-	-	-	-	-	-
2006	-	-	-	-	-	-
2007	-	-	-	-	-	-
2008	-	-	-	-	-	-
2009	-	-	-	-	-	-
2010	-	-	-	-	-	-
2011	-	-	-	-	-	-
2012	-	-	-	-	-	-
2013 (to 14 November)	€1,765.05	-	-	-	-	-

The following table sets out the total amount paid by the Offices of the Attorney General and the Chief State Solicitor to the specified companies for non-audit services from 2004 to date.

Amounts marked with an asterisk (*) are in respect of expert evidence relating to litigation against the State.

Year	PWC	KPMG	Ernst and Young	Deloitte	Grant Thornton
2004	-	-	-	-	-
2005	-	€36,300*	-	-	-
2006	-	-	-	-	-
2007	€27,932.85	-	-	-	-
2008	-	€112,042.47*	-	-	-
2009	-	€30,647.84*	-	-	-
2010	-	-	-	-	-
2011	€4,918.32*	€30,641.18*	-	€52,407.52*	-
2012	-	-	-	€14,259.99*	-
2013 (to 14 November)	-	-	-	€16,974.00*	-

The following table sets out the total amount paid by the Offices of the Attorney General and the Chief State Solicitor to Senior Counsel(1) from 2004 to date.

Year	Total
2004	€6,031,180.15
2005	€6,950,602.84
2006	€5,670,129.62
2007	€7,649,326.31
2008	€8,346,596.09
2009	€6,832,635.59
2010	€4,705,588.23
2011	€3,984,654.90
2012	€3,592,659.56
2013(to 14 November 2013)	€2,995,076.06

(1) Please note that these figures relate to date of payment. It is possible that payments listed to Senior Counsel were in respect of work carried out as Junior Counsel.

Seanad Reform

114. Deputy Patrick Nulty asked the Taoiseach his plans for the reform of Seanad Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49519/13]

The Taoiseach: On 23 October 2013, I listened in the Seanad Chamber to the views of Senators on how to move forward in relation to the Seanad. I now intend to meet with the leaders of the parties in the Dáil and Seanad to discuss the matter further with them.

I will take all of the views into account so that the future of Seanad Éireann can be shaped in a way that will enable it to become a more meaningful and effective institution in our society.

As a small first step I have already announced that legislation is to be prepared to implement the 1979 referendum decision which allowed the State to extend the provisions for the election of members of the Seanad by certain universities to other institutions of higher education in the State.

Question No. 115 answered with Question No. 86.

Global Economic Forum

116. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the meetings he held in or around the Global Economic Forum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41828/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The 3rd Global Irish Economic Forum took place on the 4th and 5th of October and brought together members of the Global Irish Network and the Government, along with heads of third level institutions and semi-state bodies. The Forum discussion was very focussed on this occasion, with attendees being asked to consider the contribution that the Forum and the Global Irish Network could make to the Action Plan on Jobs. I attended the Forum and spoke at the opening session, and the closing Plenary alongside the Taoiseach. I also participated in a panel discussion on the theme ‘Opportunities for Ireland in the UK and Europe’, as well as a number of the closed-session working groups. As part of a commitment arising from the 2011 Forum to bring more tangible benefits of the Global Irish Economic Forum to indigenous Irish companies, I also participated in a side-event to the Forum which brought over 100 Irish SMEs together with Global Irish Network members to discuss scaling up for global business. The SMEs were drawn from Enterprise Ireland client companies, as well as officials and companies from Northern Ireland who were brought together by InterTrade Ireland.

Also attending the Forum this year was Helene Conway-Mouret, Minister for French Nationals Abroad. Minister Conway-Mouret has a long connection with Ireland, having lived here for many years. I took the opportunity to have a formal meeting with the Minister en marge of the Forum.

Global Economic Forum

117. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the achievements the Global Irish Economic Forum has made to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42735/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The first and second meetings of the Global Irish Economic Forum, in 2009 and 2011 respectively, transformed the way in which the Government does business with leading international figures who are connected to Ireland. A number of initiatives emerged from both of these events which have achieved considerable success. Perhaps the best known of these is the Gathering, which is the largest tourism initiative ever organized by the State and which continues to attract visitors to Ireland. Connect Ireland, which aims to harness the power of Irish networks across the world in support of job creation, announced 83 new jobs in Dublin and Cork during the 2013 Forum.

Another initiative assisting Irish companies in expanding is the Global Irish Contacts Programme, which directly links the leading business figures abroad with Irish companies seeking to increase their exports. Developing on the Contacts Programme, the 2013 forum included an event which brought Global Irish Network members together with Irish SMEs to share knowledge and develop networks. The SMEs were nominated by Enterprise Ireland in the main but also included companies from Northern Ireland working with InterTrade Ireland.

Benefitting both Irish business and young graduates is the Farmleigh Fellowship, which is establishing a critical mass of highly skilled Irish professionals with first-hand experience of business in Asia.

The value of Irish networks is seen in the enhanced support for business & technology networks such as the Silicon Valley based Irish Technology Leadership Group.

A further achievement was President Clinton's "Invest in Ireland" Forum in New York in February, 2012.

The outcomes of the 2013 Forum will be presented to Government shortly and a plan will be put in place to ensure that the hard work carried out over the two days is brought to fruition. The inclusion of Regional Roundtables and networking opportunities for SMEs, both north and south, will also hopefully produce tangible outcomes for Irish businesses.

Question No. 118 answered with Question No. 99.

Cross-Border Enterprise Initiatives

119. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on an all-island economy. [44111/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): My ambition for the all-island economy is for well-educated, highly-trained and confident people North and South working cooperatively and successfully together for the economic benefit of this island. The Comprehensive Study on the All-Island Economy, launched in October 2006, set out an ambitious range of strategies and collaborative actions aimed at maximising the competitive advantages of the island. Through constructive engagement with Northern Ireland Ministers, we continue to build on the findings of that study, to develop initiatives designed to boost economic activity on the island and to eliminate market distortions arising from the existence of the border. We are far better off working together than separately, and the development of an all-island economy is in everyone's interests. Promoting an all-island identity has already

proved very successful in the Tourism sector, where Tourism Ireland has successfully marketed the island throughout the world.

Progress on an all-island basis also continues to be made in the area of Innovation which is now a major priority both North and South with hundreds of research scientific projects underway involving partners from universities and institutes of technology. As we focus on promoting jobs and growth, it is also important that we maximise co-operation and participation in current and forthcoming EU Framework programmes for research and technological development. InterTrade Ireland, in addition to encouraging small and medium enterprises to maximise commercial opportunities across the island, has developed programmes specifically to help SMEs develop their innovative and exporting capabilities, and to encourage and stimulate greater co-operation and increased applications for Framework Programmes funding.

I am convinced that with the agencies, North and South, cooperating in marketing our innovative island and on investment promotion and overseas trade missions, this will be the engine that ensures there will be a bright economic future for this island.

I believe that the potential for intra-island trade and economic activity has not yet been fully tapped and that there is scope for increasing the levels of trade in both directions. In support of this we clearly need to assist our SMEs in whatever ways we can. This in turn can safeguard jobs, and encourage cross-border investments. InterTrade Ireland is already doing excellent work in this area.

The opportunities to work together in developing trade links with the key emerging markets on an all-island basis are clear. Our Embassies continue to be available to assist trade missions from both parts of the island and individual companies from either North or South or on an all-island basis to take advantage of opportunities for mutual cooperation.

Discussions on financial and economic matters feature at all Plenary meetings of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC). At the recent NSMC plenary meeting in Armagh on 8 November 2013 discussions covered a wide range of financial, economic and EU matters including the actions being undertaken to help support economic recovery, the importance of attracting Foreign Direct Investment and ensuring adequate access to credit within the banking sector in each jurisdiction.

In the context of the St Andrews Agreement Review, Ministers are considering their priorities for further co-operation in their respective sectoral areas.

We will continue to work closely and constructively with our colleagues in the Northern Ireland Executive to examine how we can jointly support economic growth and the creation of jobs on the island and will continue to look at areas where we can expand mutually beneficial cooperation, find economies of scale and seek to eliminate unnecessary duplication in the provision of services.

In particular, there is a pressing need to create jobs, especially for our young people. Youth unemployment is an urgent priority across this island, and Ministers have agreed that, where possible, we should work together to make the most of the common approaches being taken North and South to deal with this key issue.

The recent Global Irish Economic Forum focused on opportunities for job creation, especially for the young, and on economic growth. I was clear that this year's Forum should provide an opportunity to plan and to strategise on an all-island basis. That is why I asked that one of the three regional events take place in Belfast. Very significantly representatives of Northern companies and business groups also attended roundtable discussions with Network members as

part of the main Forum event at Dublin Castle. The indications are that genuine contacts were established with real prospects for assisting the export growth of businesses with all-island business interests. It is clear that the Northern business community have recognised how much the economy, North and South, can gain from such co-operation.

Northern Ireland Issues

120. Deputy Joe McHugh asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions held with First Minister Robinson and Deputy First Minister McGuinness in respect of the programme of work being conducted in Northern Ireland by Dr Richard Haass. [44110/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I regularly meet with the First Minister and deputy First Ministers for discussions on a range of issues. The Taoiseach and I met with both the First Minister and the deputy First Minister most recently en marge of the North South Ministerial Council in Armagh on 9 November. I also met with deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness in Derry on 19 October and with First Minister Peter Robinson in Belfast on 10 November. Amongst the issues discussed on each occasion were the Panel of Parties talks on parades, flags and emblems and the past currently ongoing under the Chairmanship of Richard Haass and the Vice-Chairmanship of Meghan O'Sullivan. Both party leaders are actively engaged in the talks process. I conveyed the Government's belief that the process presents an opportunity to reaffirm the commitments made throughout the hard-won peace process and to making further progress towards advancing reconciliation and the creation of a truly reconciled and prosperous society in Northern Ireland. I recalled that whilst the issues to be addressed in the talks are difficult and contentious, I had encouraged Dr Haass to be ambitious in his approach and for all talks' participants to engage actively with the process. I assured them that the Irish Government is ready and willing to support the process in any way we can.

Good Friday Agreement

121. Deputy Gerry Adams asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the date which has been agreed to set aside to hold a week long debate on the outworking of the Good Friday Agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47676/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The implementation of the Good Friday Agreement is a matter of the highest priority for this Government. I value the contribution made by the Houses of the Oireachtas in this regard, as shown by the motion adopted last May by Dáil Éireann to coincide with the Agreement's fifteenth anniversary. The valuable work of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, through its regular meetings and through visits by delegations from the Committee to Northern Ireland, ensures that there is ongoing cross-party debate and consideration of issues relating to the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Question No. 122 answered with Question No. 105.

Middle East Peace Process

123. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide an update on his engagement with the Middle East peace talks; if he condemns the announcement by Israel that it plans to build new settlements in east Jerusalem; the actions he has taken as a result of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48995/13]

146. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the Middle East peace process is proceeding in satisfactory fashion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49541/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 123 and 146 together.

The Israeli and Palestinian sides are negotiating directly, with the United States as the only outside observer. The role of Ireland and our EU partners is therefore to support and encourage both parties in their engagement together, and work on how EU policies can help this, including by addressing issues which are damaging to prospects for peace.

The talks have been proceeding in regular session, and the parties have endured domestic criticism to enter them and have remained engaged. These are positive signs. Last week, however, the Palestinian negotiating team offered their resignations to President Abbas, stating that Israel was not engaging seriously, and no real negotiations were taking place. This is clearly very worrying, and resonates with concerns which we had ourselves.

But there is simply no point in generating headlines and pressure about this process. The parties are wisely and commendably saying as little as possible about this in public, and we need to do the same.

I will of course be discussing the position, and whether the EU can do anything to help, with my EU colleagues, and indeed with any relevant actors, in the period ahead.

Continuous settlement announcements by Israel have clearly been damaging to the confidence which is the only basis for any talks process such as this. The announcement of new settlement projects last week, later suspended, was startling in both its size and locations, and clearly damaging.

However that announcement related to a preliminary stage in the planning process, not to actual building, and has now been suspended. I am more concerned in many ways with actual ongoing construction, and with the continuing waves of evictions and demolitions which are part and parcel of the settlement process. I made clear this concern in a statement I issued on 1 November relating to plans for a further 1,500 settlement units in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Question No. 124 answered with Question No. 91.

Common Foreign and Security Policy

125. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on whether there is a need for political commitment at the highest level of the EU to ensure the development and provision by EU member states of capabilities for the operations of a Common Security and Defence Policy; if he supports an effective industrial and technology base to deliver those capabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48997/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The December European Council will hold a thematic discussion on security and defence issues, in accordance with the mandate received from the December 2012 European Council. The discussions will be informed by a Report on the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) by High Representative Ashton and a Commission Communication entitled “Towards a more competitive and efficient defence and security sector”. The meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council in Defence Ministers’ format on 18-19 November is expected to agree substantial conclusions on CSDP, which will feed into the December European Council Conclusions. The draft conclusions cover the effectiveness and visibility of the CSDP, defence capabilities and the defence industry. CSDP is intended to equip the Union with an operational capacity for missions outside the EU aimed at strengthening international security in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter. These missions draw on civilian and military capabilities provided by Member States for a range of tasks encompassing humanitarian and rescue efforts, conflict prevention, joint disarmament operations, peace-keeping, crisis management, including peace-making, and post-conflict stabilisation. These tasks form part of the EU’s Comprehensive Approach to the promotion of peace and security.

The EU’s capacity to engage in CSDP peace-keeping and crisis management operations relies on the assets made available to it by its Member States. For that purpose, an effective industrial and technological base is needed to ensure that the market can continue to provide the required capabilities for the purposes of CSDP in the future.

Defence Forces Deployment

126. Deputy Lucinda Creighton asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his role with the Department of Defence in determining the deployment of members of the Defence Forces on EU training missions; the reason the EU training mission in Somalia has seen a decrease in the number of Irish Defence Force personnel stationed there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49043/13]

127. Deputy Lucinda Creighton asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the Defence Forces deployment with the EU training mission in Somalia is to continue in 2014 and beyond; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49088/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 126 and 127 together.

The decision-making process in relation to the participation of the Defence Forces in EU Training Missions, such as EUTM Somalia, is the same as the process involved in all deployments to UN-authorised peacekeeping and crisis management operations overseas.

Possible participation by the Defence Forces is considered in the first instance by my colleague, the Minister for Defence, on a case-by-case basis. When considering any particular deployment, a number of factors are taken into account, including the existence of realistic objectives and a clear mandate which has the potential to contribute to a political solution; consideration of how the mission relates to the priorities of Irish foreign policy; and the degree of risk involved. My Department works closely with the Department of Defence in advising on the foreign policy considerations to be taken into account in the decision to deploy.

EUTM is playing a very important role in strengthening the capacity of the Somali army, with a view to the long-term sustainable development of the country’s security forces. Ireland’s participation in EUTM Somalia, which has been led by an Irish Force Commander since 2011,

has formed an important part of Ireland's contribution to efforts to support peace and stability in the country. There are currently eight members of the Defence Forces serving with EUTM Somalia, and my Department has seconded a civilian Political Advisor to the mission since September 2013.

Following a change in the mandate of the mission in January 2013, EUTM Somalia is gradually moving its activities from Uganda to Mogadishu. It has also refocused its activities towards strategic-level mentoring and advice to the Somali Ministry of Defence and General Staff, along with support and advice on Security Sector Development. Subject to security conditions in Mogadishu, the move is expected to be completed in January. Participation in EUTM Somalia is reviewed by the Government on an annual basis. Government approval is required for the continued participation of the Defence Forces in the mission beyond 31 December 2013. Proposals in this regard will be brought to Government by my colleague, the Minister for Defence, in the coming weeks. Ireland will hand over the role of Force Commander in Spring 2014, therefore it is anticipated this may result in a small reduction in the number of personnel deployed.

The Irish Government's new Policy for International Development, which I launched last May, re-affirms Ireland's commitment to promoting stability and development in countries that are experiencing fragility, such as Somalia. We will continue to support Somalia as it transitions to stability and we will build on the €41 million in humanitarian and development assistance provided by Ireland to Somalia since 2007.

Trade Missions Data

128. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide the total number of ministerial led trade missions that have taken place as part of St. Patrick's Day festivities since 2011; if he will further provide the country for each of these missions; the names of each business who have operations here who accompanied the respective Minister on each trade mission; the amount of additional business quantifiable in euro terms each business who accompanied the Minister is doing with that country since the trade mission; the total number of businesses the Ministers met with that were potential foreign direct investors here; the total number of these businesses that have subsequently created jobs here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49237/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): St. Patrick's Day offers a unique opportunity to promote Ireland's economic and political interests overseas, with levels of publicity and media attention unmatched by the national day of any other country. Ministerial visits around the St. Patrick's Day period are organised to ensure that we use this exposure to maximise the promotion of Ireland's trade, tourism and investment interests and to spread a positive message about Ireland's economic recovery. The proposed programme of Ministerial travel is drawn up by my Department in consultation with the Embassy network and the state agencies and then considered by Government on my recommendation. Each year, Enterprise Ireland also organises a series of trade missions for its client companies, with the active support of my Department's Embassy network.

Since 2011, there have been 47 Ministerial visits as part of the St. Patrick's Day programme, (including travel by the Taoiseach and the Attorney General). The following table shows the number of visits each year, the number of countries visited and the number of individual company engagements (to note: the number of visits over the St Patrick's Day period in 2011 was significantly reduced, due to the timing of the General Election of that year).

-	Year	-	-
-	2011	2012	2013
St. Patrick's Day Visits	9	18	20
Countries Visited	8	15	21
Individual Company Meetings	17	43	70

Company meetings during St. Patrick's Day Ministerial visits are a key marketing tool for the state agencies, including the IDA. They provide, at first hand, an opportunity for Ministers to reinforce the Government's commitment to foreign direct investment as well as policies that highlight Ireland's competitive operating environment and have contributed to strong FDI growth with the creation of over 12,722 new jobs by IDA client companies in 2012.

As well as individual meetings with companies, the St. Patrick's Day period is also used to promote trade, tourism and investment at larger business events and to promote Ireland in the international media.

In 2013 for example, the Taoiseach, Tánaiste, Ministers and Embassy network, together with the IDA, Enterprise Ireland and other state agencies promoted trade and investment in Ireland to 101 business events, attended by over 8,500 Irish and international company representatives leading to new leads for Irish exporters and for inward investment to Ireland.

In addition, The Taoiseach, Tánaiste, Ministers and the Embassy network promoted key messages on trade, tourism and investment in op-eds and interviews in the international media – reaching, at a very conservative estimate, over 16.3 million people.

Trade Missions Data

129. Deputy Lucinda Creighton asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide the total number of trade missions he or a Minister for State within his Department have been on since he became Minister; if he will provide the country for each of these missions; the names of each business who have operations here who accompanied him on each trade mission; the amount of additional business quantifiable in euro terms each business who accompanied the Minister is doing with that country since the trade mission; if he will provide the total cost to his Department for each of these trade missions; the total number of businesses the Ministers met with that were potential foreign direct investors here; the total number of these businesses that have subsequently created jobs here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49238/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Trade promotion and economic messaging are key elements in all visits abroad undertaken by myself and the Minister of State for Trade and Development. My visit to China in July of this year, organised by my Department and the Embassy of Ireland in Beijing, in close cooperation with the state agencies, had a strong trade and investment focus including targeted meetings with Chinese companies interested in investing in Ireland and potential partners for Irish exporters, several business networking and investment events, a promotional event with Tourism Ireland and the announcement of the achievement of full market access for Irish salmon to the Chinese market.

Last week, I met with Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg in London on a visit which focused on opportunities for Irish financial services companies. During the visit, I hosted an En-

terprise Ireland event for senior executives from thirty Irish technology and financial services companies and their key UK-based clients from the banking, insurance and retail sectors. Organised in close cooperation between the Embassy of Ireland and Enterprise Ireland, the annual event is designed to support Irish software and financial services companies to increase exports to the UK and create jobs in Ireland. It is Enterprise Ireland's premier financial services sector event in London, where financial services is a key target sector.

Since 2011, I have led several trade-focused visits to the US and the UK as well as individual visits, focusing on trade and economic promotion to China, Canada, France, Germany, Russia, Japan, Korea, Uganda and Kenya. The then Minister of State for Trade and Development Jan O'Sullivan led a trade-focused visit to Vietnam in 2011 and her successor, Minister of State Joe Costello has led trade-focused visits to Vietnam, Malaysia, South Africa, Ghana and Nigeria and also accompanied the President on his recent visit to Mexico and last year's visit to South America (Brazil, Argentina and Chile), both of which included a substantial trade focus.

In addition to the visits outlined above, I agree the programme of Enterprise Ireland trade missions each year with the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation based on the proposals submitted by Enterprise Ireland and focused on the priority markets of interest to their client companies. Enterprise Ireland Ministerial-led overseas trade missions and events, organised with the active support of my Department's Embassy network, are an important element of the Government Trade Strategy, which recognises the valuable role they play in developing and creating new trade, tourism and investment opportunities for Ireland.

Ten Enterprise Ireland trade missions have been led by myself and Ministers of State from my Department since the formation of the Government. In 2011, then Minister of State for Trade and Development, Jan O'Sullivan TD led Enterprise Ireland trade missions to Saudi Arabia/Qatar and to South Africa. In 2012, Minister of State Joe Costello led Enterprise Ireland trade missions to Turkey, Russia, Brazil and South Africa. This year, I led an Enterprise Ireland trade mission to Turkey and Minister of State Costello has led Enterprise Ireland trade missions to Canada, Belgium and South Africa/Nigeria. Enterprise Ireland does not release the names of companies that accompany Ministers on trade missions as this is commercially sensitive information. The travel and accommodation costs for the travelling Minister and two officials are borne by Enterprise Ireland.

The benefits flowing from such trade missions are realised over time making it difficult to measure accurately the jobs or total exports secured as a result of a specific trade mission. However, Enterprise Ireland provides information on contracts won during trade missions as appropriate. These contracts won and the contacts made during trade missions lead to job creation and long-term economic benefits for Ireland. In 2012, indigenous exports reached a new record level of €16.2 billion and net job creation from inward investment was at its highest in ten years. This level of exports and investment is greatly supported by Ministerial-led trade missions and the continued strong interest from companies in participating demonstrates clearly the value placed on such trade missions.

Diplomatic Representation

130. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he intends to reopen the Irish embassy in the Vatican; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48811/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): In November 2011, the Government announced its decision to close Ireland's Embassy to the

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Holy See. This decision was driven by economic factors deriving from our need to cut public expenditure and focus the modest resources of our diplomatic service on economic recovery.

As the Deputy is aware, the Government decided to appoint the Secretary General of my Department as non-resident Ambassador to the Holy See, thereby ensuring that contact with the Holy See is maintained at the highest possible diplomatic level. The Ambassador travels to Rome regularly and I am satisfied that the current arrangement for Ireland's representation at the Holy See is the most effective possible in light of the resource constraints faced by my Department.

While there is no plan to re-establish a resident Embassy to the Holy See in the immediate term, I will keep the deployment of our diplomatic and consular resources under review in light of ongoing national priorities and the availability of resources.

Departmental Budgets

131. Deputy Gerry Adams asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the budget for the Anglo-Irish division of his Department for each year since 2010; and any proposed budget reductions currently under consideration for 2014. [49348/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The figures in the table includes expenditure charged to the Anglo-Irish Division's budget. Salary and related costs of staff are not included as they are a charge on the overall budget of the Department rather than on a specific Division. Capital expenditure is not included as such expenditure does not form part of the Division's budget. The budget allocation for 2014 is based on a no policy change on 2013.

Anglo Irish Budget 2010-2013

Anglo Irish Division	Budget 2010	Budget 2011	Budget 2012	Budget 2013
ADMINISTRATION EXPENDITURE	€133,330	€126,500	€173,302	€168,541
PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE	€3,195,000	€3,150,000	€2,865,000	€3,085,000
TOTAL BUDGET	€3,328,330	€3,276,500	€3,038,302	€3,253,541

Questions Nos. 132 and 133 answered with Question No. 99.

Overseas Development Aid Provision

134. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the amount of funding provided for youth programmes through Irish Aid in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49464/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): Irish Aid works on behalf of the Irish people to address poverty and hunger in some of the poorest countries in the world. Support to children and young people is an integral part of Irish

Aid's focus, and is mainstreamed especially through our health and education programmes.

Support to our hunger programmes, which accounts for twenty per cent of the Overseas Development Assistance budget, includes targeting of maternal and child nutrition and child mortality. Addressing gender based violence, including against young women is also an area of particular concern of our aid programme. Ireland also contributes to the UN Children's Organisation UNICEF which has as its core mandate supporting the children of the world. Given the wide range of supports targeted both directly and indirectly at young people across a very diverse range of Irish Aid programmes and funding streams, including NGOs and organizations assisting young people, it is not possible to give a precise figure for this expenditure in 2013. A full list of the projects and programmes supported by Irish Aid is given in the Annual Reports which are available on line and in hard copy.

Irish Aid's Development Education Strategy (2007-2015) specifically sets out our continued commitment to supporting development education in the youth sector in Ireland. A budget of €3 million was made available in 2013 for development education activities in Ireland. As part of this funding, Irish Aid provides support to a range of programmes in Ireland that target young people, both in the formal setting of schools, as well as the more informal environment of clubs and youth organisations. The overall aim of these programmes is to deepen the understanding of young people and build the capacity of their educators on issues related to global poverty and development.

Question No. 135 answered with Question No. 104.

Questions Nos. 136 to 138, inclusive, answered with Question No. 94.

Overseas Development Aid Provision

139. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the international community continues to monitor and assist the various locations throughout Africa which continue to suffer from human rights abuse, war, famine and genocide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49534/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): Ireland, along with our EU Partners, pursues a strategic and comprehensive approach to countries in Africa suffering the consequences of conflict or natural disaster. This approach encompasses political and diplomatic engagement, development cooperation programming, humanitarian assistance, and support for peacekeeping operations.

The progress in African countries, particularly those emerging from conflict, and the approach the EU should take to promote peace and security and development, is discussed at the EU Foreign Affairs Council. The Tánaiste participated in a discussion on the latest developments in some of Africa's most troubled regions - the Great Lakes, Somalia and Mali - at the Foreign Affairs Council in July.

The EU is the largest donor to African countries providing approximately €21 billion in assistance annually, while Ireland channels some 80% of its development assistance to Africa. Together with other donor countries, we have worked particularly closely with the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to put in place new systems to improve the way in which aid is delivered and to ensure that coordination on the ground is improved through enhanced monitoring systems. The EU, and Ireland as a bilateral donor, also provide very significant humanitarian support across Africa, in close cooperation with regional bodies, including the African Union.

Significant progress has been made on regional security with the support of EU Common Security and Defence Policy missions. Somalia is a good example of the EU's Comprehensive Approach in action, with the Horn of Africa Strategy acting within the wider framework for EU action in Africa. One element of this approach is Operation Atalanta, the EU's first CSDP Maritime Mission which aims to protect World Food Program and merchant shipping transiting the Gulf of Aden against piracy. Another element is the EU's Military Training Mission which has been training Somali soldiers since 2010, and which is currently led by an Irish Mission Commander, Brigadier General Gerald Aherne. Last year a civilian maritime capacity building mission, EUCAP NESTOR, was launched, which is mandated to enhance the capacities of five countries in the Horn of Africa to tackle maritime security issues, including piracy. An initiative proposed by Ireland on enhancing the EU's contribution to UN peacekeeping was further strengthened during Ireland's Presidency of the EU earlier this year. Ireland has and will continue to deploy personnel to civilian and military EU and UN missions.

Overseas Development Aid Provision

140. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps that have been taken to ensure that international aid reaches those for whom it was intended throughout the African continent with particular reference to countries in respect of which difficulties have arisen in this regard in the past; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49535/13]

147. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the countries worldwide now deemed to be the top ten world's poorest countries; the extent to which the international community continues to engage in a co-ordinated effort to address the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49542/13]

155. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which Irish aid workers continue to be allowed to engage in their work without interference at local level throughout the African continent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49550/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): I propose to take Questions Nos. 140, 147 and 155 together.

As Minister of State with responsibility for Ireland's Official Development Assistance, I am very conscious of the need to have a high level of assurance that our development assistance is fully accountable and that it makes a real difference to the lives of the world's poorest people, reaches those most in need and without interference.

All proposals for funding are rigorously appraised by Irish Aid staff using clear criteria, including quality of intended impact, sustainability, cost effectiveness and efficiency in the use of resources. All partners in receipt of Irish Aid funds are obliged to report regularly on the results being achieved. The programmes are subject to regular internal and external monitoring and are evaluated and audited by independent experts, as well as by my Department's Evaluation and Audit Unit.

The top ten poorest countries in the world are in Africa. The UN Human Development Index classifies Niger as the poorest, followed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, Chad, Burkina Faso, Mali, Eritrea, Central African Republic, Guinea and Burundi. In an effort to help the continent to confront these far-reaching challenges, we allocate some 80% of Ireland's development assistance to Africa.

The international community's efforts to address global poverty in a comprehensive and coordinated way are encapsulated in the focus on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These goals, established in 2000 have set clear targets to be reached by 2015. Overall there has been good progress to date, although there are significant gaps in certain countries and in some of the social sectors. There is now a real push globally to make further progress by 2015 and to look beyond that timeframe to replace the MDGs with a new and updated vision for development.

The commitment and dedication of Irish aid workers is well known and greatly respected, both in Ireland and around the world. They bring technical excellence and solid experience in their field, which enables them to meet the needs of local communities in often demanding environments.

The engagement of Irish citizens includes a wide range of groups from Missionaries and NGOs, to personnel within UN and other international organisations, the Defence Forces and an Garda Síochána as well as from my own Department. The skills that our aid workers bring to Africa and the programmes in which they work reflect the needs and demands of the host countries.

In recent years, the aid community has had to face, in particular, the growing problem of insecurity, especially in humanitarian contexts. Irish-based aid NGOs have not been immune to such difficulties, operating as they do in some of the most volatile and insecure environments in the world.

Against this challenging backdrop, my Department developed guidelines this year on NGO Professional Safety and Security risk Management. The guidelines were designed to help our NGO partners fulfill both their legal obligations as employers and their duty of care responsibilities towards their own staff, especially through an enhanced implementation of their own existing governance processes.

Foreign Conflicts

141. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the peace process in Colombia remains on track; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49536/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I strongly support the Colombian peace process and hope that the negotiations underway will bring an end to the long conflict which has caused much suffering. In May, negotiators reached agreement on the land reform element of their discussions. In a positive development earlier this month, agreement was reached on the issue of political participation. The timetable for the talks is a matter for the parties involved and I wish them success in reaching agreement on the other important items remaining on their agenda so that a final comprehensive peace agreement can be secured as soon as possible. Ireland will continue to follow closely developments on the Colombian peace process, and to support a negotiated solution to the conflict in Colombia.

Foreign Conflicts

142. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the international community has been able to positively influence or assist the democratisation of Egypt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49537/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I have already made clear my concerns about the overthrow of Egypt's elected President and the implications for Egyptian democracy of the troubling events of recent months. The Egyptian interim authorities have established a constitutional reform process, which is aimed at submitting a new constitution for approval in a referendum, expected to be held in late 2013 or early 2014. According to reports from Egypt, parliamentary and presidential elections will be held in 2014 following the approval of a new constitution. Ultimately, it will be for the Egyptian people to decide freely on the merits of any draft constitution which they will hopefully have the opportunity to do in the planned referendum.

Ireland supports the return of a democratic constitution and government in Egypt at the earliest opportunity, and I have made this point both to colleagues within the EU and in discussions with other international community partners. I have also spoken recently with Foreign Minister Fahmy on a bilateral issue and we both look forward to a fuller discussion of the situation in Egypt in the near future. It is at least some encouragement to note that the state of emergency imposed by the interim authorities in August during the large-scale disturbances which took place at that time has now been lifted, following calls from many in the international community, including the EU.

Egypt remains a vital partner for Ireland and Europe and it is very much in all our interests to keep working with and assist the Egyptian people to return to a sustainable path of democratic renewal and development.

Humanitarian Aid

143. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the ongoing efforts of the EU and UN in regard to offering practical support and aid to the war victims in Syria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49538/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The protracted and tragic crisis in Syria and in neighbouring countries has resulted in unprecedented levels of humanitarian need, requiring a sustained and urgent response from the international community. There are now approximately 9 million people who are in need of immediate life saving support. In addition to more than 6.5 million people who are displaced within Syria, there are currently 2.2 million Syrians who have fled the violence to take refuge in neighbouring countries. Ireland has been doing all it can to help alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people and is one of the most generous contributors to the humanitarian response on a per capita basis, having provided almost €14 million in assistance since the crisis began. The total includes support to NGOs partners as well as to members of the Red Cross/Red Crescent and six different UN agencies.

The EU has expressed grave concerns about the humanitarian situation in Syria, and underlined the pressing need to protect civilians. The EU has stated it will continue its support as the largest donor with the total aid contribution reaching now €1.9 billion. Thus, the EU welcomed the Presidential Statement of the UNSC on 2nd October, which calls on the Syrian regime to take immediate steps to facilitate the expansion of humanitarian relief operations and lift bureaucratic impediments and other obstacles including, *inter alia*, the need to allow for humanitarian access across borders from neighbouring countries. It has also expressed its full support for all diplomatic measures to ensure protection of medical and humanitarian personnel and the safety of their passage.

The revised UN response plans for Syria and the refugee populations in neighbouring coun-

tries has requested close to US\$5.2 billion dollars for operations in 2013. This represents the largest humanitarian appeal in the UN's history. The appeal for the humanitarian response inside Syria is 58 per cent funded to date and the refugee appeal for neighbouring countries is 63 per cent funded to date. The UN is succeeding in reaching many vulnerable populations across Syria. In September, WFP reached 2.7 million people with family food rations throughout the 14 Syrian governorates and is planning to scale up to 4 million people per month. WHO has reached 339,566 people with medicine and medical supplies and UNICEF has reached 233,344 children with health screening in both Government and opposition controlled areas. Nevertheless, despite these positive results, the Government remains concerned that over 2.5 million people inside Syria have not been reached with any assistance for up to a year. Reaching these populations under siege is an urgent priority.

Over the course of the next month, a regional UN team will complete consultations on the Comprehensive Regional Strategy exercise which will inform finalisation of the Regional Response Plan (RRP) due to be launched on 16th December. It has been agreed that all initiatives – including the response to a new worrying polio epidemic – will be incorporated under the chapeau of this integrated plan. The Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP) for 2014 will be launched on the same date.

Peace in Syria remains the overall objective and Ireland supports calls for an urgent political solution to solve the crisis which continues to have a profound impact on Syrians and neighbouring countries.

EU Enlargement

144. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the issue of European Union enlargement remains active; the degree to which the various negotiations are proceeding satisfactorily; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49539/13]

145. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the European Union remains committed to and is actively progressing enlargement negotiations with the various countries in the western Balkans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49540/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 144 and 145 together.

The EU remains committed to enlargement, as one of its most successful policies, fostering peace, stability and prosperity in the wider European region.

This year, in addition to Croatia's accession to the Union, there has been welcome progress in the accession negotiations with Turkey and Montenegro. Following the agreement reached in June under the Irish Presidency, a new chapter in Turkey's accession negotiations was formally opened for the first time in three years at an Inter-Governmental Conference which took place earlier this month. Under our Presidency, we opened a new chapter in talks with Montenegro and work is underway towards the opening of the two key chapters relating to the judiciary, fundamental rights and justice, freedom and security.

The countries of the Western Balkans are continuing on their respective EU paths, with Serbia and Kosovo having made particular progress this year. In June, under the Irish Presidency, the EU agreed to open accession negotiations with Serbia and to begin negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with Kosovo. This agreement came in recognition

of the progress achieved in the EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and the agreement on principles governing the normalisation of relations between the two countries.

The European Commission has recently recommended the granting of candidate status to Albania, in light of the progress it has made and on the understanding that it continues to take action in the fight against organised crime and corruption. Member States will consider this recommendation in the context of preparing Council conclusions on enlargement in December.

The European Commission has also once again recommended that accession negotiations begin with Macedonia, and this will also be considered by Member States in December.

Progress has not been as significant for other countries. Accession negotiations with Iceland have come to a standstill, following a decision of the Icelandic Government to put them on hold.

There has been a disappointing lack of progress in Bosnia Herzegovina, where political leaders have so far failed to reach agreement on key national reforms, despite the on-going intensive efforts by the EU to facilitate agreement through the High Level Dialogue on the Accession Process. While the EU will continue to do everything in its power to encourage movement in Bosnia's path towards the EU, this is ultimately, however, a matter for Bosnian political leaders.

Ireland remains a strong supporter of EU enlargement and we look forward to seeing each country make progress on its EU path.

Question No. 146 answered with Question No. 123.

Question No. 147 answered with Question No. 140.

Middle East Issues

148. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the international community has established visiting rights in respect of prisoners held by the various protagonists in the Middle East with particular reference to the need to ensure that basic human rights are observed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49543/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): In its engagement with countries across the Middle East region, the EU works to advance protection of human rights as a standard element in its dialogue with all these countries. This includes the full range of human rights issues, including issues relating to prisoners. The conditions relating to prisoners, including issues such as visiting rights, vary from country to country across the Middle East region and it is not possible to characterise them generally. While the situation in relation to such prisoners may in many cases be less than satisfactory, we are at least able to press for better treatment for them. We are also conscious, however, of numerous instances of persons held in various territories by non-state actors, who are in general accorded no visiting rights at all, and no assurance of their wellbeing or indeed their safety.

Middle East Issues

149. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and

Trade the extent to which the international community continues to monitor and encourage the administration in Iran towards democratisation; the extent to which events to date show hopeful signs of progress; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49544/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Iranian system cannot be considered a democracy in our terms, in that the people do not ultimately have full control of the system, and opposition voices are excluded from the system and in particular from contesting elections. Nonetheless, it should also be recognised that the Iranian people enjoy greater political participation than in many countries in the region, and that the Majlis, while open only to supporters of the system, is not merely a rubber stamp assembly. In the recent Presidential election, while the people were not offered a free choice of candidates, it is clear that President Rouhani was the popular choice for President, and holds a clear mandate. President Rouhani has come to office with a commitment to greater openness and respect for human rights. In terms of delivery, these are early days, and the new administration is heavily committed to an attempt to make progress on the nuclear issue. We need also to remain aware that there are other political forces in Iran, many of whom may be highly resistant to change. We will be observing closely what happens in Iran, and trying where we can to encourage positive change.

Foreign Conflicts

150. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the situation in Sudan continues to be monitored by the UN and the EU; the extent to which efforts to bring about an improvement in the area in respect of human rights and other issues has been achieved to date through the efforts of the international community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49545/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): The situation in Sudan and South Sudan is monitored on an ongoing basis by the EU, the UN and other international partners. Ireland is working closely with our EU partners and others to ensure that, in addition to a focus on the political and security situation, priority is given by the international community to the vital issues of human rights and humanitarian access to people and communities affected by the conflict and the tension in the region. The latest outbreak of violence in Sudan, including the attacks on UNAMID peacekeepers on 13 October near El Geneina, in West Darfur, in which one Zambian and three Senegalese peacekeepers were killed and one more wounded, were strongly condemned by the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton, and by UN Secretary General Ban and members of the UN Security Council. I am pleased to note that the mandate of the joint African Union - UN lead mission, which is over 20,000-strong and contributes greatly to peace and security in the region, has recently been extended until August 2014.

In January last, with Ireland's encouragement, the EU urged the Government of Sudan to allow safe and unhindered access for international humanitarian workers to all civilians and has underlined the fact that the ongoing conflicts in Southern Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur remain obstacles to progress in providing the full range of support that we would like to provide to Sudan, and in the greater region. The UN Security Council on 2 May and 17 May adopted Resolutions demanding that both Sudan and South Sudan fulfil their obligations under international law to allow access by humanitarian agencies to civilian populations in need of assistance.

In the period following the adoption of the UN Security Council Resolutions, there has reportedly been some calming of the tensions between Khartoum and Juba, and less violence on

the ground. However, the issue of humanitarian access has remained unclear, despite continuing pressure from the EU and other parties.

On 27 June 2012, the Sudanese Government finally approved a Tripartite Proposal of the African Union, the Arab League and the United Nations for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to civilians in the areas of the Blue Nile and South Kordofan held by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N). The deal further included a joint plan between the Sudanese Government and the UN to deliver humanitarian relief to those in need in both states.

Ireland also ensures that focused attention is given to the situation in both Sudan and South Sudan in the UN Human Rights Council, of which Ireland is currently a member. At the 23rd session of the Human Rights Council in June 2013, Ireland, as Presidency of the Council of the European Union, delivered a statement on behalf of the European Union about the human rights situation in South Sudan. In it, the European Union expressed concern at reports of increasing intimidation towards journalists and human rights defenders, as well as serious constraints on the rights to freedom of expression and of assembly. The EU encouraged the Government of South Sudan to bring the legal framework regulating activities of civil society actors in line with international standards. The statement also highlighted major concerns as to the justice and prison systems and encouraged the Government of South Sudan to ensure accountability for all perpetrators of human rights violations.

At the 24th session of the UN Human Rights Council which took place in September 2013, the EU delivered a statement to the Council under Item 4 of the Council's agenda. Item 4 deals with human rights situations that require the Council's attention. This statement expressed concern as to the violent conflict in both Sudan and South Sudan, noting in particular ongoing human rights violations against civilians, perpetrated in impunity.

As a member of the EU, Ireland aligned itself fully with this EU statement and also made a national statement under Item 4 which further emphasised our concerns as to the situation in Sudan.

At the same session, Ireland also intervened in the interactive dialogue with the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Sudan, focussing in particular on freedom of religion and the rights of women and children. Ireland urged the Government of Sudan to implement fully its constitutional provisions and international obligations relating to freedom of religion, ensuring respect for the religious belief of others. Ireland noted its disquiet at the security risks, including sexual and gender-based violence to which women are exposed and urged the Government of Sudan to accede to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women at the earliest opportunity.

My Department is currently in contact with a range of interlocutors in Sudan, including our Irish NGO partners working in the area. In terms of practical and financial support, the Government has provided substantial assistance for those affected by the conflict in this region. At the start of this year, I approved an allocation of €3 million for the UN-managed Common Humanitarian Funds (CHFs) for both the Republic of Sudan and South Sudan. On 8 July, in recognition of deterioration in the humanitarian situation I announced a further funding allocation of €2m to these CHFs. These funds are being provided to help UN agencies and NGOs target the most critical humanitarian needs across both countries, including in areas affected by conflict and by displacement of populations from the Blue Nile and South Kordofan areas. In addition, almost €2.5 million in assistance has been allocated to a number of key Irish NGO partners, including Goal, Trócaire, MSF and World Vision for programmes in Sudan and South Sudan under the annual Irish Aid Humanitarian Programme Plan funding scheme.

Question No. 151 answered with Question No. 99.

Foreign Conflicts

152. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the use of child soldiers throughout various conflict areas worldwide continues to be monitored by the international community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49547/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): The recruitment and use of child soldiers continues to be a serious problem and a matter of grave concern to Ireland and indeed the international community. The involvement of child soldiers has been reported in most recent armed conflicts and in almost every region of the world over the last two decades. Each year, the United Nations Secretary-General issues a report on children and armed conflict which lists all armed groups – both state and non-state – that recruit and use children. The most recent list includes 52 state and non-state armed groups operating across three continents. It is estimated that up to 300,000 children continue to be involved in more than 30 conflicts worldwide, including, notably, in a number of internal and regional conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa. Against this background, international legal efforts to curb the practice of using children in armed conflict have been stepped up significantly. In 1996, the UN General Assembly voted to establish the post of Special-Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, tasked to serve as an independent advocate for the protection and well-being of boys and girls affected by armed conflict.

In 1999, the UN Security Council passed its first Resolution highlighting the impact of armed conflict on children and condemning violations carried out in that context. With the adoption of nine Resolutions and several Presidential statements since then, the Security Council has developed important tools to strengthen child protection and to promote compliance with international standards.

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

Ireland has engaged on this issue in various ways including, crucially, through the core work of our aid programme in addressing poverty and under-development – major root causes of this problem. Ireland has also supported more targeted and specific interventions from supporting agencies such as UNICEF and the International Criminal Court, to designing interventions in our bilateral programmes that address the needs of children affected by conflict. We remain deeply committed to addressing this issue, as has been recently reflected in Ireland's new Policy for International Development, 'One World, One Future', where we have pledged to increase our engagement on the issue of child soldiers and children in armed conflict.

Ireland has also been active on the question of child soldiers during our membership of the Human Rights Council. Ireland intervened in the interactive dialogue with the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, which took place during the 24th session of the Human Rights Council in September 2013. In our intervention, we expressed strong support for the mandate of the SRSG and underlined that the conviction of Thomas Lubanga last year for the recruitment and use of child soldiers sent a powerful message that no individual who violates international criminal law can be confident of impunity. We encouraged all concerned countries to cooperate with UN mechanisms and to ratify the Optional

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

Human Rights Issues

153. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he continues to use his influence at EU and UN level with a view to ensuring that women and girls under various regimes worldwide not known for their observance of women's human rights are encouraged to address these issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49548/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): The Government remains fully committed to combating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls. This is a key element of our human rights agenda. I will continue to advocate for this important issue at the regional and international level. Ireland has been a strong advocate of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. We have taken a leadership role in the international arena calling on other states to commit to implementation of this resolution. The resolution calls for an increase in the participation of women in peacemaking and peacebuilding processes; the protection to women and girls in armed conflict; and the incorporation of a gender perspective into peacekeeping and peacebuilding processes.

At an EU level, Ireland has taken an active role in negotiations on the EU guidelines on violence against women and girls and combating all forms of discrimination which were adopted in 2008. Ireland is an active member of the EU Taskforce on Women, Peace and Security.

Ireland is also an active participant in the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) which is the principal global policy-making body on gender equality and the advancement of women.

Combating all forms of violence against women and girls is a key priority of Ireland's overseas development programme both through policy dialogue and programme support.

Both bilaterally in our engagement with partner countries, and at the UN and in other multi-lateral bodies, the Government consistently emphasises the importance of gender mainstreaming as a key aspect of ending poverty, hunger, discrimination and vulnerability across the globe.

The Government cooperates closely with key UN partners in their work on combating all forms of violence against girls. UNICEF, UN Women and UNFPA work closely with governments across the developing world to promote women's rights and empowerment. In this context, Ireland supports specific programmes on targeting elimination of discrimination against women and girls; empowerment of women; and achievement of equality between women and men as partners and beneficiaries of development, human rights, humanitarian action and peace and security.

Human Rights Issues

154. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the international community continues to engage with Yulia Tymoshenko in the context of the need for observation of her entitlement to basic human rights; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49549/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I am

on record in Dáil Éireann expressing concern over the ongoing detention of the former Prime Minister of Ukraine, Yulia Tymoshenko and refer the Deputy to my statement to this House of 2 October last. As the Deputy will recall, I raised the matter with Ukraine's Foreign Minister during our bilateral meeting on 27 September on the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York. The issue was also raised at an informal ministerial level breakfast meeting between members of the Council and Ukraine which I attended before the FAC last month. The European Parliament's monitoring mission to Ukraine, which is led by the former President of Poland, Aleksander Kwaœniewski, and the former President of the European Parliament, Pat Cox, has also been engaging actively with the Ukrainian authorities to resolve all areas where the EU has expressed concern, including the area of selective justice. The mission has met with Ms Tymoshenko in hospital in Kharkiv more than a dozen times over the past 17 months. I wish to commend the mission for the conscientious and professional manner in which it has performed its important task and to reaffirm Ireland's full support for its work. On 4 October, the monitoring mission made a public appeal to the President of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovych, to release Ms Tymoshenko for medical treatment on health and humanitarian grounds by way of pardon. Germany has publicly stated that it would be ready to host Ms Tymoshenko for such treatment. I support their appeal. However, President Yanukovych has indicated a preference for the alternative path of a special law, to be agreed in the Ukrainian parliament, which would permit treatment abroad of convicted persons on health and humanitarian grounds, including Ms Tymoshenko.

Unfortunately, and as the monitoring mission reported to the European Parliament's Conference of Presidents on 13 November, the Ukrainian parliament has been unable to reach agreement to date on a draft law or formula that would permit Ms Tymoshenko to leave Ukraine for medical treatment. While the monitoring mission has expressed the view that it would be premature to conclude that there has been compliance with the conditions set, it believes that the outstanding issues can be resolved with the necessary political will. The mandate of the mission has been further extended until the Vilnius Summit and it is scheduled to return to Ukraine this week.

Question No. 155 answered with Question No. 140.

Tax Code

156. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan asked the Minister for Finance the reason his Department is supporting the one-parent tax credit cut that undermines the equal rights of children, discriminates against children living in separated units, enforces less favourable financial, social and emotional supports on these children than on all other children in our society; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48895/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, the One-Parent Family Tax Credit (OPFTC) is being replaced with a new Single Person Child Carer Tax Credit from 1 January 2014. The Single Person Child Carer Tax Credit will be of the same value, i.e. €1,650, as the existing OPFTC and will also carry the same entitlement to the extended standard rate tax band of €36,800 per annum. The new credit will be targeted such that it is available only to the primary carer of the child. A maximum of one credit will be available per single carer/claimant, regardless of whether he or she cares for more than one child. This is the same condition that applies to the current OPFTC. Given the difficult fiscal environment it is essential to review all tax reliefs, credits and incentives in order to ensure that they are properly targeted and if necessary re-focused in order that they can achieve the socio-economic objectives that are set for them. A system that allows multiple claims in respect of the same child, as can

happen with the OPFTC, is unsustainable.

The Commission on Taxation acknowledged that the One-Parent Family Tax Credit plays a role in supporting and incentivising the labour market participation of single and widowed parents. However, in its recommendations it concluded that the credit should be retained but that it should be allocated to the principal carer only. The restructuring of the credit will achieve such an outcome.

I should point out that, there is no specific tax credit for children in the Irish tax code; rather credits are applicable in respect of children in different circumstances and therefore the decision to replace the One-Parent Family tax Credit with the new Single Person Child Carer Tax Credit does not undermine the equal rights of children or discriminate against children living in separate units. If anything, the parents or guardians of such children will continue to be treated more favourably than others due to the availability of the new credit.

Notwithstanding the above, I have listened carefully to the views expressed by my colleagues and many Deputies in this matter and I will be bringing forward an amendment at Committee Stage, which will allow the credit to be used by a non-primary carer in situations, for example, where the primary carer has no tax liability.

Tax Exemptions

157. Deputy Dessie Ellis asked the Minister for Finance the reason for the delay in granting tax exemption in respect of an organisation (details supplied) in Dublin 12. [49134/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that Section 134(3) of the Finance Act 1992 (as amended) and Statutory Instrument No: 353 of 1994 (Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations, 1994 (as amended) provide for permanent relief from the payment of specified maximum amount of VAT and VRT for organisations registered under the scheme. On 22 May 2013, an application form (DDO) was received in Revenue's Central Repayments Office, Monaghan from the organisation (details supplied). In order to process this application, further details regarding the funding of the organisation were required. This information was requested from the organisation on 24 May 2013. To date no reply has been received. A further reminder issued to the organisation on 14 October 2013.

Vehicle Registration

158. Deputy Alan Farrell asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider the introduction of further provisions to Statutory Instrument No. 432 of 1999, Vehicle Registration and Taxation (Amendment) Regulations 1999, to ensure the illegal cloning of licence plates can be eliminated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49274/13]

159. Deputy Alan Farrell asked the Minister for Finance his views on the number of licence plates in circulation which do not conform with Statutory Instrument No. 432 of 1999, Vehicle Registration and Taxation (Amendment) Regulations 1999, namely, displaying D instead of IRL; the use of Fraktur font and the absence of the placename; if additions to this statutory instrument could be brought forward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49275/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 158

and 159 together.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that Statutory Instrument (S.I.) No. 318 of 1992, Vehicle Registration and Taxation Regulations (as amended by Statutory Instrument No. 542 of 2012) prescribes the format, lettering, dimensions and technical specifications of registration plates to be displayed on vehicles in the State. I am also informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the correct format of the registration plate is a requirement for the National Car Test (NCT), and where the registration plate is not in the prescribed format the vehicle will fail the NCT Test. In addition, it is an offence to display the wrong registration number on a vehicle or to display the registration number in the incorrect format and a person convicted of such an offence is liable to a fine of up to €5,000.

While the format of the number plate is regulated, there are no controls or regulations in relation to the manufacture of such plates. This is a matter that has been considered by the Revenue Commissioners but it is considered that such controls would not be effective given the simplicity and widespread availability of the technology for manufacturing number plates.

I am satisfied that the measures in place provide an appropriate deterrent to non-compliance with the regulations on registration plates.

Further information may be obtained on the Revenue website at the following link: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/vrt/leaflets/format-vehicle-registration-plates.html>.

Property Taxation Assessments

160. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the way a person may change the value of his or her house for local property tax purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48817/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I understand that the person who has contacted the Deputy about this matter wishes to decrease the value previously declared to the Revenue Commissioners. As I informed the House previously in my replies to a number of Questions on this matter, most recently in my reply to Question 64 (47424/13) on 7 November 2013, Local Property Tax is a self-assessed tax so 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 as at 1 May 2013.

I also informed the House that the Revenue Commissioners had confirmed to me 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, setting out fully the circumstances in which the overpayment arose and providing the relevant supporting documentation. Evidence could be in the form of recent sales or advertised house prices in the area, professional valuations or house price surveys for the area.

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 to make a repayment.

Tax Reliefs Eligibility

161. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider allowing ap-

prentices to apply for tax relief on tuition fees as a result of the changes in the funding requirements being faced by apprentices during their time in institutes of technology. [48824/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Section 473A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides, subject to certain conditions, for tax relief at the standard rate of income tax (20%) as regards a portion of qualifying fees paid by an individual in respect of a third-level education course including a postgraduate course. Qualifying fees means tuition fees in respect of an approved course at an approved college and includes what is referred to as the “student contribution”. No other fees (e.g. administration fees, examination fees, capitation fees) qualify for tax relief. For the tax year 2011 and subsequent tax years, the maximum qualifying fee per course per academic year is €7,000.

The tax relief is confined to tuition fees actually borne by the claimant. Tuition fees that are, or will be, met directly or indirectly by grants, scholarships, employer contribution or other means are to be deducted in arriving at the fees qualifying for tax relief.

An individual can claim tax relief on fees paid by him or her in respect of an approved course pursued by other individuals (e.g. a son or daughter) and that the claim may cover more than one student. Only a portion of the qualifying fees in each claim is eligible for relief. Each claim is restricted by the amount shown in the following table.

Year	Full time (Where any one of the students in respect of whom relief is claimed is a full-time student).	Part time (Where all the students in respect of whom relief is claimed are part-time students).
2013	€2,500	€1,250
2014	€2,750	€1,375
2015	€3,000	€1,500

The Annual Student Contribution is levied on students attending Institutes of Technology. According to the Department of Education and Skills, FÁS/SOLAS has paid a part of the Annual Student Contribution due in respect of apprentices since 2004, with apprentices themselves paying the part of the contribution relating to examination fees. As part of Budget 2014, SOLAS will cease making payments to Institutes of Technology and apprentices will pay the full pro rata Annual Student Contribution.

The amount due by apprentices is calculated on a pro rata basis of the time which they spend in Institutes of Technology during the academic year. This is typically one third of the Annual Student Contribution paid by students attending for the full academic year but it can be greater for certain trades where longer periods are spent in Institutes of Technology.

From January 2014 up to the end of the academic year in June, apprentices will be due to pay €833 (1/3 of €2,500) per typical attendance block. From September 2013, they are already paying €233 (28% of €833) in respect of the exam fee element of the ASC. Following the Budget, from January 2014 they will also be required to pay the balance which amounts to €600 for the academic year 2013/2014. It is not planned to continue the apportionment of the ASC between exam fees and the remainder, so a single figure will be presented to apprentices in the same way as other students.

Apprentices are paid a training allowances by SOLAS for phases of their training spent in Institutes of Technology. This allowance is equivalent to the wages they receive from their employers for on the job phases and is unaffected by the budgetary changes. The amount of the SOLAS training allowance paid to apprentices while they attend IOTs ranges from €293 to €647 per week depending on the trade and phase in the apprenticeship programme.

Apprentices are not eligible for grants under the Student Grant Scheme as they do not meet the funding condition of participating in an approved full-time course in an approved institution.

As the amount being paid by apprentices for their attendance at Institutes of Technology does not exceed the minimum student contribution, it will not attract tax relief.

Tax Collection

162. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons who paid the domicile levy in each year from 2010 to 2013; the total collected in each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48826/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the Domicile Levy was introduced in the Finance Act 2010. The first year for which individuals were required to make returns was the year 2010, and these returns had to be filed by 31 October 2011 or by 15 November 2011 if filed electronically using the Revenue Online Service (ROS). As requested by the Deputy, Table 1 sets out the domicile levy returns received in each year since its introduction together with the amount of levy paid in each year.

TABLE 1

Year in which return was made	Number of returns	Amount of Domicile Levy collected
2011	11	€1,667,011
2012	14	€1,719,768
2013	21	€2,759,557

The 11 returns filed in 2011 all related to tax year 2010; the 14 returns filed in 2012 all related to tax year 2011; and of the 21 returns file in 2013, 11 related to tax year 2010, four related to tax year 2011 and six related to tax year 2012.

In the interests of completeness and clarity, Table 2 sets out the number of Domicile Levy returns received in respect of each year since its introduction together with the amount of levy paid in respect of these returns. Returns for the tax year 2012 were due to be filed by 31 October 2013 or by 14 November 2013 if filed electronically using ROS.

TABLE 2

Year for which return was made	Number of returns	Amount of Domicile Levy paid in respect of those returns
2010	22	€2,645,843
2011	18	€2,500,493
2012	6	€1,000,000

I am further advised by the Revenue Commissioners that earlier this year they started a compliance programme in relation to the Domicile Levy. This focusses on cases where a Domicile Levy return has not been filed and the individual concerned has been identified by Revenue as having a possible requirement to file such a return. To date Domicile Levy enquiries have is-

sued to 60 individuals. This programme has resulted in additional returns and payments being received and this is reflected in the above tables. Inquiries are still on-going in a number of cases.

Property Taxation Administration

163. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Finance if he will explain the source of the error with regard to the property tax and the fact that Revenue will have to refund many persons who were not first-time buyers; and if he will outline the full amount of the refund to be paid. [48827/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I assume the Deputy is referring to the exemption in section 8 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended). It was originally intended that this exemption would only apply to first-time buyers, which is clear from the heading to the section: "Exemption for first-time buyers". The Explanatory Memorandum to the Bill (prior to enactment) also states that the exemption applies to first-time buyers. The Deputy may recall that mortgage interest relief was phased out on mortgages taken out after 31 December 2012 and this measure was a transitional provision to help first-time buyers in the first year after the abolition of mortgage interest relief. However, as written, the exemption benefits any buyer, not just a first-time buyer. The result is that a person who purchases a second hand house and occupies it as a sole or main residence is entitled to the exemption regardless of whether s/he is a first-time buyer.

The Revenue Commissioners have advised me that this exemption applies to a clearly defined group of property owners, who are being identified using Stamp Duty records. These fall into two broad groups; those who purchased a residential property between 1 January 2013 and 1 May 2013 and paid the LPT for 2013, and those who purchased a property after 1 May 2013.

There is a significant amount of work involved in identifying individuals who bought in 2013 and who are entitled to the exemption. When this work is completed Revenue will write to these individuals and will provide advice on what action should be taken where the individual confirms that s/he qualifies for the exemption and wishes to claim it, so that s/he may receive a refund of any LPT already paid for 2013 or 2014. In relation to the total amount of tax that will be refunded to these individuals, the Commissioners have advised that this figure will only be available when they are satisfied that they have identified all individuals who have paid LPT but are entitled to the exemption.

I am also advised that information on this matter was first published on the Revenue website in July 2013. Since then further information was updated on the Revenue website on 8 November 2013 confirming that the exemption in question was not restricted to first-time buyers who are owner occupiers, and that any person purchasing a property in 2013 will qualify for this exemption once they occupy the property as their sole or main residence.

In addition, Revenue recently issued clarification on this matter to the media, which was extensively reported. On the basis that purchasers almost inevitably avail of the services of a solicitor, Revenue has also contacted the Law Society as well as auctioneering and estate agent representatives to advise them of the issue and to ask them to publicise it amongst their membership.

Tax Collection

164. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will respond to a query regarding the payment of CAT to Revenue (details supplied). [48836/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that in the vast majority of CAT cases, payment is made on behalf of the taxpayer by an agent or solicitor via the Revenue On-Line System (ROS). Once the user opts to pay via ROS then he/she has the choice of the full range of payment methods available including debit card. Revenue has also advised me that it has developed ROS to the very highest international standards so that people can meet their tax obligations through a user friendly system at a time that best suits them. By engaging with Revenue through ROS, users are not restricted to normal office hours nor is there any need for direct contact to conclude transactions.

In circumstances where a person chooses not to engage with Revenue via ROS then payment can be made by cheque, postal order, bank draft, or by way of an electronic fund transfer (EFT) to a designated Revenue bank account.

In regard to the specific case to which the Deputy refers, it is noted that the person in question is currently recuperating from illness. Given the circumstances, if the person wishes to make direct contact with Revenue at 061 488302 a member of the payments team will be more than happy to assist him/her in making the CAT payment.

Tax Credits

165. **Deputy Jerry Buttiner** asked the Minister for Finance if he will clarify the tax credits available to a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48866/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that this tax payer is jointly assessed with his wife, and that they are entitled to the married tax credit of €3,300 plus the PAYE tax credit of €1,650. These tax credits have been allocated to the wife for 2013 as requested by the couple. However, if the tax-payer believes he is entitled to other tax credits he should contact his local tax office at 1890 22 24 25.

Tax Code

166. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that when printed matter is purchased and downloaded via the Internet it is considered to be a service within the meaning of electronically supplied services in the Fourth Schedule to the VAT Act, 1972 (as amended); in view of the fact that this has the effect of discouraging the use of e-books by schools in place of printed books, if he will consider altering the aforementioned Schedule so that e-books would no longer be considered a service and instead be zero rated as with printed material; if he will consider a derogation for education ebooks in this manner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48889/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The VAT rating of goods and services is subject to the requirements of EU VAT law with which Irish VAT law must comply. In Ireland the zero rate applies to printed books, including atlases, children's picture, drawing and colouring books and books of music. It is possible for Ireland to apply the zero rate to printed books because Ireland applied the zero rate to these books on and before 1 January 1991, and the EU VAT Directive provides a derogation for such exceptional VAT treatment to continue to apply. However, the VAT Directive does not allow goods and services to apply at the zero rate which

were not in place at that rate on 1 January 1991. As e-books were not applied at the zero rate in 1991 it is not possible to apply the zero rate to them now. Furthermore, under the EU VAT Directive, all digitised publications, regardless of their rate when printed (for example, a book liable at zero rate), are treated as the supply of a service liable at the standard rate of VAT, which in Ireland is 23%. E-books, online newspaper subscriptions and online information services purchased via download over the internet are also considered the supply of services liable for VAT at the standard rate. The different VAT treatment of printed books and e-books reflects the nature of these products, the latter being a richer product often providing content beyond simple text to include embedded digital music, software, film and internet links. There is no option under EU VAT law to exempt e-books from VAT or to apply a zero or reduced rate to them.

Revenue Commissioners Investigations

167. Deputy Finian McGrath asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding a liquidation issue and unfair dismissal case (details supplied). [48951/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that for reasons of taxpayer confidentiality the details cannot be provided to the Deputy. Where a company is in liquidation, the liquidation is subject to court supervision. It is a matter of public record that the Revenue appointed liquidator has raised some issues in the High Court in relation to the conduct of a director prior to liquidation of one of the companies. Neither Revenue nor this Department have any role in relation to the Unfair Dismissals Act.

IBRC Liquidation

168. Deputy Joan Collins asked the Minister for Finance the number of individual offers that have been received by the liquidator of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation from debtors through the process; and the number have been rejected and or accepted. [49014/13]

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. The valuation process is on-going in respect of certain assets and I have been advised that while the Special Liquidators have commenced the formal sale process in relation to the sale of the four primary portfolios of loans assets in IBRC it will take some time for this process to be completed. It would be inappropriate for the Special Liquidators to release such information whilst they are engaging in the sales process as bids on the assets are being received and evaluated.

I have been advised by the Special Liquidators that they do not intend on releasing this type of information as they believe it is commercially sensitive.

Tax Yield

169. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a breakdown by VAT rate of the total amount of VAT collected by the State to the end of October 2013. [49031/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the total amount of VAT collected by the State to the end of October 2013 is

€8,621.9 million but details from tax returns are not captured in such a way as to provide a basis for breaking down the figures by VAT rate.

Certain non-Revenue data is used to provide indicative figures in the estimation of VAT yield by tax rate. This data will not be available to provide a basis for a 2013 estimate until 2014 at the earliest.

Property Taxation Data

170. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide separately for each local authority the average local property tax amount paid within that local authority area in 2013. [49033/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that compliance data for the Local Property Tax (LPT) for 2013 are compiled on the basis of the numbers of properties and are available broken down by city and county councils nationally. The most up to date figures are published on the Commissioners website at: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/lpt/lpt-stats-11-2013.pdf>.

The Commissioners have confirmed that data on the average LPT amount paid within each local authority area in 2013 are not currently available. However, the published data include information on the distribution of properties across the 20 valuation bands which may be of interest to the Deputy. The figures show that, based on returns filed to date, over half of all properties nationally had a declared valuation of €150,000 or less, equating to a half-year charge of either €45 or €112 for 2013. Furthermore, almost 22% of properties were valued at between €150,001 and €200,000, which equates to a half-year charge of €157.

The Commissioners have advised that work is on-going to refine the LPT Register and more detailed and up-to-date data will be published in due course. The Deputy will be aware that the Pay and File campaign for LPT 2014 is underway and this is Revenue's current priority in relation to LPT.

I am further advised that by the end of October 2013 approximately €215m had been transferred by Revenue to the Exchequer in respect of LPT.

Tax Code

171. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide details of the enforcement activity being undertaken by the Revenue Commissioners against the importation of coal from Northern Ireland where the tax due to the Irish State has not been paid; the number of recent prosecutions that have been taken by the Revenue Commissioners in respect of this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49066/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners, who are responsible for collecting tax on coal, that under EU law, the introduction of any tax cannot give rise to import controls between member states. As a consequence, solid fuel carbon tax (SFCT) was introduced in the Finance Act 2010 but was not commenced, in light of concerns about the impact of the tax on cross-border sales of coal, until May 2013. This was to allow the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government time to introduce a robust mechanism to address the risk of coal products with lower environmental standards, and on which carbon tax has not been paid, being sourced from Northern Ireland. Under

these environmental regulations, suppliers who are producing and supplying coal unlawfully are subject to regulation by local authorities and other State agencies charged with enforcing the regulations and preventing such unlawful supply. Accordingly, the question of enforcement and prosecution for the illegal sale of coal sourced in Northern Ireland is primarily a matter for the respective local authorities and my colleague the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government.

Suppliers who suspect or have evidence that illegal coal is being sold in their area should report this to their Local Authority either directly or through their representative associations.

Illegal Moneylenders

172. Deputy Dominic Hannigan asked the Minister for Finance the type of investigations the Central Bank has undertaken into illegal moneylenders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49092/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Neither I nor the Central Bank have any role in relation to this matter. Illegal money lending is a criminal offence and a matter for An Garda Síochána to investigate. Such matters are relevant to the Minister for Justice and Equality in the first instance.

Property Taxation Collection

173. Deputy Patrick O'Donovan asked the Minister for Finance the numbers of persons who opted to have their local porperty tax deducted from their Department of social welfare payment for the 2013 period; of those persons the number who actually had the charge deducted from their payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49097/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that property owners in respect of approximately 15,450 residential properties have opted to pay their 2013 Local Property Tax (LPT) by way of deduction at source from a Department of Social Protection payment. The Commissioners have confirmed that, in the vast majority of cases, deductions from DSP payments have already commenced and over €1m has been collected by Revenue to date. In my reply to Question 228 (38380/13) on 18 September 2013, I informed the House that a number of issues had arisen with this payment option and that these were subsequently addressed by the Revenue Commissioners. The Commissioners have advised that where operational and administrative issues arise, these are being addressed on a case by case basis.

I am further advised that there is an ongoing dialogue between Revenue and the Department of Social Protection, with a view to ensuring that this payment option operates as smoothly as possible.

Small and Medium Enterprises Supports

174. Deputy Jonathan O'Brien asked the Minister for Finance the steps he has taken to address the issue of small and medium enterprise debt and need to increase credit to the SME sector. [42597/13]

177. Deputy Brian Stanley asked the Minister for Finance the steps he will take to ensure

adequate bank lending to the small and medium enterprise sector. [42821/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 174 and 177 together.

Facilitating access to finance for SMEs is a key aspect of the Action Plan for Jobs 2013. It is the Government's vision that all viable businesses operating in Ireland should have the opportunity to access sufficient finance to meet their enterprise needs in a manner that supports growth and employment in the economy.

The Government has imposed SME lending targets on AIB and Bank of Ireland for the three calendar years, 2011 to 2013. Each bank was required to sanction lending of at least €3 billion in 2011, €3.5 billion in 2012 and €4 billion in 2013 for new or increased credit facilities to SMEs. Both banks achieved their 2011 and 2012 targets.

AIB and Bank of Ireland are expected to lend to viable businesses both for investment and working capital purposes. The Credit Review Office is available to assist businesses which have been refused credit. The recent CRO report shows that the Credit Review Office upheld the credit appeal in 150 cases or 55% of cases decided. The upheld appeals have resulted in €18.5 million in credit being made available to SMEs and farms, protecting 1,521 jobs. In the recent Budget, I increased the CRO appeals threshold from €500,000 to €3 million and I would strongly encourage SMEs refused credit to seek a review by the Office.

The Government has taken a number of actions to improve the situation in relation to credit availability to SMEs. The range of credit options available to SMEs now include the Micro-enterprise Loan scheme which can facilitate up to €40 million in additional lending to micro-enterprises over the next five years. In addition, the Credit Guarantee Scheme is designed for SMEs who, because of lack of collateral or because of the specialised sector they operate in, face difficulties in accessing bank credit.

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

More generally, small businesses can benefit from support, guidance and advice provided at local level through the network of County Enterprise Boards which are currently being transformed into Local Enterprise Offices with closer links to businesses in their local area.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Taoiseach mentioned in this House last week that he had held discussions with Chancellor Merkel. Germany is keen to help and specifically to find ways to reinforce Ireland's economic recovery by improving funding mechanisms for the real economy, including access to finance for Irish SMEs. The German Government has asked KfW, the German development bank, to work with the German and Irish authorities swiftly, in order to deliver on this initiative at the earliest possible date.

Officials of my Department have already exchanged working papers on this subject with KfW and the German Ministry of Finance. We have held consultations with the German embassy in Dublin which helped pave the way for discussions with the German Ministry which are being held in Berlin today and further discussions will be held with KfW and other key stakeholders over the coming weeks both here and in Germany.

I am keen to see the establishment of a healthy and balanced relationship. As we are trying to ensure that any initiative that comes out of this process is as effective as it can be, we will be discussing approaches that meet the strategic objectives of both States.

Questions - Written Answers
Single Euro Payments Area

175. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he is taking to support Irish businesses in preparation for the single euro payments area in view of the extra costs placed on them by the banks' refusal to implement a business to business system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42715/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The aim of the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA) project is to create a single market for euro-denominated retail payments. SEPA is an EU initiative that will change the way that these payments are processed across Europe. SEPA will allow payment systems users to make euro-denominated retail electronic payments to payees located in any of the participating countries, using a single payment account and a single set of payment instruments.

SEPA comes into full effect on 1 February 2014 and businesses will need to ensure that payroll, direct debit and accounting systems are SEPA-ready.

The implementation of SEPA within Ireland is overseen by the National Payments Plan (NPP) Steering Committee, which was established in 2012 to modernise the way payments are made in Ireland. In this regard, an NPP-SEPA sub-group has been formed, consisting of representatives of consumers, businesses, Government and banks. This sub group provides an avenue for the discussion of any issues that arise in the process of migrating to SEPA.

I understand from the Central Bank that there is significant support available to Irish businesses to help them make the transition to SEPA. The Irish banking sector has led with a comprehensive informational campaign overseen by the Central Bank. All impacted businesses (approx. 50,000) have had individual contact from their bank and the requirements of SEPA outlined to them. The 'readyforsepa.ie' website provides general SEPA-related information and in addition, all of the banks have dedicated SEPA pages on their own websites. SEPA migration teams are available to help businesses deal with the necessary changes and many of the banks also have educational videos and webcasts supporting the migration effort. The payments software industry has also provided significant support to the business sector, working with the banking industry to make this complex change happen as seamlessly as possible.

While not all Irish banks are making the 'business-to-business' variant of the SEPA direct debit (SDD) scheme available, this should not result in any additional costs being placed on Irish businesses. The banks, through the Irish Payments Services Organisation (IPSO, the representative body for the payments industry in Ireland) have recently announced a SEPA Business Service that will be in place from 1 December, which is an interim direct debit solution that will be provided pending the introduction of the full SDD 'business-to-business' service at a later date. The costs associated with this service should be no greater than those associated with the full SDD 'business to business' scheme.

Credit Review Office Reports

176. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the recent report of the Credit Review Office; the implications of the continuing difficulties for companies accessing credit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42728/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In his most recent quarterly report, the Head of the Credit Review Office observed that "the remaining banks continue to lend to low/medium risk credit applications" but that "credit reviewers see too many cases which may not

‘tick all the boxes’ on current bank lending policies and criteria, but are still bankable propositions”. The report states that “while a sizeable minority of enterprises face some form of financial challenge” it expects “the banks can ensure that adequate finance should be made available to support business and associated employment”.

Access to finance for SMEs is a key aspect of the Action Plan for Jobs 2013. It is the Government’s vision that all viable businesses operating in Ireland should have the opportunity to access sufficient finance to meet their enterprise needs in a manner that supports growth and employment in the economy.

The Government has imposed SME lending targets on AIB and Bank of Ireland for the three calendar years, 2011 to 2013. Each bank was required to sanction lending of at least €3 billion in 2011, €3.5 billion in 2012 and €4 billion in 2013 for new or increased credit facilities to SMEs. Both banks achieved their 2011 and 2012 targets.

AIB and Bank of Ireland are expected to lend to viable businesses both for investment and working capital purposes. The Credit Review Office is available to assist businesses which have been refused credit. The recent CRO report shows that the Credit Review Office upheld the credit appeal in 150 cases or 55% of cases decided. The upheld appeals have resulted in €18.5m in credit being made available to SMEs and farms, protecting 1,521 jobs. In the recent Budget I increased the CRO appeals threshold from €500,000 to €3 million and I would strongly encourage SMEs refused credit to seek a review by the Office.

The Government has taken a number of actions to improve the situation in relation to credit availability to SMEs. The range of credit options available to SMEs now include the Micro-enterprise Loan scheme which can facilitate up to €40 million in additional lending to micro-enterprises over the next five years. In addition, the Credit Guarantee Scheme is designed for SMEs who, because of lack of collateral or because of the specialised sector they operate in, face difficulties in accessing bank credit.

The SME State Bodies Group develops key policy initiatives to support SME access to credit and other forms of finance and ensures their implementation through the annual Action Plan for Jobs. It has continued in 2013 to engage intensively in proactively addressing issues associated with SME funding and financing in conjunction with the relevant stakeholders through the SME Funding Consultation Committee. My officials also meet frequently with additional stakeholders who wish to contribute to policy development in relation to access to finance.

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

More generally, small businesses can benefit from support, guidance and advice provided at local level through the network of County Enterprise Boards which are currently being transformed into Local Enterprise Offices with closer links to businesses in their local area.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Taoiseach mentioned in this House last week that he had held discussions with Chancellor Merkel. Germany is keen to help and specifically to find ways to reinforce Ireland’s economic recovery by improving funding mechanisms for the real economy, including access to finance for Irish SMEs. The German Government has asked KfW, the German development bank, to work with the German and Irish authorities swiftly, in order to deliver on this initiative at the earliest possible date.

Officials of my Department have already exchanged working papers on this subject with

KfW and the German Ministry of Finance. We have held consultations with the German embassy in Dublin which helped pave the way for discussions with the German Ministry which are being held in Berlin today and further discussions will be held with KfW and other key stakeholders over the coming weeks both here and in Germany.

I am keen to see the establishment of a healthy and balanced relationship. As we are trying to ensure that any initiative that comes out of this process is as effective as it can be, we will be discussing approaches that meet the strategic objectives of both States.

Question No. 177 answered with Question No. 174.

Tax Residency

178. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Finance if progress is being made on the programme for Government commitment on tax exiles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43145/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Programme for Government indicated that, as part of its fiscal policy, the Government will ensure that “tax exiles” make a fair contribution to the Exchequer.

The Deputy may be aware I removed the “citizenship” condition for the Domicile Levy to ensure that individuals cannot avoid the levy by renouncing their citizenship. The first year for which the changes apply is tax year 2012; the levy payment for that year was due on 31 October 2013 or on 14 November 2013 for those filing online.

Other measures in recent budgets to increase the tax take from high earners will have an impact on so-called “tax exiles”, such as the High Earners’ Restriction, the increases in Capital Gains Tax and Capital Acquisitions Tax (CAT) rates, and the reductions in the CAT tax-free thresholds.

Apart from the Domicile Levy, the taxation of individuals in the State is broadly in line with the system prevailing in most other OECD jurisdictions, that is to say —

(a) individuals who are resident in the State for tax purposes are taxable here on their worldwide income; and

(b) individuals who are not resident for tax purposes pay tax here only on income arising in the State and on income derived from working here.

The present rules are considered to be consistent with international practice and in particular with OECD standards. It is the view of the Government that our interests would be best served by operating our residence rules within the best practice guidelines of the OECD.

A public consultation on tax residence rules was undertaken last year and the submissions received have been published. Most submissions stated the present rules are considered clear and workable and the clarity, certainty and stability of our domestic tax regime enables us to compete effectively in the international economic context. Significant concern was expressed regarding potential impact on Foreign Direct Investment, and that such changes could inhibit investment in Ireland, and result in a loss to the Exchequer rather than raise money. Concerns were similarly expressed about changing the rules with a view to dealing with a small number of cases, and that for a likely small additional yield generated a disproportionate effect could result on a larger proportion of non-residents, and bring the Irish tax regime out of line with

international standards.

I am keeping this area under review.

Irish Fiscal Advisory Council Meetings

179. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Finance when the fiscal council last met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43319/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Irish Fiscal Advisory Council was established on a statutory basis on 31 December 2012 under the Fiscal Responsibility Act 2012.

The Deputy should be aware that the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council is an independent body. The Fiscal Responsibility Act states that the Fiscal Council may regulate its own procedures (including quorum) and therefore this question is a matter for the Council directly.

A list of all the Council meetings can be found on the Fiscal Council's website, which indicates that the last meeting was October 25th.

Irish Fiscal Advisory Council Reports

180. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Finance his views on the most recent fiscal council recommendations. [44103/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Fiscal Council's most recent Fiscal Assessment Report was published in April 2013. The Fiscal Council's analysis and recommendations were considered in my Department's preparation of its updated economic and fiscal projections, published in the Stability Programme Update. Chapter 5 of this Update contains the response to this report.

This report was largely supportive of the rate of fiscal adjustment chosen by Government, and stated that the fiscal stance remains conducive to prudent economic and budgetary management. Comments were also made about economic forecasting methodologies and risks to the forecast. The report was taken into account when preparing the Stability Programme Update, and Budget 2014.

The Fiscal Council intend to publish their November Fiscal Assessment Report shortly, which will contain their assessment of the official forecasts and fiscal stance within the Budget.

EU-IMF Programme of Support

181. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Finance his views on a precautionary credit line for Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44412/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Government decided on 14 November that Ireland is now in the best position to exit the EU-IMF programme of financial assistance on December 15 without the need to pre-arrange a new precautionary credit line from our EU and IMF partners.

Following a careful and thorough assessment of all of the available options, and broad consultation with the European Commission, the ECB, the IMF, the President and members of the

Eurogroup, the Governor of the Central Bank of Ireland and the NTMA, the decision was taken to exit without a pre-arranged precautionary facility or backstop.

I am of the view that exiting our EU-IMF programme of financial assistance without a pre-arranged precautionary facility or backstop is the right decision for Ireland. Market confidence in Ireland is high, the public finances are under control, we are reducing our deficit and debt levels and economic conditions and sentiment are improving. We have already returned successfully to the financial markets. We have a domestic backstop in place with cash reserves expected to be of the order of €20 billion by the end of the year. This option represents greater normalisation, with Ireland now subject to EU economic co-ordination and fiscal surveillance, and governance rules that apply to other EU and Euro Area Member States that are not in a programme of assistance. This decision is the latest in a series of steps to return Ireland to normal economic, budgetary and funding conditions. Like most other sovereign eurozone countries, from 2014 we will be in a position to fund ourselves normally on the markets. Confidence in Ireland has improved considerably in recent months and interest rates on Irish Government bonds are at now highly affordable levels. This is the right decision for Ireland.

Pensions Levy

182. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Finance his views on the pension levy and its link to job creation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46202/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The pension fund levy applies to the market value, on the valuation date, of assets under management in pension funds and pension plans approved under Irish tax legislation.

The moneys raised from the pension fund levy are being used to pay for the Government's *Jobs Initiative* introduced in May 2011. The measures introduced as part of the *Jobs Initiative* include a new 9% VAT rate on certain activities, the halving of the lower rate of PRSI and other additional current and capital expenditure measures.

I announced in my Budget 2014 speech that the 0.6% Pension Fund Levy introduced to fund the *Jobs Initiative* in 2011 will be abolished from 31st of December 2014. I will however, introduce an additional levy on pension funds at 0.15%. I am doing this, among other things, to continue to help fund the *Jobs Initiative*, including the continuation of the reduced 9% VAT rate detailed below. The additional levy within the existing legal framework will apply to pension fund assets in 2014 and 2015.

The impact of the *Jobs Initiative* can be seen by the increase in employment levels, particularly in the accommodation and food services sector. The *Jobs Initiative* included the reduction of VAT on tourism services to 9% from 13.5% on a temporary basis until the end of 2013. This measure has proved to be a major success, helping create over 15,000 new jobs as well as protecting existing jobs. It was due to end this year. However, it is important that we reinforce success when possible, so I have decided to continue this reduced rate. This will support the increased number of jobs already in place and accelerate the creation of new jobs.

The Deputy will be aware that I announced the reduction of the Air Travel Tax to zero with effect from 1st April 2014. The decision to remove the tax, together with the retention of the 9% VAT rate for tourism services, will help maintain the momentum created by the success of The Gathering this year. Since the Budget announcement, airlines have announced the opening up of new routes resulting in a significant increase in passenger numbers with the associated increase in tourism activity and employment.

The *Jobs Initiative* also included a number of current and capital expenditure measures, including a number aimed at retraining the workforce. I would ask the Deputy to note that my colleague the Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton T.D., with responsibility for JobBridge, the National Internship scheme, recently announced that the number of internships, originally planned at 5,000 has now exceeded 20,000. Indecon Economic Consultants undertook an evaluation of the JobBridge scheme in 2012 (published in April 2013) and their report found that 61.4% of the JobBridge survey respondents were in employment within 5 months of finishing their internships.

Under education measures, the Springboard scheme as announced in the Jobs Initiative had initially provided for 5,900 places. During 2011 and 2012, over 10,000 people enrolled on programmes under the Springboard scheme. The scheme has been extended further with my colleague, the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn T.D. announcing in June this year, another 6,000 places under the third Springboard allocation. Further rollouts of the springboard scheme will be considered in the context of the findings of an on-going evaluation.

Finally, I want to reiterate that addressing the difficulties in the labour market remains the Government's biggest challenge and, accordingly, the Government is giving its highest priority to job protection and job creation.

International Tax Strategy

183. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance the Government's international tax strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45860/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As I have outlined in the document "Ireland's International Tax Strategy", published on Budget day, the key word in relation to Ireland's international tax strategy is "openness". As the Deputy is aware Ireland is one of the most open economies in the world and we are "open for business". We will continue to compete fairly to attract business and foreign direct investment into Ireland.

In addition our tax system is transparent, and statute based and our stable competitive corporate tax rate is a key element in attracting investment into Ireland. We engage constructively within the EU and with international organisations such as the OECD in order to further international tax reform.

The strategy document also sets out for the first time Ireland's International Tax Charter which is a set of policy objectives and commitments for how we view and will deal with international tax policy issues.

Ireland's International Tax Strategy can be viewed on the Government's Budget website www.budget.gov.ie.

Stock Exchange

184. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the Irish Stock Exchange; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45858/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Irish Stock Exchange (ISE) is an important part of the economic and financial architecture in providing a publicly regulated venue by which investors can allocate capital resources to businesses.

A listing on the ISE provides access to an alternative source of funds for a growing business, and the increased visibility that comes from being listed on the exchange increases their potential for further capital investment by investors. These factors are particularly important to SME growth companies that do not have the same visibility or financial options as larger companies.

From an investor perspective, the ISE provides a regulated venue which promotes greater confidence to invest. Additionally, stock exchanges are an important outlet for pension funds and the many people that are invested in them.

From an economic perspective, the ISE along with other stock exchanges facilitate more efficient capital allocation, increased innovation and ultimately employment. Additionally, information from stock exchanges can provide a useful barometer for the overall health of the domestic and international economy and such information is closely monitored by economists as well as financial market participants.

In the recent budget, I enhanced the attractiveness of investing in Irish SMEs listed on the Enterprise Securities Market (ESM), the ISE's market for SME growth companies, through exempting from stamp duty investor transactions in ESM companies. This supports the implementation of the Government's Jobs Action Plan 2013 which provides a commitment to incentivise dynamic companies to grow through using the Initial Public Offering (IPO) route as an alternative to a trade sale exit.

European Stability Mechanism

185. Deputy Gerry Adams asked the Minister for Finance if he is concerned at the German Government rebuff to a letter from the Taoiseach to EU leaders asking that the ESM be used retrospectively on Irish banking debt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47688/13]

186. Deputy Gerry Adams asked the Minister for Finance the EU leaders that have indicated support for the demand of the Taoiseach that the ESM be used to retrospectively recapitalise Irish banks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47689/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 185 and 186 together.

The letter to which the Deputy refers was sent by the Taoiseach to the President of the European Council, Herman van Rompuy, and the Heads of State or Government in the 28 EU Member states, for information, prior to the October 2013 European Council. The Taoiseach wrote his letter against the background of our planned exit from the EU/IMF Programme and stressed the need to deliver on long-standing commitments to break the vicious circle between banks and sovereigns.

The European Council conclusions, the agreed output of the summit, reflect the issues the Taoiseach highlighted in his letter to colleagues.

There has been no rebuff from Germany as intimated by the Deputy. Coalition negotiations in Germany are continuing, and it is expected that it will take until mid-December for them to conclude and for any new government's official policy programme to emerge.

The Deputy will be aware that the Euro-Area Heads of State or Government agreed on 29th June 2012 to break the vicious circle between banks and sovereigns, and that when a Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM) involving the ECB, is in place and operational, the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) could recapitalize banks directly.

The Eurogroup meeting of 20th June 2013 agreed on the main features of the ESM's Direct Bank Recapitalisation instrument (DBR). The DBR instrument will come into effect when the SSM is operational. There is a specific provision included in those main features. This provision states that "The potential retroactive application of the instrument should be decided on a case-by-case basis and by mutual agreement." Therefore, the agreement that we were active in negotiating keeps open the possibility to apply to the ESM for a retrospective direct recapitalisation of the Irish banks should we wish to avail of it. The SSM is expected to be place and operational in the second half of 2014.

European Stability Mechanism

187. Deputy Gerry Adams asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the decision by the EU Council to reduce the role of the ESM in any future recapitalisation of banks; the way the proposed new rules will affect any retrospective recapitalisation of Irish banks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47690/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I assume the question refers to the European Council conclusions following the meeting of EU Heads of State or Government in October of this year.

The Council conclusions outline the hierarchy of decision making for bank recapitalisation. It continues to provide for ESM Direct Bank Recapitalisation (DBR) as part of this process.

The ECOFIN Council agreed in June 2012 to break the vicious circle between banks and sovereigns, and that when a Single Supervisory Mechanism, involving the ECB, is in place and operational, the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) could recapitalize banks directly.

The Eurogroup meeting of 20th June 2013 agreed on the main features of the ESM's Direct Bank Recapitalisation instrument. There is a specific provision included in those main features. This provision states that "The potential retroactive application of the instrument should be decided on a case-by-case basis and by mutual agreement." Therefore, the agreement that we were active in negotiating keeps open the possibility to apply to the ESM for a retrospective direct recapitalisation of the Irish banks, should we wish to avail of it.

The DBR instrument will come into effect when the Single Supervisory Mechanism is in place and operational. This is not expected to take place until the second half of 2014.

The Eurogroup has agreed that there will be strict eligibility criteria as well as a clear pecking order for the ESM DBR instrument, so any possible application for DBR will be determined on its own merits within the rules laid down by the ESM's DBR instrument.

The overall framework agreed this summer builds upon the earlier Euro area Heads of State or Government agreement secured on 29th June 2012 and is an important step in the Eurozone's efforts in this regard.

Tax Reliefs Availability

188. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which income tax relief is now available in respect of college fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49108/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Section 473A of the Taxes Consolida-

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tion Act 1997 provides, subject to certain conditions, for tax relief at the standard rate of income tax (20%) as regards a portion of qualifying fees paid by an individual in respect of a third level education course including a postgraduate course.

Qualifying fees means tuition fees in respect of an approved course at an approved college and includes what is referred to as the “student contribution”. No other fees (e.g. administration fees, examination fees, capitation fees) qualify for tax relief. For the tax year 2011 and subsequent tax years, the maximum qualifying fee per course per academic year is €7,000.

The tax relief is confined to tuition fees actually borne by the claimant. Tuition fees that are, or will be, met directly or indirectly by grants, scholarships, employer contribution or other means are to be deducted in arriving at the fees qualifying for tax relief.

An individual can claim tax relief on fees paid by him or her in respect of an approved course pursued by other individuals (e.g. a son or daughter) and that the claim may cover more than one student. Only a portion of the qualifying fees in each claim is eligible for relief. Each claim is restricted by the amount shown in the following table.

Year	Full time (Where any one of the students in respect of whom relief is claimed is a full-time student).	Part time (Where all the students in respect of whom relief is claimed are part-time students).
2013	€2,500	€1,250
2014	€2,750	€1,375
2015	€3,000	€1,500

The restriction applies to each claim, the subject of which may be one or more students. Therefore, if a person is claiming for more than one student they will get full relief, subject to the maximum limit, for the second and subsequent students claimed.

Example

A parent with two children in college full time in the academic year 2013/14 and paying €8,000 in fees (including the ‘student contribution’) for each child gets the following relief.

-	€
Maximum qualifying fee per student per year is €7,000 by two	= €14,000
Less the 2013 restriction €2,500	= €11,500
Tax relief @20%	= €2,300

Financial Services Regulation

189. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Finance if he has confidence in the Financial Regulator regarding the oversight of Royal and Sun Alliance’s Irish operations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49168/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): To improve regulatory supervision and protect the Irish consumer, the Central Bank has, along with increased staffing levels, introduced a risk-based supervision framework, PRISM (Probability Risk and Impact SysteM). The framework establishes a new approach for supervisory engagement with regulated firms. As

part of the framework the Central Bank of Ireland engages with firms at a level that corresponds to their impact category; the higher the impact, the higher the level of engagement. Engagement involves reviews, inspections and meetings, and the frequency and level of engagement is associated with the firms' impact rating.

The Central Bank of Ireland has had an on-going programme of engagement with RSA Insurance Ireland (RSAII) since the implementation of PRISM, as it does with all high impact companies. This programme includes eight on-site inspections over a two year period and on-going meetings with key role holders such as the Chief Executive Officer, Chief Finance Officer, Chief Risk Officer, etc. The Central Bank carried out an onsite review of claims cases in RSAII in August 2013.

The Central Bank has informed me that it identified an issue with regard to delays in increasing case reserves on large claims in a timely manner and this informed the terms of an internal audit that RSAII had already scheduled in relation to the same area. RSAII brought the findings of this internal audit report to the attention of the Central Bank as soon as they became known. The terms of reference for a further multi-stranded investigation and review were outlined to the Central Bank as were the interim measures that the company planned in relation to the executive team.

The Central Bank will continue to liaise with RSA Ireland, PWC and other stakeholders to ensure that all matters identified are resolved to the Central Bank's satisfaction.

Credit Unions

190. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Finance his views on Permanent TSB taking over Newbridge Credit Union (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49170/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have no concerns in relation to the transfer of Newbridge Credit Union to Permanent TSB. Although Permanent TSB was recapitalised in 2011, it is compliant with its regulatory capital requirements and as of June 2013 it had a Core Tier 1 capital ratio of 15.7%. This compares to a Central Bank of Ireland minimum requirement of 10.5%. As I have previously stated, it was in the context of a possible liquidation that my Department, with the support of the Central Bank, requested Permanent TSB to undertake this transaction. The participation of Permanent TSB in this process has provided an alternative to liquidation and in doing so has brought stability and certainty to the situation and specifically to the members and staff of Newbridge Credit Union. This transfer means that Newbridge Credit Union members will continue to have full and uninterrupted access to their savings.

Financial Services Regulation

191. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Finance the reason there is currently no upper rate limit on the interest that licensed moneylenders can charge on loans; his plans to introduce legislation in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49174/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Moneylenders are governed by a number of legislative obligations and supervisory requirements. Moneylenders are required to hold a licence in accordance with the provisions of the Consumer Credit Act 1995 as amended. This licence is issued by the Central Bank and must be renewed annually. Section 93(10)(g) of the

Act states that the Bank may refuse to grant a licence where, in its opinion, the cost of credit to be charged is excessive or any of the terms or conditions attaching thereto are unfair.

Introducing an upper limit could make the licenced moneylending sector unviable, forcing consumers who are unable to access other conventional credit to turn to illegal, unlicensed moneylenders.

Furthermore, the annual percentage rate allowable under moneylending licences is publicly stated on the public register for moneylenders. This register is available on the Central Bank's website.

While it should be noted that moneylender loans can be more expensive than other forms of credit, many of these loans are unique in nature. For example, they may be small value loans, over a short term and repayments may be collected at the consumer's home.

The Central Bank recently published a "Report on the Licensed Moneylending Industry". The report is available on the Central Bank's website. It is particularly striking that the figures show that moneylenders provide a service which many people are happy to use, even though the interest rate charged is very high. The report also found that the majority of customers know and/or understand the interest on their loan, the cost of credit and the APR.

Pension Provisions

192. Deputy Denis Naughten asked the Minister for Finance if a person (details supplied) is receiving a pension from the former Anglo Irish Bank; the value of that pension; if these payments are made from a private pension fund or through an Exchequer supported fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49213/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised that no Exchequer support was used to fund the pension entitlements of the individual referred to. I am further advised that Pension Schemes that were available to staff at the Anglo Irish Bank included defined benefit schemes (which closed to new membership in 1994) and a defined contribution scheme. These schemes are funded schemes, and are operated by appointed trustees. The schemes are operated independently from the bank under distinct rules and legislation. I am advised by the Special Liquidators that that due to obligations under Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003 they cannot comment on the emoluments of individual staff members of IBRC (in Special Liquidation).

Property Taxation Assessments

193. Deputy John McGuinness asked the Minister for Finance the reason a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny has been required to pay €1,125 property tax for 2014 in view of the fact that they paid €125 in 2013; if his Department's records will be corrected as soon as possible. [49218/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The administration of the Local Property Tax is a matter for the Revenue Commissioners. My Department does not hold any records on individual tax payers. I am advised by Revenue that a key aspect of the work it has undertaken in connection with the administration of Local Property Tax (LPT) has been the development of a register of residential properties in the State. The development of the register required Revenue to extract and consolidate data from multiple Government and non-Government sources.

The Deputy will be aware that Revenue clearly indicated at the commencement of the LPT project that errors in the compilation of the Property Register were inevitable given the scale of the task and requested that anybody who received incorrect information in regard to their properties to contact the LPT Helpline at 1890 200255 or to write to the LPT Branch, PO Box 1, Ennis, Co Clare.

On the specific case mentioned by the Deputy, the person in question was linked to a property at Goresbridge, Kilkenny on the basis of records imported by Revenue from another Government agency database, during the development of the LPT Property Register. Revenue has confirmed that the LPT Return in respect of this property issued to the person in March 2013. The correspondence included with the Return clearly requested that if the person was not the liable owner that he immediately notify Revenue. There is no record of any contact or correspondence disputing the accuracy of the property record being received from the person.

The person did however file two separate returns, thereby generating two separate property records, in respect of a property at Dublin Road, Kilkenny. The person indicated a Band 4 liability and paid €202 in respect of the LPT due.

The 2014 LPT charge, which the person received in October was based on the information input to the Property Register for the 2013 half year, i.e. one Band 3 property at €315 and two Band 4 properties at €810 giving a total of €1,125. The person's records also show an amount outstanding in respect of the Household Charge which also now needs to be addressed.

On further investigation it appears that the linkage of the property at Goresbridge to the person may be incorrect but this needs to be confirmed. It is also clear that the second property at Dublin Road was set up by the person in error and has now been removed from the Register.

Revenue will now make direct contact with the person in the coming days to confirm his connection or otherwise to the Goresbridge property and to confirm his correct LPT/Household Charge liability.

Property Taxation Data

194. Deputy John McGuinness asked the Minister for Finance if the client details and record of payment of the property tax in 2013 and for 2014 will be confirmed in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny, in view of the fact that they self-assessed in 2013 and paid by credit card. [49219/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that payments of Local Property Tax (LPT) are acknowledged in all circumstances where a person pays via the online service at www.revenue.ie. On the specific case mentioned by the Deputy I can confirm that payment for the 2013 LPT liability was received on 29 May 2013 via the online service and is receipted on the person's account under the appropriate Property ID number.

Revenue has further confirmed to me that in the original construction of the Property Register, the person in question was incorrectly allocated two Property ID numbers for the same property. The duplication was subsequently identified as part of Revenue's data matching programme and one of the Property ID numbers was deleted.

There is no requirement on the person to confirm his payment method for 2014 until 27 November 2013 assuming that he again intends to meet his obligations through the online system. There is also no requirement on him to make the 2014 payment before 1 January 2014. However, the person should be aware that if he chooses to pay by credit card as he did for 2013 then

that payment will be deducted immediately. This is the nature of credit/debit card payments.

EU-IMF Programme of Support

195. Deputy Joe McHugh asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide an update on engagements with the troika in respect of an exit from the EU-IMF-European Central Bank bailout programme. [44107/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Government decided on 14 November that Ireland is now in the best position to exit the EU-IMF programme of financial assistance on December 15 without the need to pre-arrange a new precautionary credit line from our EU and IMF partners. Following a careful and thorough assessment of all of the available options, and broad consultation with the European Commission, the ECB, the IMF, along with the President and members of the Eurogroup, the Governor of the Central Bank of Ireland and the NTMA, the decision was taken to exit without a pre-arranged precautionary facility or backstop.

NewERA Remit

196. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Finance if the review undertaken by NewERA of State companies to assess their financial performance has been completed. [42294/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The core role of NewERA involves the ongoing oversight of the financial performance, corporate strategy, capital and investment plans of the five commercial semi-state companies within its remit - ESB, Bord Gáis Éireann (BGE), EirGrid, Bord na Móna and Coillte. NewERA works closely with the relevant Government Departments and the companies, with NewERA analysing the financial performance of each of these entities based on the annual audited accounts of the company, the interim accounts of the company and using output from quarterly financial performance meetings which have been initiated with the companies since NewERA was established. This work is undertaken on an ongoing basis.

The Annual Report of the National Treasury Management Agency 2012, which is available on the Agency's website (www.ntma.ie), includes a section on the activities NewERA carried out in 2012 (pages 23-25).

Tax Reliefs Eligibility

197. Deputy Noel Harrington asked the Minister for Finance the relief available to a person who, while working, is not earning enough to pay tax and wishes to carry out home improvements; if he will consider extending the recently announced scheme relating to tax rebates to allow those on low incomes to reclaim VAT; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49245/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, I announced the Home Renovation Incentive in the recent Budget. This scheme will run from 25 October 2013 to 31 December 2015 and provides for tax relief for homeowners by way of a tax credit at 13.5% of qualifying expenditure incurred on repair, renovation or improvement work carried out on a principal private residence. There is no VAT relief under this scheme. I have no plans

to extend this initiative to individuals who have no tax liability. However, the tax credit is being provided over a period of two years in order to assist those with low incomes. In addition, unused credits may be carried forward to future years.

It is worth noting that the SEAI operate the Better Energy Homes Scheme where cash grants are provided for qualifying works. The SEAI also install energy efficiency measures at no cost to qualifying individuals under the Warmer Homes Scheme. Further information on these schemes is available on the SEAI website, www.seai.ie.

Foreign Direct Investment

198. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if, given the levels of capital which foreign multinationals retain here and do not repatriate, he has proposed a Government-secured investment facility to direct much-needed capital from this stockpile towards projects with the potential to create jobs, or towards training and development in areas where Ireland has a skills gap; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42702/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) offers a suite of investment products – long-term bonds, short-term paper, State Savings including the National Solidarity Bond, inflation-linked bonds – which are designed to appeal to as wide a spectrum of investors as possible. The funding raised by those investment products is used to fund Government expenditure. In relation to the Deputy's suggestion of an investment facility, as recently announced, the Government has decided to establish the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) which will absorb the National Pensions Reserve Fund (NPRF). The discretionary assets of the NPRF, worth some €6.6 billion currently, will be channelled towards productive investment on commercial terms in the Irish economy. Using the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund, we will maximise our resources to enhance growth in the Irish economy and improve key infrastructure to maintain Ireland's attractiveness as a place to do business and to create jobs. The NPRF has already established funds that support both strategic projects and a number that support SME financing. Additionally, my colleague the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Richard Bruton TD, announced on Monday 4 November 2013 the establishment of a new fund of €125 million managed by MML Growth Capital Partners Ireland which will focus on investing in Irish SMEs.

Credit Unions

199. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the recent announcement by the Central Bank to grant permission to wind up a credit union (details supplied) and to allow it to be taken over by a bank; if he will respond to recent commentary that 56 credit unions countrywide were found to have insufficient capital as per a report by the Commission on Credit Unions; his views on the future role of credit unions; and if there will be a requirement for any other credit unions to merge in the future. [49294/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank has secured a High Court order to transfer the assets and liabilities of Newbridge Credit Union to Permanent TSB; Newbridge Credit Union has not been wound-up. In serving the High Court order, the Central Bank had to make a case to the Court that winding up was not in the public interest. The resolution report (available at www.centralbank.ie) sets out the detailed Central Bank case on this point, including the fact that winding up, or liquidation, would have led to losses by savers at Newbridge Credit Union. I recognise the important role of credit unions as a volunteer co-

operative movement and the distinction between them and other types of financial institutions and I am determined to support a strengthened credit union movement and would encourage the movement to work with its stronger credit unions so they can provide a viable option for assisting weaker credit unions.

The figure of 56 credit unions referred to in the question is taken from the Report of the Commission on Credit Unions. However, the Central Bank has provided updated statistics based on data as at 30 September 2013. These show that some 20 credit unions have reported regulatory reserves below the minimum requirement of 10 per cent of assets, giving rise to a capital shortfall in the region of €11 million in total.

The Commission on Credit Unions, in its Report, made a number of recommendations regarding the future of credit unions. These are being implemented in the tiered regulatory approach and will see some credit unions opting to provide additional services. The core objective of these reforms is to provide the most effective regulatory structure for credit unions, taking account of their not-for-profit mandate, their volunteer ethos and community focus, while paying due regard to the need to fully protect members' savings and financial stability.

The restructuring process will be overseen by the Credit Union Restructuring Board (ReBo) which is an independent statutory body established by the 2012 Act. Restructuring will be carried out on a voluntary, incentivised and time-bound basis and €250 million has been allocated to the Credit Union Fund to support this process.

In addition, the resolution process may also involve the transfer of assets and liabilities of credit unions. The Resolution Fund contains €250 to support resolution action and was used for the transfer of assets and liabilities of Newbridge Credit Union to Permanent TSB.

Banking Sector

200. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 97, 100 and 101 of 12 November 2013, the number of days it will take for the information requested to be provided; if he will also provide the data requested in Parliamentary Questions Nos. 97, 100 and 101 with respect to the National Treasury Management Agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49314/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I can confirm that the information requested in Parliamentary Questions Numbers 97, 100 and 101 of 12 November 2013 was forwarded to the Deputy on 15 November 2013. With regard to the data requested in respect of the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA), it has not been possible for the Agency to collate the information requested in the time available. I will write to the Deputy directly with the information as soon as it becomes available.

Tax Reliefs Availability

201. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Finance if he will introduce tax provisions that complement the maintenance of old buildings, prevent demolition or encourage sponsorship and donation to heritage foundations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49337/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): There are a number of tax provisions already in the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (TCA) that provide reliefs and incentives to pre-

serve and renovate built heritage.

Significant Buildings and Gardens

Section 482 of the TCA provides for tax relief for expenditure incurred on the repair, maintenance or restoration of approved buildings or gardens. For a building or garden to be approved it must be a building or garden which is intrinsically of significant scientific, historical, architectural or aesthetic interest, as determined by the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government. A garden may also be determined as being intrinsically of significant horticultural interest. The building or garden must be reasonably accessible to members of the public, as determined by the Revenue Commissioners.

Donations of Heritage Items

Section 1003 of the TCA provides tax relief of 80% of the market value for the donation of heritage items to certain approved bodies.

Donations of Heritage Property

Section 1003A of the TCA provides tax relief of 50% of the market value for the donation of heritage property to the Irish Heritage Trust or the Office of Public Works.

Tax Relief for Donations

Section 848A of the TCA provides for tax relief on donations to approved bodies. The list of approved bodies for the purposes of section 848A, which includes eligible charities, bodies approved for education in the arts and eligible primary, secondary and third level institutions, is available on the Revenue website at www.revenue.ie. The Irish Heritage Trust and the Heritage Council are two examples of heritage bodies that qualify for the relief.

Charitable Tax Exemption

In order to qualify for a charitable tax exemption, a body or trust must be established for charitable purposes only and must apply all of its income to those purposes. A list of bodies that have a charitable tax exemption is available on the Revenue Commissioners web site at the following link: http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/publications/charities_alpha.xls.

Living City Initiative

The Living City Initiative is a pilot project which was enacted in section 30 of Finance Act 2013 and was targeted initially at certain designated areas of Limerick and Waterford. Finance Act 2013 sets out the parameters of the scheme.

In my Budget speech on 15 October, I announced the extension of the Initiative to 4 other cities (Dublin, Cork, Galway and Kilkenny). As was the case with Limerick and Waterford, the Initiative will be targeted at certain designated neglected areas of these 4 cities – these designated areas will be agreed in conjunction with the relevant local authorities. It is not possible at this stage to say what streets will be included within a designated area, but it will not extend to an entire city. Finance Bill (No 2) 2013 also allows for certain amendments to the existing scheme to be made, including the eligibility date for buildings within these areas – now defined as “pre-1915”.

The Initiative is made up of a series of residential and retail tax incentives, the purpose of which is to try to break the spiral of urban depopulation and decay which afflicts many of our cities by encouraging families to return to live and work in these inner city centres.

An independent cost benefit analysis on the pilot project was published on my Department's website on Budget day. An application for EU State Aid approval will be submitted shortly – it could not be submitted until the independent cost benefit analysis was received. It is not known how long the approval process will last but it can reasonably be expected to take several months.

Pyrite Remediation Programme

202. Deputy Alan Farrell asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider a tax write-off, rebate or concession for property owners who have been affected by the pyrite problem in the Leinster region and do not qualify under the Pyrite Resolution Board criteria for funding toward the remediation of their property; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49338/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) provides for a number of specific exemptions from the charge to Local Property Tax (LPT), as well as the possibility of deferring the charge in certain cases of hardship. Exemptions from or deferral of the Local Property Tax only apply in the circumstances provided for in the legislation. Accordingly, whilst those who have been affected by the pyrite problem, but do not qualify for relief under the Pyrite Remediation Scheme, may be exempt from LPT for another reason, or may be entitled to avail of a deferral arrangement under the provisions contained in the legislation, there is no specific exemption in such cases.

I am not proposing to extend the relief from Local Property Tax as provided for in the legislation for property owners who have been affected by pyrite.

As the Deputy is aware the Pyrite Remediation Scheme is under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government.

Tax Code

203. Deputy Jim Daly asked the Minister for Finance his plans regarding alterations to the current revenue pay and file date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49375/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Under the regulations known as the "Two-Pack" which were formally adopted on 30th May 2013, a common budgetary timeline is being introduced for all Euro Area member states. Specifically:

- the draft budget for central government and the main parameters of the draft budgets for all the other sub-sectors of the general government must be published by the 15th of October each year;
- draft budgetary plans in a common format must be submitted by all Euro area Member States not in a programme of assistance; and
- the budget for the central government must be adopted or fixed upon and published by 31st December each year.

In light of these requirements, the Government decided to bring Budget Day forward from the first week in December to on or before 15th October from now on. Accordingly, I presented Budget 2014 on Tuesday, 15th October. The Government also decided that the Finance Bill should complete its passage through the Oireachtas by 31st December each year. One of the most critical elements of the Budget process is the accuracy of systems for forecasting potential revenue yield in the year in question prior to the Budget actually taking place.

In the context of a December Budget Day, the availability prior to the Budget of information on cumulative tax yields to the end of November gave a high degree of certainty to the estimation of potential outturn for the year. For example, cumulative tax yield to the end of November 2012 was €33.8bn, which represented 92% of the full year outturn of €36.6bn. On the other hand, cumulative yield to end September, at €26.1bn, represented only 71.3% of the eventual outturn.

The scope for unanticipated events which would lead to either a higher or lower than projected outturn is considerably increased in the context of an October Budget. In addition the ability to project future yield is compromised. Consequently, measures which would result in improvements in the availability of information or increases in the proportion of total yield already available prior to the Budget have to be considered.

The main areas where scope exists to introduce such improvements relate to the income tax Pay & File arrangements and on 11th October I initiated a consultation process on a revision of the existing arrangements.

I am aware of the concerns that have been raised and the results of this consultation process, and any other representations received, are a factor in my decision making process regarding the necessary measures to be taken.

I would reiterate that changes to the Pay and File regime are necessary as a result of the move to an earlier Budget Day, following the adoption of the Two-Pack and will provide increased certainty around the annual tax take.

Tax Code

204. Deputy Michael Creed asked the Minister for Finance the implication for those in the hotel industry of the capital allowances guillotine that comes into effect on 31 December 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49378/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The measure to which the Deputy is referring was announced by me in the Budget in December 2011 and provided for in the Finance Act 2012. This was complemented, at that time, by the introduction of an additional 5% USC charge in the form of a property relief surcharge on the use of property reliefs by certain higher earning individuals. The broad intention of these two measures was to reduce the legacy of property reliefs in line with Government policy to develop a fairer tax code. Although almost all of these property and area-based incentive reliefs have been brought to an end by this stage, unused reliefs were being carried forward year after year into the future at substantial cost to the Exchequer. The changes which I introduced were informed by an Economic Impact Assessment into this area which was conducted by my Department and the changes received broad cross party support at the time. The details of the measure curtailing property-based accelerated capital allowances are as follows:

- It only applies to the various accelerated property and area-based capital allowances schemes. The ordinary industrial buildings allowance or the wear and tear allowance for plant and machinery are unaffected.

- The measure applies potentially to any industrial building for which accelerated capital allowances have been claimed. It is not restricted to hotels.

- Importantly, it applies only to passive investors in these schemes or to those who are deemed in law not to be actively engaged in the trade. Persons who are actively engaged in their

respective trades are not affected by this measure.

- With effect from January 2015, any unused capital allowances which are carried forward beyond the tax life of the building will be lost. This essentially means that if the tax life has ended anytime up to the end of 2014, then the unused allowances are lost in 2015. If, on the other hand, the tax life of a building ends in 2016 or 2017 or later, then it is at the end of that year that the unused allowances are lost.

My intention back in December 2011, when I announced 2015 as the operative date for this measure, was to give adequate notice to those who may potentially be affected to take steps to ensure that the impact on them is minimised. The practical impact of this measure will only begin to be felt in a little over a year's time, at the earliest. I have no immediate plans at this time to review the policy before it has even come into effect and as far as I am concerned, the measure is proportionate and will be effective in bringing to an end the legacy of these property reliefs.

Drugs Smuggling

205. Deputy Frank Feighan asked the Minister for Finance if he will review existing patrols at ports, land and sea, in the west of Ireland regarding sniffer dog cover for operation and practice in relation to checks and monitoring for drugs; and the changes that are proposed to strengthen the cover in these locations. [49383/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that they attach a very high priority to combating the smuggling of controlled drugs and are committed to playing an active role, in conjunction with other relevant agencies, in working against this criminal activity and those responsible for it. Revenue has primary responsibility for the detection, interception and seizure of controlled drugs at points of entry into the State. They maintain an enforcement presence at strategic locations and place particular emphasis on developing an intelligence-based focus at both national and regional level, deploying resources to areas of highest risk. Enforcement strength at particular locations is regularly augmented with additional personnel on a risk-assessment basis, or when particular operations are taking place against illegal activity.

Revenue enforcement officers carry out regular and ongoing monitoring of the coastline, including patrols and physical checks at harbours and piers. This work is supplemented by Revenue's Customs Drug Watch Programme, which incorporates a coastal reporting mechanism. This allows members of the public, maritime and local communities to report, in confidence, suspect or unusual movements at sea or around the coast through a confidential 24/7 free phone facility.

Revenue deploys two Customs Cutters, the *RCC Suirbhéir* and the *RCC Faire*, to patrol the coastline and undertake maritime intelligence gathering duties. These vessels support teams of land-based enforcement officers involved in anti-smuggling duties. The cutters are deployed to cover potential high-risk areas along the coastline.

Revenue has two drug detector dog teams based on the western coast, at Sligo and Shannon, which are deployed over the wider geographical area as necessary. Overall, Revenue has 13 detector dogs at its disposal (8 of which are specifically trained in drugs detection) and these dogs can be deployed to any location as required on a risk-assessment basis. Four additional dog teams are currently being commissioned (two to replace dogs which have recently been retired and two additional teams). This will bring the total number of dog detection teams with

drug detection capability to ten.

Customs controls at regional airports are risk-based and are carried out by mobile enforcement personnel. Attendance at these airports is selective and targeted and is based on analysis and evaluation of national and international smuggling trends, traffic frequency, routes and other risk indicators. Attendance can also be as a result of specific intelligence. Flights with origins and destinations with a high-risk rating attract particular interest and the enforcement presence at regional airports is kept under constant review.

Revenue's Customs service works proactively with An Garda Síochána and the Naval Service in the fight against drug trafficking as part of the Joint Task Force on Drugs Interdiction. There is excellent cooperation between these agencies in the sharing of intelligence and the identification and investigation of the criminals involved in the illegal drugs trade.

Revenue's work against drugs crime is extensive and multi-faceted and is kept under constant review to ensure that it makes the most effective contribution possible to dealing with this societal problem.

Unfinished Housing Developments

206. Deputy Willie Penrose asked the Minister for Finance the position pertaining to financial bonds issued by the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation in relation to the construction of various housing estates throughout the country; if he will give an assurance that these bonds are fully honoured when called upon by the relevant local authorities to ensure they are in a position to complete such estates and take them in charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49434/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am aware of the problems facing local authorities and in particular in relation to unfinished housing estates as a result of developers not complying with the terms of their planning permissions. Both the Special Liquidators and officials from my Department have recently met with the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, Local Authorities and the Housing Agency in relation to this issue as a matter of concern. I am advised that development bonds previously entered into by IBRC in favour of the various County Councils or local authorities remain in place. Unfortunately it is likely that any liabilities arising under these arrangements, if called upon, will rank as unsecured claims in the special liquidation.

I am advised that the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government are currently working with the relevant local authorities to ascertain the actual level of exposure that exists in relation to these bonds and submit a claim to the Special Liquidators in respect of the bonds.

Property Taxation Administration

207. Deputy Sean Fleming asked the Minister for Finance the position under the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 that requires employers and pension providers to provide a statement of deductions to be given to liable persons at the end of the year, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to give a statement of deductions of local property tax to liable persons at the end of the year while the Minister for Social Protection is not obliged to provide a statement of deductions to liable persons from whose benefits the Department deducted the local property tax during the course of the year; the reason persons who pay their local property

tax by deduction from their social welfare payment are not treated similarly to other categories of persons who make deductions from Government payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49476/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Part 10 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) provides for payment of the Local Property Tax (LPT) by deduction at source from salary or occupational pension or from certain payments made by the Departments of Social Protection and Agriculture, Food and the Marine. I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that where this payment method is chosen, the following provisions outline what a liable person can expect to receive in relation to an end of year statement of the amount of LPT deducted. Section 80 of the Act obliges an employer or pension provider to provide each employee or pension recipient with a statement showing the amount of LPT deducted from payroll during the year within 46 days after the end of that year. I am advised by the Commissioners that this statement of LPT deducted should be included on the annual P60 form which employers and pension providers are already required to provide to their employees/pension recipients under Regulation 27 of the Income Tax (Employments) (Consolidated) Regulations 2001 (S.I. No. 559 of 2001).

In accordance with section 115 of the legislation, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine is obliged to provide each liable person with a statement showing, in respect of that year, the total amount of LPT deducted from the person's net scheme payments. According to information supplied by Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine to the Revenue Commissioners, the statement of the amount of LPT deducted during the year will be shown separately on the "Annual Farmer Statement" that issues to farmers after the end of each calendar year.

Section 98 of the Act allows any person who paid their LPT by deduction of LPT from certain payments received from the Department of Social Protection to request a statement of the amount of LPT deducted from his/her Department of Social Protection payments. The Minister for Social Protection is obliged to comply with this request. The Commissioners further advise that this legislative provision was drafted in consultation with the Department of Social Protection.

Credit Unions

208. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Finance when will the credit report and the viability report, both dated the 10 February 2012, regarding Newbridge Credit Union will be published or available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49478/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank has published on its website, a range of material in relation to the transfer of Newbridge Credit Union to Permanent TSB. This includes a resolution report prepared for the Governor of the Central Bank and an affidavit prepared for a hearing in the High Court. I am advised by the Central Bank of its view that a range of other material remains subject to confidentiality restrictions, which includes the credit report and viability report, and the Central Bank is currently examining whether any of this material can come into the public domain in due course.

Financial Instruments

209. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance in relation to MiFID, if Ireland supports the setting of position limits at EU level or by the trading venue. [49482/13]

210. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance in relation to MiFID, if Ireland supports the application of position limits to all trading venues and to all over the counter trades. [49483/13]

211. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance in relation to MiFID, if Ireland supports the application of position limits to each single month and all months combined. [49484/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 209 to 211, inclusive, together.

Position limits are a regulatory tool designed to increase the ability of regulators to ensure stable markets and to prevent market abuse, and this is achieved through imposing limits on the extent to which certain financial market participants can take positions in the market in question. Position limits can be applicable to individual transactions or positions built up over time.

Ireland supports the imposition of a position limits regime through MiFID which will support market stability and help prevent market abuse. The position limits regime is set to apply to each class of commodity derivative. It will be supplemented by much greater transparency requirements, a position management regime and product intervention powers for the national competent authorities. We also support these important provisions.

In relation to the decision maker on the application of position limits, Ireland supports a decision making process which provides an important role for all relevant actors, including trading venues, national competent authorities (NCAs) and the European Securities Markets Authority (ESMA). It is important that trading venues co-operate fully with the NCAs and it is important that the NCAs bring to bear their knowledge and experience at ESMA level. ESMA should lead in relation to bringing a strong level of coherence and consistency into the decision making on position limits through setting the parameters in which decisions on position limits are made by the NCAs.

Of course the MiFID negotiations between the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission are still ongoing, with the Council agreement secured via a qualified majority (QMV) of member states. One possible compromise outcome is an enhanced role for ESMA, empowering it to provide an opinion where it considers an NCA to have made a decision inconsistent with the criteria it has set, and this could be supplemented by an added obligation on NCAs to explain the reasoning for its decision on its website in such instances. However, solutions are still under consideration by the co-legislators.

In relation to the detailed rules to be applied with respect to a position limits regime, it is likely that much of this will be left to level 2 legislation, which can provide for a more coherent and calibrated regime, determined at an EU level by ESMA.

In relation to the scope of EU financial services legislation on commodity and related derivative markets, it should be noted that the MiFID file, along with the Market Abuse Regulation (MAR) agreement secured under the Irish Presidency, and the European Market Infrastructure Regulation (EMIR), provide for a much stronger legislative framework for dealing with speculation in commodity derivative markets deemed to be harmful.

Tax Reliefs Eligibility

212. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Finance the additional number of health insurance policyholders who would have been unaffected by the tax relief changes announced

in budget 2014 who will no longer qualify for this relief following the changes to risk equalisation credits and stamp duty levies announced on 12 November 2013; his estimate of the total number of policyholders who will now be impacted by the change in tax relief; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49489/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy appears to be suggesting that the increase in Stamp Duty proposed in the Health Insurance (Amendment) Bill 2013 will lead to an increase in policy charges, which in turn will mean that a portion of some policies will no longer qualify for tax relief, because of the restriction in tax relief on health insurance policies which I announced in Budget 2014. The Stamp Duty is part of the permanent scheme of risk equalisation, which commenced in 2012 and followed the previous interim scheme of risk equalisation introduced by the previous Government. Both schemes give effect to the policy of community rating of health insurance, which was a policy common to both this and the previous Government.

The increased Stamp Duty rates, if agreed by the Oireachtas, will apply from 1 March 2014. The Stamp Duty is charged on the health insurance company rather than the individual policy holder. It does not automatically follow that any or all of the increased Stamp Duty charge will be passed onto the policy holder, although there is nothing to prevent the company doing so. The Deputy will be aware that my colleague, the Minister for Health, has called on insurance companies not to pass on all the cost of the increased Stamp Duty. Also, the Stamp Duty has not increased on “non-advanced cover” policies, broadly speaking, those policies which provide cover for public hospitals only.

A variety of factors will influence the insurance companies pricing strategy for health insurance policies, not only the income tax relief changes announced in the Budget and the Stamp Duty changes announced by the Minister for Health. The tax changes may not be the most significant factor affecting the price of health insurance policies. It is therefore not possible to estimate how, whether and to what extent the tax changes will impact on individual policies.

I would like to point out to the Deputy that there is no question of any policy holder no longer qualifying for tax relief on the premium. The Budget change imposed ceilings on the relief which will, be available in future.

Tax Reliefs Eligibility

213. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to amend section 469 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 to allow persons to claim tax back on treatment if they self-refer to a physiotherapist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49490/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have considered this matter carefully and I have decided at this time, not to extend the parameters of the scheme to include self-referral for physiotherapy.

General practitioners act as an access and control point for the scheme of tax relief on health expenses, as all such expenses must be incurred on the advice or referral of a general practitioner. If physiotherapy was allowed without the need for the treatment to be prescribed by a practitioner, it would inevitably lead to calls for other treatments to similarly qualify for relief, which could greatly increase the overall cost of the scheme. Given the difficult fiscal environment, I am not predisposed to such a potential cost increase.

Banking Sector Staff

214. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Finance if he will clarify a matter regarding overtime payments at a bank (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49492/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy will be aware the Relationship Framework with the Allied Irish Banks provides that the State will not intervene in the day-to-day operations of the bank or their management decisions. This framework is published on the Department of Finance website. I must ensure that the bank is run on a commercial, cost effective and independent basis to ensure the value of the bank as an asset to the State, as per the Memorandum on Economic and Financial Policies agreed with the EU Commission, the ECB and the IMF.

I have been informed that AIB manages “overtime” within its commercial business requirements.

Excise Duties Yield

215. Deputy John Lyons asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a breakdown in excise returns by category and by month from January 2011 to November 2013. [49504/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the breakdown in excise returns by category for November 2013 is not yet available. The breakdown in excise by category and by month from January 2011 to October 2013 is as follows:

2011	Alcohol €m	Tobacco €m	Oils €m	Carbon €m	VRT €m	Other Excise €m
JAN	87.8	0.6	234.7	14.5	41.5	12.1
FEB	35.9	26.8	176.7	44.7	57.7	9
MAR	51.2	64.7	183	23.3	49.1	8.2
APR	67.9	96.1	180.2	32.2	45.9	9.5
MAY	67.5	65.4	177.5	19.4	33.5	5.5
JUN	65.6	102.9	177.9	26.9	36.1	4.8
JUL	70.8	113.7	174.3	22.1	31.4	12.5
AUG	72	109.7	185.6	20.5	19.5	6.1
SEP	70.2	78.3	174	22.2	36.4	9
OCT	64.7	90	174.7	22.9	14.6	10.8
NOV	75.3	110.7	181.3	24.3	12.2	7.8
DEC	100.8	267.2	109.9	25.3	10.4	4.6
TOTAL	830	1126	2130	298	388	100
2012	Alcohol €m	Tobacco €m	Oils €m	Carbon €m	VRT €m	Other Excise €m
JAN	87.8	1	223.8	16.8	47.7	8.5
FEB	35.6	52.8	166.7	41.3	62.9	4.1
MAR	50.6	55.8	176.7	24.5	56.1	4
APR	64.7	70.8	166.8	34.2	44.5	9

2012	Alcohol €m	Tobacco €m	Oils €m	Carbon €m	VRT €m	Other Ex- cise €m
MAY	61.4	108	180.9	26	33.6	4.8
JUN	73.3	121.8	168.6	33.3	33.6	4
JUL	68.4	80.2	167.7	27.9	25.8	10.7
AUG	64.7	92.4	175.9	26.7	21.1	5.6
SEP	68.7	68.3	165.3	26.4	17.2	5.8
OCT	65.9	99.8	175.1	29.7	14.5	14.6
NOV	85	97.5	171.9	33.6	11.2	5.4
DEC	120	224	87.9	33.6	11.2	4
TOTAL	846	1072	2027	354	379	81
2013	Alcohol €m	Tobacco €m	Oils €m	Carbon €m	VRT €m	Other Ex- cise €m
JAN	93.5	1.1	231.4	26	52.1	8.3
FEB	40.6	104.8	158.9	42.7	64.6	3
MAR	52.2	52.5	173.2	33.6	55.1	3.9
APR	77.2	72	170.5	37.6	47.5	9.8
MAY	68.5	93.6	182.8	29.4	38.8	4.3
JUN	85.2	93.2	161.4	39.2	27.2	4.4
JUL	80.9	70.1	173.9	25.8	36	11
AUG	88.6	59.6	175.8	30.5	42.2	5.4
SEP	80.5	87.3	163.3	29.1	25	8.4
OCT	82.1	90.1	177	27.8	21.2	13
TOTAL	749	724	1768	322	410	72

The Category Other Excise includes Licences, Betting and Travel Tax.

Please note that the receipts shown for 2013 are provisional and are subject to revision.

Totals are rounded to the nearest million euro and any apparent discrepancies in totals are due to rounding of constituent figures.

Banking Sector

216. Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan asked the Minister for Finance if the banking licence held by the ACC Bank will be handed in to the Central Bank when the bank closes; if this is the only option being examined by his Department; if he will consider selling off the bank, including its licence, brand and its outlets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49506/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): ACC Bank is a subsidiary of the Rabobank Group based in the Netherlands which has taken the commercial decision, as a private enterprise, to return ACC’s banking licence to the Central Bank. The Central Bank does not envisage that this will occur until the second half of 2014. As Minister for Finance, the issue of selling the bank does not arise because it is owned by Rabobank Group, not the Irish state.

ACC’s situation must be considered against a backdrop of a comprehensive programme of bank recapitalisation and restructuring that has been underway to change the future banking landscape in Ireland and abroad. While it is disappointing that ACC have taken this decision one of the key features of banking strategy in the financial crisis has been the retrenchment to

national borders.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Government has decided to establish the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) which will absorb the National Pensions Reserve Fund (NPRF).

Using the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund, we will maximise our resources to enhance growth in the Irish economy and improve key infrastructure to maintain Ireland's attractiveness as a place to do business and to create employment. Officials of my Department are currently preparing the necessary legislation which I anticipate will be enacted early next year.

Already, in the lifetime of this Government, the NPRF has established funds that support both strategic projects and a number that support SME financing.

The Government has made a commitment to improve funding mechanisms for the real economy, including access to finance for Irish SMEs. As the Taoiseach announced on 14 November in order to advance this commitment, government officials led by the Department of Finance will be engaging with the German authorities to leverage KFW expertise and resources to support credit availability for Irish SMEs.

Mortgage Resolution Processes

217. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance the progress and targets being achieved in tackling mortgage arrears by the banks through the mortgage arrears and resolution process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49507/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank Mortgage Arrears Resolution Targets requires the main mortgage lenders to propose and conclude sustainable agreements with their mortgage customers who are in arrears of more than 90 days on their mortgage. The targets so far set require the relevant banks to propose sustainable solutions to

- 20% of their mortgage customers who are in arrears of over 90 days by end June 2013,
- 30% by the end of September,
- 50% by the end of the end of 2013 and
- 70% by the end of March 2014.

In addition, the targets so far set for concluded solutions are

- 15% of their arrears customers by the end of December 2013 and
- 25% by the end of March 2014.

Banks have now submitted returns to the Central Bank regarding the end June and end September targets. The Central Bank has informed me that it is currently reviewing the data submitted and it will publish information following receipt of audit reports on quarterly performance against targets at an aggregate industry level.

Mortgage Resolution Processes

218. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance the number of split mortgages that are now in place in particular in the pillar banks; his projections over the next three

years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49508/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): My Department is now publishing mortgage restructures and mortgage arrears data, on a monthly basis, in respect of the six institutions covered by the Central Bank Mortgage Arrears Resolution Targets (MART) process. The most recent published data is for the end of September and it shows that, in respect of those institutions, a permanent split mortgage restructure has been put in place for 3,688 primary dwelling mortgage accounts. As the Deputy will be aware, under the MART process, the Central Bank has set targets requiring these institutions to progressively increase the number of proposed and concluded sustainable mortgage restructures for those accounts in arrears of more than 90 days, over the course of 2013 and 2014. Accordingly, it will be expected that the number of mortgage restructures will continue to increase. However, it will be a matter for the lender and borrower to agree on the particular type of sustainable restructure that will be most appropriate to the individual case of mortgage difficulty.

AIB Response:

AIB reports on a half yearly basis and the number of split mortgages completed to 30 June 2013, was 28. AIB also disclosed that under MARTs Q2 2013 targets, set by the Central Bank of Ireland, it had made offers of 153 split mortgages to customers. All offers of split mortgages are offered on a case by case basis. All of AIB's relevant disclosures are contained in its Half Yearly Financial Report 2013 which is available on its website www.aibgroup.com/investorrelations

BOI Response:

Bank of Ireland's annual report for the year to 31 December 2012 gives comprehensive disclosures on its Residential Irish Mortgage Portfolios (particularly pages 321 - 333). Bank of Ireland also provides detailed disclosure on its Irish mortgage book on pages 114 through to 125 of the Group's interim financial statements for the six month period ended 30 June 2013.

Black Economy

219. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the steps that have been taken by his Department or the Revenue Commissioners to tackle the illegal black market in the solid fuel trade, particularly in the area of the sale of sod turf and chopped wood. [49512/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that they are aware of the threat that illicit trade in this area causes both to the exchequer and to legitimate business. Sales of solid fuel, including coal, peat and chopped wood offered for sale as a fuel, are subject to VAT at a rate of 13½ %. Any person whose sales in a 12 month period exceed or are likely to exceed €75,000 is required to register for VAT. In addition, since 1st May 2013, solid fuel carbon tax (SFCT) is chargeable on coal and peat, including sod peat, when these products are first supplied in the State. Any person making such a supply is required to register with Revenue.

Both VAT and SFCT on solid fuels are collected on a self-assessed basis and are subject to the full range of compliance interventions and enforcement provisions for self-assessed taxes applied by Revenue. In circumstances where there are grounds to believe that tax due has not been paid, Revenue investigates the suspect person's tax liabilities and enforces the collection of any unpaid tax, including income tax, SFCT and VAT, together with any interest or penalties due. As part of its work in this area, Revenue chairs the Hidden Economy Monitoring Group (HEMG) and has established regional sub-groups of the HEMG to facilitate the reporting of information by traders through their representative associations. Suppliers who suspect or have

evidence that illegal solid fuel is being sold in their area should report this to their Local Authority and to Revenue either directly or through their representative associations. Any reports to Revenue are treated as confidential and are fully investigated. There have been some reports recently concerning suspected untaxed fuel supplies and these are being investigated.

The application of the solid fuel carbon tax on coal is heavily dependant on the regulatory regime for coal put in place by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, and enforced by Local Authorities. Regulations were made that established higher standards for coal supplied in the State compared with Northern Ireland and to enable local authorities to control those supplies. Suppliers who produce and supply solid fuels unlawfully are subject to investigation and prosecution by local authorities and other State Agencies charged with enforcing environmental regulations and preventing such supply. Revenue liaises with these bodies, as required, to ensure that lawful supplies of solid fuels are properly taxed.

Pension Provisions

220. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Finance the pension arrangements in place for retired senior executives of the former Anglo Irish Bank; the cost to the Exchequer to maintain payments to these persons; and the number of former senior executives who are currently in receipt of pensions as a result of them having been employed by Anglo Irish Bank. [49515/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I advised that Pension Schemes that were available to staff at Anglo Irish Bank included defined benefit schemes (which closed to new membership in 1994) and a defined contribution scheme. These schemes are funded schemes, and are operated by appointed trustees. The schemes are operated independently from the bank under distinct rules and legislation. Payments are not made from the Exchequer to fund these as pension entitlements are paid from the funds of the relevant schemes and in accordance with the rules of the particular scheme.

I am advised by the Special Liquidators that due to obligations under Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003 they cannot comment on the emoluments of individual staff members of IBRC (in Special Liquidation).

Property Taxation Exemptions

221. Deputy Martin Heydon asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that persons who close the sale of a property between 1 November and 31 December 2013, are liable for the local property tax for 2014 for a house they will not own in 2014, and will not be in a position to reclaim the tax from purchasers who are all now exempt until 2016; his plans to address this unfair situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49518/13]

223. Deputy Joanna Tuffy asked the Minister for Finance in the event that a property is sold in November or December 2013, the position regarding the liability for property tax on that property for 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49556/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 221 and 223 together.

In accordance with the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended), liability for

Local Property Tax (LPT) will arise where a person owns a residential property on the liability date, which was 1 May 2013 for 2013 and for subsequent years is 1 November in the preceding year. Section 119 of the Act sets out the dates for payment of the Local Property Tax and clarifies that while the LPT is due by reference to a liability date it is not payable until a later date. For the year 2014, the liability date is 1 November 2013 and the tax is payable on or before 1 January 2014.

Where a liable person sells their residential property between 2 November 2013 and 31 December 2013, provided that they owned the property on 1 November 2013, they will be liable to pay LPT on that property for 2014. Detailed guidance on LPT issues arising in the context of the sale or transfer of a residential property, including this issue, was prepared by the Revenue Commissioners in consultation with the Law Society and published earlier this year. The guidance is available on the Revenue website at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/lpt/sale-transfer-property.html>.

For a tax such as LPT to function properly, legislation must specify a liability date for the tax to have application for a particular year. Whatever date is prescribed, the question of liability when there is a change of ownership has to be managed, and I would expect that the LPT liability involved is likely to be factored in during negotiations between the parties on the sale price and the closing date of a particular contract.

The liability date for 2014 of 1 November 2013 is settled and has been approved by the Oireachtas in passing the LPT legislation. Having a liability date before the year commences is preferable from an administrative point of view as there is certainty about who the liable person is for the coming year, that person has a reasonable amount of time to make the necessary provisions and they have access to the widest possible range of options for paying the tax. In particular, the liable person can put the required arrangements in place to ensure that phased payments by way of direct debit or deduction at source from employment, occupational pension or from certain Government payments would commence from January 2014 and would spread payment of the full LPT liability evenly over the course of 2014. I do not intend to change the liability date as specified in the legislation. Therefore, I have no plans to change the legislation in question.

An individual selling a property will often be purchasing another property at around the same time. While a vendor who owns a property on 1 November 2013 is liable for the 2014 LPT on that property, if s/he does not purchase another property before 1 November 2013 s/he will not be liable for the 2014 LPT on that "replacement" property – whoever is the owner as of 1 November 2013 will be liable.

Tax Yield

222. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Finance the amount of money collected by the Revenue Commissioners from taxi companies in VAT collected on hand held radios issued to drivers, on an annual basis for the past five years, and the number of companies involved. [49522/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that as the information furnished on VAT returns does not require the yield for a particular sector or sub-sector of economic activity to be identified, the amount of VAT collected on hand held radios issued to drivers cannot be identified.

Question No. 223 answered with Question No. 221.

Property Taxation Collection

224. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of property tax collected in Drumcondra area, Dublin 9. [49567/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that compliance data for the Local Property Tax (LPT) for 2013 are only available broken down by city and county councils nationally and the most up to date figures are published on the Commissioners website at: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/lpt/lpt-stats-11-2013.pdf>.

The Deputy will be aware that the Pay and File campaign for LPT 2014 is underway and this is Revenue's current priority in relation to LPT. I am advised that work is on-going to refine the LPT Register and while more up-to-date data will be published incrementally in due course, data at the level of a specific area within a postal district, as sought by the Deputy, is unlikely to be available.

Weight of Schoolbags

225. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the issue of the weight of children's schoolbags; the risk they may pose to the health of children; the action he is taking; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48887/13]

231. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the responsibility his Department has for addressing the issue of the weight of children's schoolbags and the potential risk to their health; the actions his Department has taken to address this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48888/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 225 and 231 together.

My Department issued Circular M35/05 in 2005 to highlight the potential health hazard of overweight schoolbags and to outline a range of local measures that could be put in place to help alleviate the problem. The circular referred to the recommendations of the previously published report of the Working Group on the Weight of School Bags. This report acknowledged that many of the solutions belong at local school level and made various recommendations in this regard, such as optimum use of storage facilities, developing pupil organisation skills and timetabling. It is a matter for each individual school to determine which particular measures are most suited to its individual circumstances and to how the school concerned organises teaching and learning. The circular and the report of the Working Group on the Weight of School Bags are available on my Department's website at www.education.ie.

Momentum Programme

226. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason travel allowances for participants (details supplied) in County Meath of momentum courses who reside a considerable distance from the momentum course do not apply in the same manner as they do to FAS/VTOS and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49195/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): In the design of the Momentum Programme, consideration was given to the question of additional payments/supports but in the current difficult economic circumstances, it was decided

that no additional payments, other than the retention of social welfare benefits, was warranted. This approach was discussed between the relevant Government Departments when the Programme was being designed last year. An evaluation of the Momentum Programme is currently underway and this issue will be considered in that context.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

227. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an apprentice will now be able to avail of a student grant as a result of the changes in the payments introduced in budget 2014. [48823/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Under the terms of the Student Grant Scheme, grant assistance is awarded to students who meet the prescribed conditions of funding including those which relate to nationality, residency, approved course, previous academic attainment and means. To avail of funding an applicant must be entering an approved full-time course in an approved institution as set out in the Student Support Act 2011 and Regulation 3 and 4 of the Student Support Regulations 2013. Apprentices are paid a training allowances by SOLAS for phases of their training spent off the job. This allowance is equivalent to the wages they receive from their employers for on the job phases and is unaffected by the budgetary changes. The course of study they undertake would not satisfy the term and conditions of the Student Grant Scheme 2013.

Schools Building Projects Expenditure

228. Deputy Dan Neville asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding extra funding in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48832/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): As the Deputy is aware, my Department approved very significant levels of devolved funding to the school, to which the Deputy refers, in June 2011 and has increased the level of grant-aid on two occasions since to provide a permanent extension comprising 2 mainstream classrooms, 2 special education rooms, toilets, disabled access and car-parking/bus set-down. The school has applied for further additional accommodation and in that regard, my Department officials wrote to the school recently to seek a number of clarifications. Once a response has been received, my Department will then be in a position to meet the school authority to consider the application further.

National Internship Scheme Data

229. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a list of schools currently utilising the JobBridge scheme to employ interns in a teaching capacity. [48863/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The JobBridge Scheme is administered by the Department of Social Protection. Interns in schools are employed by the schools themselves and they continue to be paid their existing social welfare entitlement from the Department of Social Protection while participating in scheme. My Department does not maintain a record of schools who utilise the JobBridge scheme to employ interns.

Student Grant Scheme Appeals

230. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a student (details supplied) may expect a decision on their appeal to Student Universal Support Ireland and the student grant appeals board for the 2012-13 academic year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48864/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): An appeal from the student in question was considered by the independent Student Grants Appeals Board on 8th October, 2013. I understand that the student was requested to clarify certain information. This new information is due to be considered by the Independent Student Grants Appeals Board today 19th November, 2013. The student will be notified of the outcome in the coming days.

Question No. 231 answered with Question No. 225.

Student Grant Scheme Appeals

232. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress to date in determination of an appeal for a higher education grant in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48900/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) that in the case of the student referred to by the Deputy, his student grant application was appealed to the appeals officer in SUSI regarding a permanent change in circumstances. On 13th November 2013, documentation was requested in support of the change in circumstances. When the requested documentation is returned, the student will be notified directly of the outcome.

Schools Amalgamation

233. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will ensure that parents and pupils are central to any decision to amalgamate four schools (details supplied) in Dublin 10 into two schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48938/13]

234. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will ensure that the amalgamation of four schools (details supplied) in Dublin 10 into two schools does not lead to overcrowding, increased class sizes or loss of teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48939/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 233 and 234 together.

The initiative for any amalgamation or re-organisation may come from a variety of sources, such as parents, staff, Boards of Management and patron. Any such proposal to amalgamate schools must involve consultation with all of the relevant stakeholders and follow decisions taken at local level. The decision making authority for any amalgamation, including any appropriate arrangements, belongs to the Patron of a school subject to the approval of the Minister for Education and Skills. Irrespective of the amalgamation process, the pupil-teacher ratio still applies and there would be no disadvantage to any children in the schools referred to by the Deputy. However, I can confirm that my Department has not received any proposals from the Patron in relation to the future accommodation arrangements for the four schools referred to.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

235. Deputy Martin Heydon asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a Student Universal Support Ireland application submitted in June will be expedited in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48962/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) that the student referred to by the Deputy was issued with a letter on 14 November 2013 advising him that he was ineligible to receive a grant.

Where an individual applicant considers that he has been unjustly refused a student grant, or that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one, he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI.

Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down, in writing, by SUSI, and remains of the view that SUSI has not interpreted the scheme correctly in his/her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the Student Grant Appeals Board. The relevant appeal form is available to download from http://www.studentfinance.ie/downloads/1375344221/2013_SGAB_appeal_form.pdf.

School Transport Provision

236. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 339 of 5 November 2013, the additional costs to Bus Éireann of an extension of a morning bus route (details supplied) in County Kerry in view of the agreement of the private bus operator to provide this service for no additional cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49003/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The Deputy will be aware that Bus Éireann is responsible for the planning and timetabling of school transport routes. Bus Éireann endeavours, within available resources, to ensure that each eligible child has a reasonable level of school transport service in the context of the Scheme nationally.

The family in question are availing of a school transport service within the guidelines of the scheme and it is primarily for this reason, and not the consideration of the additional cost involved, that there are no proposals to change the existing service.

Parents/guardians are responsible for ensuring that children are brought safely to and collected safely from Bus Éireann designated pick up and set down points.

School Accommodation

237. Deputy Shane Ross asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a school (details supplied) is still housed within the premises of another school, when this arrangement was supposed to be a temporary measure; when building work will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49039/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The school to which the Deputy refers remains in its temporary accommodation because outline planning permission for a

permanent building for the school was refused.

A revised planning application is being lodged shortly with the local authority. This application will also be seeking planning permission for a PE Hall for the host school. This was a feature of the previous planning application. The timeframe for the delivery of the accommodation in question is dependent on the outcome of the planning application process.

Student Grant Scheme Payments

238. Deputy Robert Troy asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will expedite a Student Universal Support Ireland grant payment in respect of a person (details supplied). [49093/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) that in the case of the student referred to by the Deputy that she previously attended a course of study in the academic year 2012/2013.

Students who have previously attended, but not completed an approved course of study are required to complete an equivalent period of study on an approved course before being eligible to be considered for a grant. Payments of student grants are made monthly in arrears. I understand from SUSI that the student in question is entitled to maintenance from November and will be paid in December.

Information and Communications Technology

239. Deputy Jonathan O'Brien asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools that currently require children to use ipads or tablets, or that will require them to do so from September 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49100/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The introduction of tablet devices by a school is an operational matter for the Board of Management of the school. My Department has no role at individual school level in approving such initiatives and therefore does not have a record of the number of schools introducing tablet devices.

New technology that impacts on student teaching and learning should only be introduced by schools following consultation with the school community including parents. The cost and other implications must be fully considered by the Boards of Management.

The PDST-Technology in Education which promotes and supports the integration of a high quality ICT infrastructure into learning and teaching for schools, has published advice sheets which cover a wide range of areas relevant to ICT in education including. At present there is an advice sheet in relation to Tablet PCs which provides advice on such areas as what tablets can offer a school, educational considerations, purchasing considerations, software and Tablets. The PDST TIE does not provide advice on particular brands of tablets as the decision depends on the particular circumstances in a school.

Educational Tours

240. Deputy Jonathan O'Brien asked the Minister for Education and Skills the depart-

mental criteria governing foreign trips run by schools for students. [49101/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): In accordance with my Department's circulars, the objective of an educational tour should be to provide a significant benefit in the educational, intellectual, cultural and social development of pupils taking part.

It is a matter for each individual school to decide on the suitability of any proposed school tour having regard to these requirements.

The Board must exercise all reasonable care in respect of the pupils involved and take all necessary steps to ensure that sufficient supervision is in place and that all appropriate and necessary safeguards in respect of the welfare and safety of participating pupils are in place.

In addition, I hold the view that it is very important that schools are sensitive to the financial pressures on parents in making decision on such trips or indeed in relation to any other matter that has cost implications for parents.

School Accommodation

241. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills following the rejection by Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council of the Department's planning application for permission to construct the Ballinteer Educate Together School within the St. Tiernan's Community school site, his plans to provide a permanent site for the school within the time-frame previously envisaged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49118/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): A revised planning application for permanent accommodation for Ballinteer Educate Together on the site where the school is currently hosted is being lodged shortly with the local authority. This application will also be seeking planning permission for a PE Hall for the host school. The timeframe for the delivery of the accommodation in question is dependent on the outcome of the planning application process.

School Transport Provision

242. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department provides supervised transport for children with special needs to a college (details supplied) in County Cork; the way approval is sought for supervised transport in respect of this college; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49129/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Bus Éireann has advised my Department that there are no school transport services, under the terms of my Department's School Transport Scheme, operating into the facility in question.

School Transport Provision

243. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that no public transport under the school transport scheme is available to students from Drogheda attending a school (details supplied) in County Louth; if efforts will be made by the relevant authorities to provide such transport in this academic year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49152/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):

The school referred to by the Deputy in the details supplied will be an English-medium post primary school with an Irish Aonad. It is due to open for enrolments for the 2014/15 school year. Applications for transport for the 2014/15 school year will be considered in line with the terms of my Department's Post Primary School Transport Scheme.

Capitation Grants

244. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason students in a vocational education committee school get €212 more capitation per head than students in a voluntary secondary school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49175/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The funding arrangements for post primary schools reflect the sectoral division of our second-level system. At the core of these arrangements is reliance upon capitation as the principal determinant of funding.

The Department provides funding directly to voluntary secondary schools by way of per capita grants. However, grants for the day-to-day running costs of ETB schools and community colleges are issued to Education and Training Boards, not directly to schools, as part of a block grant. It is important to note that this block grant covers not only the day-to-day costs of schools but also the running costs of ETB head-offices and other activities apart from the second-level programme. Each ETB has a high level of autonomy in the management and appropriation of this grant and may distribute its allocations in line with its priorities and perceptions of need.

I am aware that the JMB's Pre-Budget Submission for 2012 suggested a difference of €212 in funding for each student attending a voluntary secondary school, in comparison to an ETB school or college. The Deputy should note that additional funding has been provided to voluntary secondary schools by way of "equalisation" measures since 2001. It is estimated that up to €21m has been provided in equalisation funding between 2001 and 2009.

While the current economic situation has slowed progress in that regard, it remains the Department's aim, depending on resource availability, to address anomalies in funding between the post-primary sectors.

Schools Building Projects Status

245. Deputy Robert Troy asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for a school (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [49190/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The school building project referred to by the Deputy is included in the 5 year construction programme with a scheduled construction date in 2014/15.

The project is at an advanced stage of architectural planning. The stage 2b (Detailed Design) has recently been approved and the school has been informed. My Department will be in contact with the Board of Management and Design Team in due course with regard to the further progression of this project.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

246. Deputy Robert Troy asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will ensure a person (details supplied) is granted a special rate of Student Universal Support Ireland grant payment. [49263/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department understand from Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) that the application from the student in question is under review. SUSI will make direct contact with the student when the review has been completed.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

247. Deputy Robert Troy asked the Minister for Education and Skills if adequate support will be offered to persons in a school (details supplied) in County Longford in terms of special needs assistants; his views on whether this is acceptable and needs to be addressed straight away by providing the school with additional support. [49270/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports, including the allocation of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to schools. The NCSE operates within my Department's established criteria for the allocation of Special Education supports and the staffing resources available to my Department.

All schools were advised to apply to the NCSE for resource teaching and SNA support for the 2013/14 school year by 15th March, 2013. The NCSE published details of all of their allocations for resource teaching and SNA support for the 2013/2014 school year in June of this year. The NCSE has also now published details of the additional SNA allocations which have been made to schools since the initial allocations were made to schools in June. The NCSE published details of these revised allocations on 21st October, 2013. These details are now available on the NCSE website, www.ncse.ie, and detail the allocations made for each school on a per county basis.

The school referred to by the Deputy currently has 4 approved SNA posts. It is important to note that the recruitment and deployment of SNAs within schools are matters for the individual Principal/Board of Management. SNAs should be deployed by the school in a manner which best meets the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school for whom SNA support has been allocated. It is a matter for schools to allocate support as required, and on the basis of individual need, which allows schools flexibility in how the SNA support is utilised.

Schools can contact the NCSE if they have enrolled children who were not considered at the time that the revised SNA allocations were made to schools, or where they are seeking a revision to the quantum of SNA support which has been allocated to them. In general, a revision to SNA allocations will only be made in circumstances where schools have enrolled new pupils, or where schools can demonstrate that they do not have sufficient SNA posts to cater for the care needs of all of the qualifying children in their school.

All schools have the names and contact details of their local SENO. Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

School Costs

248. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all schools in Fingal will be included in the parents questionnaire on school uniforms; if not, the schools that will receive the questionnaire; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49273/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that it is my intention to issue a circular to all recognised schools, later this month on the issue in question.

Student Grant Scheme Delays

249. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the delay in processing a student grant application in respect of a person (details supplied). [49325/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) that the student referred to by the Deputy has been awarded a grant on 13 November, 2013.

The cause of the delay was due to the need to seek additional information because of a change in the applicant's circumstances.

Education and Training Boards Remit

250. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will ensure that construction, warehousing and other courses being offered to jobseekers in future have a safe pass and manual handling certification included in view of the fact that SOLAS and education and training boards are responsible for former FÁS courses and training facilities. [49376/13]

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

I am informed that Safe Pass is a renewable licensing requirement for all persons working in the construction sector as opposed to a certificate of training. Safe Pass is not currently contained within these programmes nor is it envisaged that it will be included in these programmes in the future.

Construction, warehousing and other courses being offered cannot offer manual handling certificates, as such accreditation is no longer available through Quality Qualifications of Ireland (QQI).

Training Programmes Provision

251. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the courses in ECDL, manual handling, first aid, driving and safe pass that were offered free to social welfare recipients in the Dublin 8, 10 and 12 areas in the past year. [49377/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):

Questions - Written Answers

This is a day to day operational matter for SOLAS.

I have made enquires of SOLAS and am informed that the Ballyfermot Training Centre catchment area includes Dublin 8, 10 and 12. However, SOLAS Ballyfermot does not provide training in Safe Pass or Driving Instruction. Day Course ‘multimedia’ does include an option for ECDL as a module but not on its own. All other provision is through SOLAS evening course programmes. The following tables set out the number of trainees who attended ECDL, First Aid and Manual Handling courses that were offered free to social welfare recipients run in Ballyfermot Training Centre this year.

Trainees attended	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Terms	Term 1 Jan/Feb	Term 1 Jan/Feb	Term 2 Feb/Mar	Term 2 Feb/Mar	Term 3 Apr/May	Term 3 Apr/May	
Course	No. of Courses	Trainees attended	No. of courses	Trainees attended	No. of courses	Trainees attended	
ECDL	6	89	5	80	5	83	
Manual Handling	2	24	2	24	3	30	
Occupational First Aid	3	30	2	20	3	28	

Trainees attended	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Terms ctd	Term 4 Jun/Jul	Term 4 Jun/Jul	Term 5 Jul/Aug	Term 5 Jul/Aug	Term 6 Sept/Oct	Term 6 Sept/Oct	Term 7 Nov/Dec	Term 7 Nov/Dec
Course	No. of courses	Trainees attended	No. of courses	Trainees attended	No. of courses	Trainees attended	No. of courses	Trainees attended
ECDL	5	78	5	75	5	63	6	79
Manual Handling	3	31	3	31	0	0	1	12
Occupational First Aid	2	18	3	25	3	30	3	24

School Textbooks Rental Scheme

252. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will revise the guidelines issued by his Department regarding school book rental schemes to include a greater emphasis to encourage teachers and those selecting the textbooks to shop around for better value for money in view of the large differences in prices that exist between similar books from different publishers; if he acknowledges that there are major price differences between the publishers and that this provides scope for taxpayers' money supporting the scheme to go further; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49381/13]

253. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the efforts he has made to date to encourage those selecting textbooks in schools to seek better value for money

and to shop around for the most affordable fit-for-purpose books; if his Department has issued any circular to this effect; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49382/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 252 and 253 together.

The Department has issued Circular 0046/2013 to the management authorities of all recognised primary and post primary schools providing free education, in relation to the funding arrangements to schools to provide assistance for textbooks. This Circular also includes reference to the Guidelines for Developing Textbook Rental Schemes in schools and the Department encourages all schools to consider putting in place book rental schemes.

It is a matter for the Board of Management of each individual school to decide on its own policy in relation to the use of textbooks in the school. Individual schools need to adopt a more cost-conscious approach to the selection of books in their classes. However, I do not intend to revise the Guidelines issued last January at this time.

I will consider the inclusion in future circulars, as suggested by the Deputy, of further encourage of school management authorities to embrace a more cost-conscious and value for money approach when deciding the textbooks for use in their schools.

Departmental Staff Remuneration

254. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will restore the €10,243.09 withheld from a person's (details supplied) redundancy payment on the basis that his Department claims that the person was overpaid by this amount over an 11 year period between 2003 and 2013 through no fault of their own; if he will instruct his Department to make available the basis of their calculations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49447/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): My Department has no discretion in relation to the recovery of monies from staff who have been overpaid. When a staff member is appointed they agree to refund any monies paid are not properly payable and to comply with the Overpayment Policy as outlined in Circular 15/04 in this regard.

A detailed breakdown of the calculation of the overpayment amount has been sent directly to the person referred to by the Deputy.

Third Level Courses Availability

255. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the range of agriculture-related courses available to prospective young farmers in each of the country's State-funded third level institutes, universities and colleges in the current 2013-14 academic year. [49470/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Students at third level institutions across the country have access to a range of agriculture-related courses that can be taken as core subjects or in combination with a range of other disciplines. Information on all agriculture-related courses is available on the Qualifax website, www.qualifax.ie.

256. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Education and Skills his future plans for Traveller education; the reason for recent cuts in this area of education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49494/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Current and future policy in relation to Traveller education is underpinned by the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy which was launched in 2006, following wide ranging consultation with relevant stakeholders including Traveller representative groups.

The principle of inclusion is at the core of the Strategy and, accordingly, the focus of both current and future provision is on the development of a more inclusive school environment through the whole school planning process, teaching practice, admissions policies, codes of behaviour and whole school evaluation. In keeping with this principle, additional resources provided in the education system are allocated on the basis of identified individual educational need rather than that of ethnic or cultural background.

The Traveller Education Advisory and Consultative Forum, which has responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Strategy is currently working to a thematic approach to address the core issues of attendance, attainment, and retention of young Travellers in education. Membership of the Forum includes Traveller representative groups and representatives of the education partners and of relevant policy areas of the Department of Education and Skills.

Following the phasing out of segregated Traveller provision, Travellers now avail of the following mainstream resources, similar to all other children:- Free Pre-school Year- School transport- Classroom Teacher Allocation at Primary and Post-Primary level- Learning Resource Teachers at Primary and Post-Primary Level in the case of identified special educational need- Further and adult Education

The cuts to which the Deputy refers relate to the reduction in funding for segregated Traveller-specific programmes such as Resource Teachers for Travellers, Visiting Teacher Service and the phasing out of Senior Traveller Training Centres. A portion of the funding previously allocated to segregated education provision for Travellers has been redeployed to mainstream programmes in line with the principle of inclusion.

School Funding

257. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Education and Skills if it is permissible for schools to charge a €110 for mock exams papers to be corrected by an external examiner; and if he will consider bringing in a rule that would prevent such activity from occurring as it obviously places an enormous burden on hard pressed families. [49553/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Mock examinations are not part of the State examinations system. The decision to organise and/or charge for mock examinations is made at school level. Mock examinations are not a requirement of my Department.

Schools are provided with capitation and school services grants to meet their running costs. DEIS schools receive additional funds for targeted interventions to improve educational outcomes for students at risk. Schools are free to prioritise their use of these resources in accordance with the overall needs of the school.

Higher Education Courses Provision

258. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to develop access to third level education particularly at masters and doctorate levels for mature students. [49555/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): A new National Plan for Equality of Access to Higher Education (2014-2019) is currently being prepared by the National Access Office for my Department. This will include new targets to increase participation by under-represented groups.

The Springboard programme strategically targets funding of free part-time flexible higher education courses for unemployed and previously self-employed people in areas where there are identified labour market skills shortages or employment opportunities. These programmes are open to mature students. The courses, which are at level 6 (higher certificate) to level 9 (masters degree) on the National Framework of Qualifications, are being delivered in public and private higher education providers around the country. Full details regarding individual programmes are published on the dedicated Springboard website www.springboardcourses.ie as well as on the websites of providers of Springboard programmes.

Special Educational Needs Staff Remuneration

259. **Deputy Charlie McConologue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a special needs assistant can be employed as a substitute during the year after which they have been made redundant without having to repay their redundancy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49585/13]

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

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

Paragraph 18 of Circular 37/2013 indicates that Supplementary Assignment Panel rules do not apply to the filling of substitute or "cover" vacancies i.e. Maternity Leave, Sick Leave, Career Breaks etc.

Accordingly, a person who is employed as a substitute SNA will not have to reimburse the Department in respect of any redundancy compensation payment that they may have received, or may be entitled to receive.

School Transport Availability

260. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reasons school transport has not been provided to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; if a review requested recently has been carried out by Bus Éireann; if so, the decision of this review; and if

he will make a statement on the matter. [49589/13]

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 family in question were late in submitting their payment details.

Unfortunately, by the time the details were received the service was operating to capacity in that all of the seats had been allocated.

Schools Building Projects Status

261. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application for an extension to a school (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49611/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The school, to which the Deputy refers, has submitted an application to the Department for additional accommodation. In that regard, my Department sought further information which has since been received and which is currently being considered. My Department expects to contact the school shortly in the matter.

Public Sector Pensions Legislation

262. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a referendum could be held on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48835/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As with Public Servants generally, the pensions of politicians have been subject to a range of measures implemented over recent years which have had significant downward effects on pensions and pension awards.

Reforms have been introduced in relation to the age at which politicians receive a pension. Under the Public Service Superannuation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2004, pension entitlements are not payable to ‘new entrant’ Members of the Oireachtas (as defined in the Act) until age 65. Furthermore, the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and Other Provisions) Act 2012 introduced a new Single Public Service Pension Scheme, effective from 1 January of this year, with a new minimum pension age of 66, rising in due course with the age at which the State Pension (Contributory) will become payable. The scheme also provides for pensions based on career average earnings rather than the current final salary basis. This scheme will apply to all new Members of the Oireachtas, including Ministers, as defined in the Act.

As regards reductions to pensions, the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2010 provided for an average Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR) from 1 January 2011 of about 4% for those who retired prior to 1 March 2012, calculated in line with the following rates and bands:

Annual Public Service Pension (€)	Reduction Rate
First 12,000	Exempt
Between 12,000 and 24,000	6 %
Between 24,000 and 60,000	9 %

Annual Public Service Pension (€)	Reduction Rate
Between 60,000 and 100,000	12 %
Balance above 100,000	20 %

The pensions of those who retired on or after 1 March 2012 were not subject to PSPR originally as such pensions were based on reduced rates of salary applicable at the time of retirement following the 1 January 2010 pay reductions.

In parallel with further pay reductions which came into effect from 1 July 2013, the Government decided that all Public Service pensioners, including former politicians, on pensions of €32,500 and above would be required to take a further pension reduction; this was deemed necessary and appropriate and would ensure higher-paid pensioners would make a fair and proportionate additional contribution to the fiscal consolidation measures. On that basis, the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2013 provides that all Public Service pensions greater than €32,500 are subject to a reduction with effect from 1 July 2013; pensions below that level are not affected. This new reduction ranges from 2% to 5% on affected pensions and is being implemented by way of increasing and extending the existing PSPR rates outlined above. To secure the reduction, an appropriate increase in the rates is being applied to Public Service pensions above €32,500 for those who retired prior to 1 March 2012, as follows:

Annual Public Service Pension (€)	Reduction Rate
First 12,000	Exempt
Between 12,000 and 24,000	8 %
Between 24,000 and 60,000	12 %
Between 60,000 and 100,000	17 %
Balance above 100,000	28 %

In the case of those who retired on pensions above €32,500 since 1 March 2012 (i.e. those whose pensions were not subject to PSPR originally because their pensions were based on reduced salaries, unlike those who retired before 1 March 2012) the 2% to 5% pension reduction is being imposed by applying new separate PSPR rates. The new rates introduced for this group are lower than the above revised rates applicable to the earlier (pre-March 2012) retirees. The new rates are as follows:

Annual Public Service Pension (€)	Reduction Rate
First 12,000	Exempt
Between 12,000 and 24,000	2 %
Between 24,000 and 60,000	3 %
Between 60,000 and 100,000	5 %
Balance above 100,000	8 %

Finally, I would like to assure you that pay and pension costs will be kept under review as part of the Government's ongoing strategy to bring the public finances to a sustainable level.

Haddington Road Agreement Implementation

263. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the way persons working in a particular sector, who are not members of a trade union, may still be bound by the terms of collective bargaining agreements such as the Haddington Road agreement entered into by large trades unions representing that sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49306/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In the public service where a majority of employees are members of a trade union or association, the relevant union or association are recognised as negotiating parties in matters affecting the terms and conditions of employment of the grades of public servants they are recognised as representing. The public service as an employer does not distinguish between those employees who are members or not members of unions or associations when it comes to making changes to terms and conditions of employment.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

264. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a person (details supplied) in County Kildare is due to pay a public service contribution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49386/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I understand the question relates to pay reductions applied to public servants under the terms of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts.

Under Section 12 of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2013, as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, I am required to review the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts 2009 to 2013 annually. The review determines their operation, effectiveness and impact, having regard to the overall economic conditions of the State and national competitiveness. The review also considers whether or not any of the provisions of the Acts continue to be necessary having regard to the revenues of the State and commitments in respect of public service pay and pensions. The outcome of the review is laid before each House of the Oireachtas. The next review is required in June 2014.

Pending any change in the application of the measures in the context of the annual review or legislative change, the measures applying to the remuneration of public servants under the terms of the Acts continue to apply.

State Properties Data

265. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of State-owned buildings in each county that were unoccupied in each of the years 2007 to 2012 inclusive. [49465/13]

266. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the annual maintenance and security costs attached to unoccupied State-owned buildings in each of the years 2007 to 2012 inclusive. [49466/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): I propose to take Questions Nos. 265 and 266 together.

The Office of Public Works is currently assembling the data requested in respect of properties for which they have responsibility and will reply to the Deputy directly.

Protected Disclosures in the Public Interest

267. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he

will provide more detail on protections afforded to whistleblowers in the public service including their rights and the way they will be afforded protection as claims are investigated; the steps being taken to monitor and replace poorly performing managers across the public service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48915/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The protections set out in Part 3 of the Protected Disclosures Bill 2013 are the same for all workers regardless as to whether they are employed in the public or private sector.

Sections 11 and 12 of the Bill provide protections against unfair dismissal and penalisation falling short of a dismissal respectively. In both instances the extent to which protections under these sections can be invoked will be determined by the relevant elements of the State's industrial relations machinery such as Rights Commissioners, the Labour Court or the Employment Appeals Tribunal as appropriate. In such cases all of the usual rights, processes and procedures associated with that machinery will apply.

Sections 13, 14 and 15 of the Bill provide protections the eventual determination of which will fall to be dealt with by the Courts and in which cases all of the usual rights, processes and procedures of the legal system will apply. Section 13 provides that where a person suffers detriment as a consequence of the actions of a third party that person has a right of action in tort against the third party. Section 14 provides that a person shall not be liable in damages, or subject to any other relief in civil proceedings, in respect of the making of a protected disclosure. Section 15 provides that in a prosecution of a person for any offence prohibiting or restricting the disclosure of information it is a defence for the person to show that the disclosure is, or is reasonably believed by the person to be, a protected disclosure.

Section 16 of the Bill provides that a person to whom a protected disclosure is made, and any person to whom a protected disclosure is referred in the performance of that person's duties, must take all reasonable steps to avoid disclosing to another person any information that might identify the person by whom the protected disclosure was made. A failure to comply is actionable by the person by whom the protected disclosure was made if that person suffers any loss as a result. The requirement to protect the identity of the discloser is however subject to a number of necessary and pragmatic qualifications such as the necessity to effectively investigate the wrongdoing or the prevention of a crime or the prosecution of a criminal offence.

In addition to the protections set out in Part 3 of the Bill section 21 requires every public body to establish and maintain procedures for dealing with protected disclosures made by workers employed by the public body and that the public body shall provide written information relating to the procedures to its workers.

In this regard it should be noted that the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation has, at my request, formally requested the Labour Relations Commission (LRC) to prepare a Code of Practice for dealing with protected disclosures. The Code of Practice is to be prepared in consultation with both employer and employee representative groups and the public service, as a significant employer, will be represented in that process. The Code of Conduct will inform and guide the preparation of the procedures to be established and maintained by public bodies in accordance with section 21 of the Protected Disclosures Bill.

As Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, I have overarching responsibility for the public service. However, each individual sector has responsibility for the management of performance in that sector. In respect of the Civil Service, as part of the strengthened approach to managing underperformance, my Department has been actively engaged with HR units across the Civil Service to support and train managers in the better management of underperformance.

My Department has to date:

- provided a framework on how to address underperformance
- provided training for all HR and training units in all Departments/Offices on the framework
- strengthened links between the Performance Management and Development System and the disciplinary process in operation in the Civil Service
- developed better technical structures for the completion of PMDS throughout the Civil Service

As a result, managers should be better equipped to deal with underperformance.

It is the intention of my Department, as part of the Haddington Road agreement, to review the effectiveness of underperformance procedures and how under performance is managed. Under the Haddington Road Agreement, performance agreements will be developed for senior levels across the public service.

In the case of the Civil Service, this will be underpinned by the revised Assistant Secretary Competency Model approved by Government last month.

There is also a commitment to streamline the procedures to deal with underperformance so that they are more effective. Performance improvement action plans will be developed for individuals identified as having performance issues. These action plans will set out the performance issues that need to be addressed over a defined timeframe. Where performance does not improve, disciplinary procedures will apply.

Public Sector Staff Redeployment

268. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the processes in place for a public servant who wishes to be re-deployed from one State agency to another; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48930/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Public Service Agreements (PSAs) covering the period 2010-16 (the Croke Park and Haddington Road Agreements) set out the redeployment arrangements that apply in the Civil Service and in other parts of the Public Service. Under the PSAs, redeployment generally takes precedence over all other methods of filling a vacancy and supersedes any existing agreements on the deployment of staff.

The arrangements for the redeployment staff within the Health, Education, and Local Government sectors are managed directly by those sectors and day-to-day issues are a matter for the Minister responsible for the relevant sector.

Redeployment for the Civil Service and Non-Commercial State Sponsored Bodies (NC-SSBs) under their aegis operates through a system of Resource Panels. These panels contain details of the posts identified by organisations for redeployment in these sectors on the basis of changing business needs or ongoing management of the Employment Control Framework (ECF) ceilings by public service bodies. The Public Appointments Service (PAS) administers the Redeployment Panel System for these sectors and facilitates cross-sectoral assignments where necessary.

It is a matter for the employer to identify the number and location of posts at each grade to be redeployed in the first instance. Once this has been done, volunteers will be sought for the Resource Panel. If the number of volunteers falls short, Last-In-First-Out (LIFO) will be applied, as appropriate.

While staff may be moved between different organisations as a consequence of the redeployment arrangements detailed above, they were not designed for and are not used to facilitate requests from individuals for transfers to address personal circumstances.

Civil Service Departments and other public service organisations vary in relation to the approaches they adopt to the transfer of their own staff between locations and to other organisations and no centrally agreed approach applies. A person employed by a State Agency who wishes to be redeployed to another State Agency outside of the redeployment system should therefore raise the matter directly with their own organisation.

Flood Relief Schemes Applications

269. Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when remedial works will commence on the River Clare in County Galway to prevent further flooding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48931/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): The Office of Public Works has recently submitted the Clare River (Claregalway) Drainage Scheme to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for statutory approval to proceed to construction.

If approval is received, it is expected that construction will commence by the end of the year, or early in the new year, in areas that do not have particular environmental or weather constraints.

Office of the Ombudsman Remit

270. Deputy Ciara Conway asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason the Ombudsman has no role in investigating Údarás Na Gaeilge; his plans to address same; the way those without the means to launch a legal appeal can query any unsatisfactory outcomes with Údarás Na Gaeilge in the absence of an Ombudsman investigation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49011/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In line with the Programme for Government commitment, the Ombudsman (Amendment) Act 2012 significantly extended the remit of the Ombudsman bringing some 180 public bodies, including Údarás na Gaeltachta, which I presume the Deputy is referring to in her question, under the legislation. As such, the Ombudsman is empowered to investigate complaints about the administrative functions of this body in line with section 4 of the 1980 Act as amended.

North-South Implementation Bodies

271. Deputy Gerry Adams asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the total budget for each All Ireland Body established under the Good Friday Agreement for the years 2010 to date in 2013; and any proposed budget reductions to the these bodies currently being

considered. [49347/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The 2010 to 2013 budgets for the North South Implementations Bodies established under the Good Friday Agreement are set out in the following table:

-	2010 €m	2011 €m	2012 €m	2013 €m
Foras na Gaeilge	20.643	18.785	17.547	*
InterTrade Ireland	12.194	9.909	12.235	11.594
Loughs Agency	4.832	4.689	4.545	4.403
SafeFood	9.522	8.5	8.5	8.5
Special EU Programmes Body**	2.533	2.666	2.434	2.501
Ulster Scots Agency	3.739	3.693	3.251	*
Waterways Ireland	38.99	35.18	31.15	*

*The 2013 Budget allocation to the Body are subject to on-going discussion by the two Sponsor Departments.

** SEUPB Administration Budget

In common with other public sector bodies North and South, the North South Implementation Bodies are expected to deliver their objectives in a cost effective and efficient manner. In order to provide a framework for this, my Department and the Department of Finance and Personnel, have issued guidance to the North South Implementation Bodies requiring them to achieve a minimum of 4% efficiency savings per annum in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

Programme for Government Implementation

272. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the referendum to protect the right of citizens to communicate in confidence with public representatives will take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43146/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Programme for Government contained a commitment to address the issue of confidential communications with public representatives through constitutional change. Following a detailed policy assessment and on the basis of legal analysis, it was decided to legislate in relation to this issue. The Houses of the Oireachtas (Inquiries Privileges and Procedures) Act 2013 provides for qualified privilege for confidential communication from members of the public to members of either House of the Oireachtas. The privilege provided for in the Act applies in all circumstances and is not restricted to inquiries carried out under the Act.

Haddington Road Agreement Implementation

273. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his

views on the progress of the Haddington Road agreement. [44104/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Haddington Road Agreement came into force on 1 July, 2013. The Agreement is comprised of a series of sustainable measures which will deliver a €1 billion reduction in the cost of the public service pay and pensions bill by 2016.

The Agreement is already delivering on its objectives. In terms of cost reduction, €300 million of savings were incorporated into the various votes in the Revised Estimates Volume 2013, which represents a real and tangible reduction in expenditure. In addition, savings under the Agreement were included in the budgetary arithmetic for 2014, in the expenditure ceilings for each vote, as appropriate. Similarly, the savings to be generated from the Agreement in 2015 will be incorporated into the expenditure ceilings for each Vote as part of the estimates process.

Furthermore, since 1 July, a number of changes in work practices and reforms have been implemented. Of particular significance is the fact that public servants are working longer hours as per the terms of the Agreement. This will result in the provision of a total of 15 million additional working hours across all sectors of the Public Service. These additional hours will help us to deliver long term and sustainable increases in productivity, while also helping to improve the provision of services to citizens.

An updated Public Service Reform Plan covering the period 2014 to 2016 is currently being developed. In this context, the Agreement will act as a key enabler for the delivery of the next phase of the Government's ambitious public service reform programme.

The Haddington Road Agreement is a three-year agreement constructed to deliver continuous sustainable reform in the Public Service with a view to achieving a more efficient and effective Public Service.

European Council Meetings

274. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the withdrawal of EU funding for the Maze Long Kesh site has been raised at the recent European Council meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47685/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Special EU Programmes Body is the Managing Authority for the North South structural funds programmes, including the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (PEACE III).

The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister applied for funding under Theme 2.2 of the PEACE III Programme for a project to develop a Peace-building and Conflict Resolution Centre at the Maze Long Kesh site. This application was successful and SEUPB issued a Letter of Offer in 2012. It was recognised at time of the funding award that the timescales for completion of the project within PEACE III timeframes were very tight.

Concerns about the viability of the project arose during 2013 and SEUPB commenced discussions with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister regarding these concerns. On foot of these discussions, it was agreed that the project was no longer viable at this time and on 1 October 2013 SEUPB rescinded the Letter of Offer. The SEUPB is now focussing on re-allocating the funding to suitable projects to ensure that EU funding is not lost to Northern Ireland and Ireland.

The European Council does not have a role in managing EU structural funds programmes

such as PEACE III.

Freedom of Information Legislation

275. Deputy Finian McGrath asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will withdraw his amendments on the Freedom of Information Bill as they are damaging to democracy and transparency. [49586/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As I outlined in detail in the course of the recent Committee Stage, the Freedom of Information (FOI) Bill, 2013 will represent a significant strengthening in Ireland's FOI regime leading to increased transparency, openness and accountability of public bodies. As the Deputy will be aware this is being achieved by:

- reversing the main additional exemptions included in the 2003 Freedom of Information Act;
- extending FOI to all public bodies
- providing scope to extend FOI to non-public bodies in receipt of significant funding from the State;
- requiring public bodies to prepare and publish publication schemes to ensure the proactive publication of information;
- setting out key statutory principles to guide public bodies in the performance of their functions under the Act including the need to achieve greater openness and to strengthen the accountability of public bodies;
- creating a general right of access to records held by public bodies which should only be set aside where the exemptions clearly support a refusal of access
- promoting the release of records under other access regimes where these apply.
- setting out the responsibilities of public bodies in dealing with electronic records and confirming that such records may be provided in electronic and searchable format.

In addition I am proposing that:

- search and retrieval fees should not be charged for the first two hours of time spent on the search and retrieval of records; and
- a cap of 500 euro should be set for the total amount of search and retrieval fees levied.

As I announced at Committee Stage last week, I intend to make these amendments to the Bill at Report Stage along with the provision discussed at length at Committee Stage which the Government recently approved as necessary - to ensure that a single FOI application containing multiple separate and unrelated FOI requests is not subject to the same single application fee that applies to an FOI application requesting information on one specific issue or matters related to it, even though it may contain several parts.

Trade Agreements

276. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the implications here of the recently concluded Canada-European Union Free Trade Agreement. [49239/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The political agreement reached on the key elements of a Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between the EU and Canada was announced on 18 October 2013 by EU Commission President Barroso and Canadian Prime Minister Harper. There will now be further technical discussions based on this political agreement, which are necessary to finalise the legal text of the agreement.

The CETA covers virtually every aspect of economic activity, and is an extremely important one for Ireland. It is the first comprehensive trade agreement with an historically close trade and economic partner and is a landmark deal between our two transatlantic economies. The CETA will see the elimination of all industrial tariffs and almost all agricultural tariffs. The sensitivities for Ireland in the beef sector are addressed by only partial liberalisation through tariff rate quotas. As to the dairy sector, substantial concessions have been granted by Canada on infant formula, milk protein concentrate and cheese. There is complete liberalisation of tariffs on milk protein concentrate and infant formula plus additional new cheese quotas for the EU in excess of 17,000 tonnes.

The CETA will also widely liberalise trade in services, among others in the areas of financial services, telecommunications, energy and transport. For the first time ever, all Canadian levels of government will open up their public procurement markets above certain thresholds to European suppliers.

The opportunities presented by the Agreement could add over €200 million to Ireland's current €2.7 billion bilateral trade with Canada, thus creating more jobs and contributing to our economic recovery.

Trade Agreements

277. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will report on the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership between the European Union and the United States of America; and his views on the way this agreement may or may not benefit Ireland. [49240/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Negotiations between the EU and the US on a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) began formally in July, with the first round of negotiations held in Washington in the week beginning 8th July 2013. The second round of negotiations concluded in Brussels on 15th November. The third round of negotiations is scheduled to take place during week commencing 16th December in Washington.

The negotiations with the United States are aimed at eliminating tariffs, solving existing regulatory barriers and working to avoid the imposition of regulatory barriers in the future. For example, in a number of years when the Partnership comes into effect I expect that over 90% of tariffs on trade in goods will be removed and Irish companies will have greater access to public sector markets in the U.S.

As most of the potential gains from TTIP will arise from regulatory convergence and mutual recognition of each parties regulatory regimes, companies and especially SMEs will benefit from lower regulatory compliance costs. All of this will provide significant opportunities for

Irish businesses to increase their access to the US market, as well as reduce the costs of goods that we need to import.

The EU and the US already have very strong trading and investment ties. The conclusion of a Trade and Investment Agreement with the US would have a significant and positive impact on trade, resulting in new markets for Irish exporters and bringing positive effects on job creation and competitiveness. A comprehensive deal on areas such as common regulatory standards and investment rules holds massive potential for economic growth and jobs which it is estimated could over time boost EU GDP by 0.5% per annum and help create approximately 400,000 jobs in the EU.

The EU Commission is responsible for negotiating on behalf of the EU, and it is doing so on the basis of a wide mandate from the EU Council of Ministers. The EU Commission has set up a specific webpage in order to provide as much information to stakeholders as is possible concerning the negotiations. The webpage can be found at <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/ttip/>.

Employment Rights

278. Deputy Gerald Nash asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of inspections undertaken by NERA to date in 2013 in respect of the enforcement of REA rates of pay at school construction sites; the locations of such inspection visits by county; the number of cases of non-compliance identified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49342/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Supreme Court in its judgment in *McGowan & others -v- Labour Court Ireland & others* on 9 May 2013 declared that “the provisions of Part III of the Industrial Relations Act 1946 are invalid having regard to the provisions of Article 15.2.1 of the Constitution of Ireland”.

The judgment had the effect of striking down Registered Employment Agreements put in place under the 1946 Industrial Relations Act. As such, the National Employment Rights Authority no longer has the authority to enforce any such agreements that existed before the Supreme Court judgment.

However, the existing contractual rights of workers in sectors previously covered by Registered Employment Agreements are unaffected by this ruling. Contractual rights can be altered only by agreement between the parties involved.

The table provides details of the number of inspections carried out in relation to school construction sites in the course of 2013 to date. The inspections were carried out under current employment legislation.

NERA: School construction site inspections 2013.

Number of Inspections	County	Cases of non-compliance
2	Dublin	0
1	Kildare	0
1	Westmeath	0
1	Wicklow	0

Small and Medium Enterprises Supports

279. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will support the small and medium enterprise sector with the high costs they are experiencing. [48873/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Government actions to support small and medium sized enterprises are set out in the Action Plan for Jobs. Since the Action Plan process was launched in 2012, a significant number of initiatives have been introduced to support the SME sector. These include:

- tackling the issue of late payments by transposing the EU Late Payment Directive into Irish legislation;
- the introduction of new financing models for SMEs, such as the Microfinance Fund for start-ups and the temporary Partial Credit Guarantee scheme;
- Corporation Tax exemption to 2014 for companies that commenced, or will commence, trading in 2012, 2013 and 2014;
- the introduction of the JobsPlus scheme that provides an employment subsidy to employers who recruit a person who has been unemployed for 12 months or more;
- the reform of support structures for SMEs through the establishment of the new Local Enterprise Offices, which is well advanced within my own Department;
- the provision of advice and training by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland to businesses that are looking to reduce their energy spend; and
- reductions in the administrative burden on business. To date, my own Department has achieved a 25% reduction in its administrative burden on business, amounting to a potential annual saving for business of over €207 million.

Budget 2014 also contained a number of additional initiatives to support SMEs. These include an increase in the cash receipts threshold for VAT, which will improve cash-flow for businesses, and a new subsidised Financial Training programme for SMEs.

These are just some of the measures which the Government has taken to support the SME sector. The Action Plan for Jobs 2014, which I am currently preparing for the Government, will seek to build on the progress already made and is set to deliver a further suite of actions to support enterprise.

As part of the Action Plan process, I am keen to ensure that businesses are fully aware of the supports that are available to them. In this context, last month my Department organised a free “Taking Care of Business” event which was attended by over 500 businesses and brought together more than 20 State bodies to provide SMEs with helpful information on transacting business across the public sector.

Employment Appeals Tribunal

280. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the position regarding an outstanding settlement awarded by the Employment Appeals Tribunal and the Circuit Order of Enforcement on 7 June 2011 in respect of a person (details supplied). [48919/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I have been

informed by NERA that efforts have been made to have payment made on foot of the Employment Appeals Tribunal award concerned.

This proved problematic; the main difficulty encountered being that there are no assets remaining in the company the subject of the award and, as such, securing payment has not been possible. In addition, as the company the subject of the award was not in formal insolvency, receivership, or liquidation the award did not qualify for possible payment through the Insolvency Insurance fund which is within the remit of the Minister for Social Protection.

There are two significant issues that arise in this case. Firstly the matter of seeking to enforce the payment of an award made by one of the employment rights bodies and secondly on this not succeeding, the potential to have recourse to the Insolvency Payments Scheme for payment arising from that award.

However, I am very conscious of the particular circumstances of the case of the difficulties that are being experienced by the individual concerned. Officials of my Department are reviewing the matter in consultation with officials of the Department of Social Protection. This review is ongoing but has not yet been finalised.

Job Creation

281. Deputy Seán Kenny asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the steps being taken in the pharmaceutical sector to attract additional high quality jobs into this vital sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49082/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Pharmaceutical Industry is an enormously important and highly valued sector in Ireland, employing 25,000+ people directly in Ireland with an equivalent number employed in service provision to the sector. Ireland has an enviable history of success in this field, attracting some of the world's leading pharmaceutical companies, and is home to a thriving domestic sector. 9 out of the top 10 global pharmaceutical companies are located here.

While the industry has been faced with some difficult years due to patent expiration and competitiveness challenges, it is starting to see an increase in R&D activity with the advent of more targeted biotech therapies and personalised medicines. Significant importance is attached to the pharmaceutical sector in the context of the research prioritisation exercise, with one of the priority areas encompassing therapeutics, synthesis, formulation, processing and drug delivery.

IDA Ireland, through its overseas network, remains committed to maintaining and growing relationships with key decision makers in the pharmaceutical industry and can offer a wide variety of assistance to companies to support new investment and uplift in technical capability of existing clients.

Unfortunately, the loss of patent protection on key drugs in recent years adversely affected some older manufacturing facilities around Ireland, resulting in downsizing or closure. However, in parallel several facilities have been acquired or expanded in recent years, in particular in the area of biopharmaceuticals. Biopharmaceuticals, which represent the next wave of opportunity in the industry has successfully attracted and developed globally leading programmes from Allergan, Amgen, Centocor, Eli Lilly, Genzyme, Merck, Biomarin and Pfizer as examples. Ireland now has a globally leading biopharmaceutical cluster in the next generation of pharmaceutical products.

Ireland already has successful generic manufacturers such as Clonmel Healthcare, Ranbaxy,

Wockhardt, Teva and Rowa as examples. These companies have operated successfully from Ireland competing with low cost competition for many years.

The indigenous bio-pharmaceutical sector plays a key role in this ecosystem and consists of approximately 100 Enterprise Ireland client companies. This sector has been growing at an average of 14% per annum over the last four years. In 2012, the sector had exports of over €450M, and employment of over 2,500 people. The indigenous sector is highly innovative and dynamic with companies competing successfully in international markets throughout the world e.g. Sigmoid, Opsona, Alimentary Health, ICON, Chanelle, TopChem, Barclays, Eirgen, Arran Chemicals etc. ICON in particular is now the 3rd largest contract research organisation in the world and the fastest growing for the last 7 years.

Central to the success of Irish companies internationally has been their R&D capabilities, leadership and management strengths and collaborative partnerships with some of the world's leading companies in the sector. The indigenous company base has extensive capabilities across the pharmaceutical and biotechnology supply chain including drug discovery/development/drug delivery (technology intermediaries); the manufacture of active pharmaceutical ingredients; the manufacture of human and veterinary finished products; the provision of pharma services including clinical trials management, regulation, engineering and construction.

The State has invested heavily through Science Foundation Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland in the development of a World-class Research Infrastructure by funding industry-academic research collaborations, Industry-led research programmes/Technology Centres and the Applied Research Enhancement Programmes through the likes of the National Institute for Bioprocess Research and Training (NIBRT), the Solid State Pharmaceutics cluster and the Pharma Technology Centre. These centres aim to improve the productivity and competitiveness of the Irish biopharma industry by investing in research on next generation manufacturing processes and training & education of people to work in this industry.

A key focus for Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and other relevant stakeholder bodies is to promote and build expertise in 'biological' research, development and manufacture such that Ireland continues to develop as a globally recognised 'biopharmaceutical hub'. The NIBRT facility has been effective in bringing training on large molecule manufacturing processes to the sector in Ireland.

Employment Rights

282. Deputy Finian McGrath asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will clarify the clause of zero hours contract in employment; if he will confirm whether this clause exploits persons on lower income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49094/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Zero hour contracts are covered by contract law. A zero hour contract must be entered into freely between the employer and the employee – it cannot be forced upon an employee. Zero hour contracts are, normally found in sectors such as retail, healthcare and hospitality. I am very conscious that in certain circumstances, they may be of great benefit to both employers and employees. They allow greater flexibility for both, reducing the employer's pay costs, while workers can decide when and if they want to work. Such contracts may be preferred by employees who require flexibility to facilitate educational or other personal requirements and banning such contracts could do a disservice to these workers. However this is an area I will keep under review.

It is important to note that Section 18 of the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997 contains a protection for employees who are employed on zero hour contracts. The zero hour protection applies to all employees whose contract operates to require them to be available whether they work on a casual basis or not. This feature of the Organisation of Working Time Act covers situations where, for example, an employee is sent home if things are quiet or is requested to be available for work and is not, on the day, asked to work. Where an employee suffers a loss by not working hours he/she was requested to work or be available to work, the zero hours provisions of the Act ensure that he/she is compensated for 25% of the time which he/she is required to be available or 15 hours whichever is the lesser. The level of compensation may be impacted if the employee got some work. An expectation of work does not, however, entitle an employee to compensation.

The zero hours provision does not apply to lay-offs, short-time, emergency or exceptional circumstances, employee illness, employee on-call or where the employee is paid wages for making him/herself available for work.

Sections 17 and 19 of the Organisation of Working Time Act may also be of particular interest to employees on zero hour contracts. Section 17 sets out the requirements regarding notification to the employee of the times at which he/she will be required to work during the week. Generally, an employee is entitled to 24 hours' notice of his/her roster for the week, although section 17(4) allows for changes as a result of unforeseen circumstances.

Section 19 sets out an employee's entitlement to paid annual leave equal to 4 working weeks in a leave year in which he or she works at least 1,365 hours (unless it is a leave year in which he or she changes employment) or one-third of a working week for each month in the leave year in which he or she works at least 117 hours or 8 per cent of the hours he or she works in a leave year (but subject to a maximum of 4 working weeks).

Work Permit Applications

283. Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will address the concerns raised in correspondence (details supplied) regarding a work visa in the Philippines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49140/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department processes employment permit applications and all employment permits are dependent on a job offer from an employer based in the State. In the particular case mentioned, an application for a Work Permit Employment Permit was received on 23rd August 2013. The Department was satisfied with the job offer and a permit issued on 27th September 2013.

Trade Missions Data

284. Deputy Lucinda Creighton asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide the total number of trade missions that he or a Minister of State within his Department, has been on since becoming Minister; the country for each of these missions; the name of each business, with operations here, which accompanied him on each trade mission; the amount of additional business quantifiable in euro each business who accompanied him is doing since the trade mission; if he will provide the total cost to his Department for each of these trade missions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49234/13]

285. Deputy Lucinda Creighton asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if

he will provide the total number of trade missions Enterprise Ireland have been on where neither a Minister nor a Minister of State has been present since March of 2011; if he will provide the country for each of these missions; the names of each Irish business who accompanied them on each trade mission; the amount of additional business quantifiable in euro terms each business who accompanied Enterprise Ireland is doing with that country since the trade mission; if he will provide the total cost to his Department for each of these trade missions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49235/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 284 and 285 together.

Enterprise Ireland is the Government agency responsible for the development and internationalisation of Irish enterprises. Enterprise Ireland has 30 offices worldwide to help Irish firms develop overseas markets. Each year, Enterprise Ireland organises a series of targeted international trade missions, market visits, participation in international trade fairs and a large number of international buyer visits to Ireland focussed on assisting Irish firms target and secure international contracts and overseas partners. In Ireland, Enterprise Ireland works directly with Irish firms to help them start up, develop their businesses, build competitiveness and innovate.

The impact of trade missions together with the many other sales, marketing and trade promotion efforts of Enterprise Ireland are reflected in the growth in exports of Enterprise Ireland clients and the jobs they sustain and create. As announced earlier this year, Irish companies supported by Enterprise Ireland set a new record for level of exports achieved - €16.2Bn. Export growth was achieved across all overseas territories and this level of growth is greatly supported by an extensive promotional programme, including trade events, trade fairs and trade missions.

Enterprise Ireland does not release the names of companies that accompany Ministers on trade missions as this is commercially sensitive information. Enterprise Ireland is not in a position to provide the total costs of these trade missions or a list of the contracts signed and announced on each mission in the time provided. However, Enterprise Ireland will compile this information and, through my Department, will forward it to the Deputy. Enterprise Ireland meets the costs of flights and accommodation of the Minister and accompanying officials for trade missions. Information on these costs will also be provided shortly to the Deputy. The list of trade missions which I or a Minister of State at my Department has been on since I came to office are outlined in the following table.

Date 2011	Country	Minister
April 17	India/Saudi Arabia	Minister Richard Bruton
Sept 10-17	Australia	Minister John Perry
Sept 18-24	USA	Minister Richard Bruton
Date 2012	Country	Minister
March 15-17	Finland/Sweden	Minister John Perry
March 22-30	China	Minister Richard Bruton
June 30- July 3	France	Minister Richard Bruton
Oct 27-Nov 2	Japan	Minister Sean Sherlock
Nov 7-10	Canada	Minister Richard Bruton
Date 2013	Country	Minister
Feb 26-27	Stuttgart	Minister Sean Sherlock
March 5 - 9 March	Texas	Minister Richard Bruton
May 13 - 16	Poland & Czech Republic	Minister John Perry
July 21 – 27	China & Japan	Minister Richard Bruton

Date 2011	Country	Minister
Nov 17-21	India	Minister Richard Bruton

I understand the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is answering a similar question in relation to St. Patrick's Day Trade Events.

National Minimum Wage

286. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if his attention has been drawn to instances where payment in lieu is being offered to minimum wage earners, particularly in the hospitality sector, where boarding in hotel rooms and meals are offered instead of regular minimum wage; the measures he proposes to take to address this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49304/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): To determine if an employee is receiving the correct minimum hourly rate of pay entitlement under the National Minimum Wage Act 2000, certain reckonable components may be taken into account to determine an employee's average hourly rate.

In this context, if an employer provides an employee with full board and lodgings, or lodgings only or full board only, a monetary allowance can be included as reckonable pay. (The term 'full board' means an entitlement to meals during the day).

The following are the amounts reckonable in such instances:- €54.13 for board and lodgings per week, or €7.73 per day; €32.14 for board only per week, or €4.60 per day; €21.85 for lodgings only per week, or €3.14 per day.

It is a criminal offence for an employer to pay an employee less than his or her minimum hourly rate of pay entitlement.

If an employee is not satisfied that he or she is being paid his or her statutory minimum entitlement under the 2000 Act, the employee may refer the dispute to a Rights Commissioner of the Labour Relations Commission or refer the matter directly to the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA) for investigation.

Departmental Expenditure

287. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 169 of 12 November 2013, if he will retrieve the relevant files in relation to the Office of Director of Consumer Affairs, which ceased to exist in 2007 and whose functions were transferred to the National Consumer Agency and provide any additional expenditure to senior counsel for the years requested; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49324/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information sought by the Deputy in relation to the Office of Director of Consumer Affairs for the years 2003 up to 2007, when it ceased to exist, is set out as follows.

ODCA	Amounts (€)
2003	416,281.40
2004	152,236.00

ODCA	Amounts (€)
2005	300,514.00
2006	115,146.00
2007	39,390.75

North-South Implementation Bodies

288. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will detail any consideration of budget cuts to the InterTradeIreland budget for 2013 to 2016; and the impact of such cuts on the services of InterTradeIreland. [49345/13]

289. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will detail any budget reductions to InterTradeIreland that have been proposed by his Department, to the relevant Department in Northern Ireland as part of the budgetary process. [49346/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 288 and 289 together.

InterTradeIreland, the North South Implementation Body whose remit is to promote increased cross-border trade and business development, has a wide range of programmes to assist businesses on an all-island basis.

The budgets for InterTradeIreland and the other North South Bodies are agreed annually by the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Finance and Personnel in Northern Ireland.

InterTradeIreland operates from a single base in Newry, Co. Down and is jointly funded in a 2:1 ratio, respectively, by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in Northern Ireland. InterTradeIreland have adapted their offering in recent years, as a result of economic circumstances, to meet the specific needs of SMEs, North and South.

Their key programmes are now focused on promoting trade and innovation activities among SMEs which it is hoped will lead to an increase in the number of firms engaging in cross-border business and exporting to the other jurisdiction, and taking innovative steps to trading themselves out of difficult operating environments. This approach has proved very successful. For example, in 2012, there were 92 First Time Innovators firms (against a target of 35) and 67 First Time Exporters firms (against a target of 50) as a direct result of these firms participating in InterTradeIreland's programmes. To date in 2013, InterTradeIreland have engaged with 2,493 companies on an all-island basis and their activities have had a jobs impact to date this year of 550 (against a full year target of 200).

Since 2008, ITI has received Exchequer funding averaging €7.5M per annum. Over the next three years I am satisfied that the annual Irish budget contribution will be maintained at a similar level.

Jobs Data

290. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of Industrial Development Agency and Enterprise Ireland jobs created and jobs lost in supported companies in each of the 26 counties for the past five years; and the euro investment

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in each of the 26 counties made by the IDA, Enterprise Ireland, the County Enterprise Boards in each of the past five years. [49355/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Forfás Annual Employment Survey is the active time series and is the source for the following data. The sample of companies changes year on year. As companies enter the population or have transferred agency, companies have the opportunity to revisit numbers for the previous year when they are filling out the survey.

Appendix 1 and 2 outline jobs created and jobs lost in IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland client companies in each of the 26 counties between 2008 and 2012 respectively.

Appendix 3, 4 and 5 set out payments made by IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and the County Enterprise Boards to companies in each of the 26 counties between 2008 and 2012, respectively.

Appendix 1 – IDA Ireland

County	Employ- ment Data	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Carlow	Jobs Cre- ated	74	49	87	75	116
Carlow	Job Losses	-28	-75	-202	0	-1
Cavan	Jobs Cre- ated	32	18	52	3	43
Cavan	Job Losses	-26	-56	-50	-22	-39
Clare	Jobs Cre- ated	140	123	30	27	37
Clare	Job Losses	-16	-93	-21	-33	-28
Cork	Jobs Cre- ated	2,116	1,108	1,393	1,990	1,979
Cork	Job Losses	-1,489	-2,370	-967	-900	-991
Donegal	Jobs Cre- ated	67	63	152	271	186
Donegal	Job Losses	-48	-29	-216	-22	-18
Dublin	Jobs Cre- ated	4,351	2,284	5,037	6,864	6,389
Dublin	Job Losses	-4,250	-6,815	-5,305	-3,395	-3,059
Galway	Jobs Cre- ated	636	442	789	1,047	859
Galway	Job Losses	-764	-1,077	-510	-169	-297
Kerry	Jobs Cre- ated	86	25	50	163	74
Kerry	Job Losses	-108	-416	-144	-182	-8
Kildare	Jobs Cre- ated	113	30	1,228	398	176
Kildare	Job Losses	-626	-1,513	-418	-507	-489
Kilkenny	Jobs Cre- ated	1	0	17	33	180
Kilkenny	Job Losses	-9	-112	-2	-5	0

County	Employ- ment Data	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Laois	Jobs Cre- ated	0	17	10	3	2
Laois	Job Losses	-20	-11	-1	-27	-23
Leitrim	Jobs Cre- ated	35	5	65	7	1
Leitrim	Job Losses	-43	-30	-81	-199	-152
Limerick	Jobs Cre- ated	286	172	163	233	400
Limerick	Job Losses	-694	-2,516	-472	-132	-99
Longford	Jobs Cre- ated	30	8	4	0	24
Longford	Job Losses	-88	-74	-127	-50	0
Louth	Jobs Cre- ated	75	33	43	109	386
Louth	Job Losses	-212	-245	-336	-58	-45
Mayo	Jobs Cre- ated	132	97	183	69	126
Mayo	Job Losses	-126	-159	-19	-87	-58
Meath	Jobs Cre- ated	132	30	38	53	68
Meath	Job Losses	-307	-184	-79	-28	-103
Monaghan	Jobs Cre- ated	15	19	28	0	3
Monaghan	Job Losses	-14	-17	-14	-85	-10
Offaly	Jobs Cre- ated	29	22	25	31	31
Offaly	Job Losses	-55	-128	-284	-87	-1
Roscom- mon	Jobs Cre- ated	41	0	12	51	53
Roscom- mon	Job Losses	0	-91	-63	-12	0
Sligo	Jobs Cre- ated	103	54	53	93	149
Sligo	Job Losses	-64	-137	-244	-51	-138
Tipp North	Jobs Cre- ated	13	0	14	22	0
Tipp North	Job Losses	-46	-188	-99	-3	-6
Tipp South	Jobs Cre- ated	262	252	56	84	10
Tipp South	Job Losses	-26	-93	-177	-279	-155
Waterford	Jobs Cre- ated	176	112	146	72	75
Waterford	Job Losses	-483	-569	-439	-764	-186
Westmeath	Jobs Cre- ated	134	231	128	194	252

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County	Employ- ment Data	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Westmeath	Job Losses	-222	-480	-40	-56	-30
Wexford	Jobs Cre- ated	120	14	174	51	111
Wexford	Job Losses	-73	-90	-67	-47	-106
Wicklow	Jobs Cre- ated	53	39	13	66	60
Wicklow	Job Losses	-327	-270	-174	-247	-110

Appendix 2 – Enterprise Ireland Jobs created Jobs Lost

County	Job Data	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Carlow	Jobs Cre- ated	223	40	225	253	152
Carlow	Job Losses	-306	-498	-238	-99	-121
Cavan	Jobs Cre- ated	335	89	196	369	374
Cavan	Job Losses	-372	-739	-266	-273	-244
Clare	Jobs Cre- ated	86	50	202	94	133
Clare	Job Losses	-181	-315	-131	-160	-105
Cork	Jobs Cre- ated	1,320	1,143	1,160	1,997	1,663
Cork	Job Losses	-1,440	-3,264	-2,036	-624	-818
Donegal	Jobs Cre- ated	270	164	218	301	180
Donegal	Job Losses	-463	-739	-323	-179	-309
Dublin	Jobs Cre- ated	4,704	3,864	4,535	3,938	4,097
Dublin	Job Losses	-6,071	-8,507	-5,994	-3,320	-3,415
Galway	Jobs Cre- ated	532	386	617	855	572
Galway	Job Losses	-818	-1,023	-593	-448	-410
Kerry	Jobs Cre- ated	260	172	142	232	194
Kerry	Job Losses	-381	-431	-206	-94	-106
Kildare	Jobs Cre- ated	351	476	295	1,082	534
Kildare	Job Losses	-683	-514	-543	-372	-244
Kilkenny	Jobs Cre- ated	176	74	140	150	320
Kilkenny	Job Losses	-386	-725	-291	-201	-100
Laois	Jobs Cre- ated	93	23	76	158	76
Laois	Job Losses	-169	-307	-123	-226	-138
Leitrim	Jobs Cre- ated	44	11	31	46	54

County	Job Data	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Leitrim	Job Losses	-85	-162	-69	-47	-16
Limerick	Jobs Created	498	344	418	289	684
Limerick	Job Losses	-1,075	-1,318	-642	-354	-453
Longford	Jobs Created	141	120	74	86	116
Longford	Job Losses	-161	-291	-192	-132	-88
Louth	Jobs Created	472	205	255	389	299
Louth	Job Losses	-624	-939	-531	-411	-196
Mayo	Jobs Created	289	203	144	716	197
Mayo	Job Losses	-432	-394	-308	-531	-270
Meath	Jobs Created	325	350	301	362	615
Meath	Job Losses	-592	-796	-307	-200	-294
Monaghan	Jobs Created	341	74	252	391	294
Monaghan	Job Losses	-1,041	-931	-293	-275	-142
Offaly	Jobs Created	689	100	266	173	139
Offaly	Job Losses	-386	-704	-285	-172	-171
Roscommon	Jobs Created	39	37	46	108	29
Roscommon	Job Losses	-391	-360	-178	-134	-75
Sligo	Jobs Created	87	74	131	140	247
Sligo	Job Losses	-149	-363	-121	-89	-71
Tipperary North Riding	Jobs Created	91	23	161	127	49
Tipperary North Riding	Job Losses	-658	-379	-106	-55	-180
Tipperary South Riding	Jobs Created	321	56	80	123	81
Tipperary South Riding	Job Losses	-392	-592	-276	-577	-117
Waterford	Jobs Created	492	317	431	909	692
Waterford	Job Losses	-902	-1,496	-426	-611	-846
Westmeath	Jobs Created	379	92	154	340	275

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County	Job Data	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Westmeath	Job Losses	-374	-798	-245	-310	-104
Wexford	Jobs Created	368	310	222	191	385
Wexford	Job Losses	-448	-550	-290	-340	-297
Wicklow	Jobs Created	265	91	215	204	410
Wicklow	Job Losses	-663	-756	-341	-219	-193

Appendix 3: IDA Ireland Payments 2008-2012

County	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Carlow	€480,305	€176,000	€0	€0	€9,503,141
Cavan	€0	€143,000	€772,345	€129,778	€0
Clare	€471,682	€790,882	€762,100	€844,145	€0
Cork	€14,422,159	€16,585,908	€20,119,751	€15,092,610	€14,308,619
Donegal	€281,200	€1,253,200	€2,353,385	€354,746	€6,221,146
Dublin	€25,910,424	€29,101,843	€46,420,938	€43,043,936	€22,156,125
Galway	€12,218,919	€10,206,304	€9,448,677	€14,107,397	€12,252,609
Kerry	€42,949	€148,565	€216,450	€152,671	€2,145,004
Kildare	€10,857,083	€9,691,781	€4,981,549	€4,281,933	€1,767,566
Kilkenny	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0
Laois	€0	€39,000	€274,324	€21,182	€0
Leitrim	€0	€28,60	€566,500	€297,622	€347,378
Limerick	€2,871,880	€5,594,812	€5,104,862	€7,801,591	€11,209,462
Longford	€678,789	€143,000	€357,000	€124,852	€0
Louth	€1,245,000	€282,000	€347,207	€489,051	€2,809,400
Mayo	€816,847	€66,007	€4,693,343	€1,198,963	€1,254,475
Meath	€691,066	€136,501	€524,671	€386,670	€152,240
Monaghan	€0	€445,882	€260,000	€70,335	€0
Offaly	€0	€257,092	€211,870	€338,200	€8,000
Roscommon	€91,938	€77,568	€283,503	€361,000	€13,098
Sligo	€555,017	€553,787	€925,555	€852,618	€0
Tipperary	€2,727,287	€1,431,584	€17,755,098	€1,875,356	€0
Waterford	€4,739,590	€854,934	€1,414,402	€115,819	€1,722,808
Westmeath	€937,110	€1,872,257	€1,564,401	€1,443,232	€1,552,832
Wexford	€0	€190,078	€569,253	€3,373,513	€1,853,970
Wicklow	€232,593	€791,321	€513,000	€0	€48,328

Appendix 4: Enterprise Ireland Payments 2008-2012

County	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Carlow	€1,485,292	€2,070,382	€2,109,613	€1,772,399	€1,575,046
Cavan	€2,677,879	€7,522,906	€7,360,019	€3,297,902	€1,711,863
Clare	€1,566,068	€1,387,433	€1,845,500	€1,069,787	€756,937
Cork	€20,519,428	€26,192,716	€17,266,627	€12,115,641	€18,756,360
Donegal	€2,621,725	€2,826,542	€2,832,444	€2,308,832	€1,580,614

County	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Dublin	€36,534,102	€61,975,284	€48,924,047	€39,983,427	€32,946,358
Galway	€7,211,749	€7,299,810	€7,751,711	€4,798,425	€5,193,252
Kerry	€3,304,562	€7,358,014	€1,321,740	€2,519,140	€701,132
Kildare	€3,855,955	€11,927,953	€5,701,483	€2,105,622	€1,423,661
Kilkenny	€11,196,254	€8,017,462	€4,443,661	€2,246,310	€2,730,305
Laois	€957,987	€1,706,285	€1,152,297	€790,168	€333,399
Leitrim	€339,163	€754,071	€314,242	€53,869	€314,386
Limerick	€5,260,777	€6,216,521	€5,545,976	€3,751,621	€4,040,403
Longford	€1,715,510	€2,271,985	€463,178	€2,774,239	€1,336,632
Louth	€1,990,915	€5,265,384	€3,968,147	€2,330,563	€2,586,909
Mayo	€2,360,074	€8,013,988	€2,202,585	€1,710,009	€1,436,413
Meath	€1,377,918	€1,299,231	€2,429,921	€1,664,833	€1,079,888
Monaghan	€2,550,223	€5,674,806	€4,864,538	€2,499,302	€4,062,338
Offaly	€4,649,888	€1,797,773	€1,430,447	€1,375,569	€1,067,722
Roscommon	€727,976	€480,174	€1,666,124	€1,182,743	€451,456
Sligo	€983,739	€2,405,265	€1,595,890	€1,248,628	€1,189,396
Tipperary	€3,040,598	€7,945,048	€5,075,238	€4,703,498	€5,342,247
Waterford	€1,769,998	€2,335,483	€3,796,280	€2,798,822	€5,608,658
Westmeath	€918,917	€1,540,090	€1,562,432	€1,339,165	€1,035,028
Wexford	€2,277,698	€1,976,884	€4,765,975	€3,816,160	€3,844,257
Wicklow	€3,358,511	€5,895,882	€2,278,825	€1,610,077	€1,825,807

1: Payments made under the Employment Subsidy Scheme which Enterprise Ireland administered on behalf of DJEI are not included here

Appendix 5 – CEB Payments 2008-2012

CEB	2008 (€)	2009 (€)	2010 (€)	2011 (€)	2012 (€)
Carlow	182,246	441,060	260,407	282,337	270,441
Cavan	311,913	179,113	274,397	192,846	234,185
Clare	236,770	300,616	332,072	475,522	616,752
Cork City	364,710	209,459	306,040	216,024	218,633
Cork North	0	100,000	69,946	155,389	88,122
Cork South	430,001	309,459	287,826	223,622	882,019
Cork West	266,592	244,750	299,698	181,234	288,145
Donegal	692,524	261,508	403,350	400,588	394,318
Dublin City	721,180	664,492	754,730	848,351	720,913
Dun-Laoghaire / Rathdown	542,187	595,164	539,188	627,790	632,964
Fingal	326,313	394,924	401,093	508,115	459,416
Galway County & City	432,703	455,927	479,772	622,707	431,789
Kerry	504,247	428,093	186,744	340,171	253,502
Kildare	352,385	133,636	291,608	406,750	285,256

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CEB	2008 (€)	2009 (€)	2010 (€)	2011 (€)	2012 (€)
Kilkenny	342,281	363,862	246,088	256,472	356,258
Laois	353,667	146,270	268,702	276,144	182,307
Leitrim	193,731	160,793	203,735	265,308	186,389
Limerick City	215,075	240,062	243,129	254,147	298,023
Limerick Co.	314,702	293,529	524,493	446,353	347,317
Longford	233,183	187,626	230,934	191,514	250,529
Louth	236,617	191,712	249,940	370,827	255,210
Mayo	554,920	243,396	429,409	280,710	208,472
Meath	286,336	228,797	230,515	459,658	228,527
Monaghan	135,953	191,113	230,740	203,302	258,523
Offaly	329,707	248,104	250,996	287,561	337,686
Roscommon	219,215	340,218	343,335	302,224	253,329
Sligo	348,565	323,834	280,464	269,145	168,138
South Dublin	317,500	487,500	478,770	357,683	604,482
Tipperary NR	308,873	273,051	126,637	521,962	361,664
Tipperary SR	240,752	218,655	143,605	167,114	238,111
Waterford City	279,600	174,016	315,176	283,261	316,508
Waterford Co	281,327	225,484	332,955	352,268	267,244
Westmeath	345,553	376,428	381,709	410,646	468,532
Wexford	392,570	413,592	341,751	420,657	457,434
Wicklow	354,166	319,293	339,705	380,507	348,492

IDA Site Visits

291. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of Industrial Development Agency sponsored site visits for potential investors arranged by the Industrial Development Agency on a county basis in the past five years. [49356/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Details of the number of IDA sponsored site visits by potential investors on a county basis for the past five years are set out in the following tabular statement. These site visits were from new companies visiting the locations for the first time and from senior executives of existing companies.

Table shows the number of IDA sponsored site visits by potential investors on a county basis from 2008 – 2012

County	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Carlow	1	1	3	2	4
Cavan	1	0	3	0	3
Clare	2	9	7	15	14
Cork	41	29	44	27	38
Donegal	3	3	4	2	1
Dublin	92	90	197	150	196

Galway	14	22	41	35	18
Kerry	4	3	2	2	1
Kildare	1	1	2	3	1
Kilkenny	1	2	0	0	3
Laois	6	1	0	2	0
Leitrim	0	0	0	0	0
Limerick	9	18	38	40	30
Longford	1	0	0	0	0
Louth	23	28	25	26	12
Mayo	3	1	1	0	1
Meath	3	2	0	2	0
Monaghan	0	0	0	1	0
Offaly	11	6	7	1	3
Roscommon	0	0	0	0	0
Sligo	2	5	12	3	6
Tipperary	0	1	1	1	5
Waterford	12	8	11	11	26
Westmeath	18	14	22	15	7
Wexford	0	0	1	0	3
Wicklow	2	2	5	3	6

IDA Investment

292. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the level of Industrial Development Agency sponsored investment made in Dublin, Cork and the rest of the State as a percentage of the State wide investment for 2007 to 2013. [49357/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): It has not been possible to provide the requested information in the time available. I will send this information to the Deputy as soon as possible.

International Bodies Membership

293. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation in view of the fact that Ireland is not a member of CERN and this places Irish secondary school students at a disadvantage, relative to their British, French, Italian and Spanish counterparts, if there are plans in place for Ireland to apply for limited membership; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49455/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Ireland's membership of international research organisations must be predicated on whether the benefit of membership, in terms of support to Irish researchers, companies and jobs, justifies the cost involved.

For example, in the case of the European Space Agency, Ireland has chosen to pursue membership because of the major benefits that can accrue to innovative Irish companies in the sector, where Irish companies have established expertise, exports and employment.

My Department, through its industrial and scientific advisory agency, Forfás, commissioned an expert report by consultants Georgia Tech to examine the case for Irish participation in a number of intergovernmental research organisations, one of which was CERN. That Report, in 2001, concluded that, because of high costs and limited potential industrial development returns, membership should not be a priority. Since then, of course, the severely depleted resources available has meant that there is an even greater imperative to ensure that publicly funded research and development will yield the maximum benefits for the country – most particularly in terms of downstream jobs.

As the Deputy is no doubt aware, the Government's priority in the area of science, technology and innovation is to implement the recommendations of the National Research Prioritisation Exercise which will see the majority of public research funding aligned with 14 priority areas where we are most likely to get economic and social returns, particularly in the form of jobs. The Steering Group which undertook the exercise included representatives of the enterprise sector and its terms of reference specifically required that it take account of complementary developments at EU level and other international initiatives. Research in the area of particle physics was not identified as a priority nor was there any recommendation that Ireland should join CERN.

The costs of full membership of CERN are understood to be over €10 million per annum. In addition to substantial fees for any type of membership, it is important to note that significant extra amounts of expenditure would be necessitated in order to ensure that Ireland benefits fully from membership. While other associate membership options may be available involving lesser amounts, the issue remains that a decision about joining CERN must take into consideration the opportunity costs involved, as payment of any fees would mean that less funding is available for our existing research priorities.

I am not aware that the fact that Ireland is not a member of CERN places Irish secondary students at a particular disadvantage relative to their UK, French, Italian or Spanish counterparts. However, should budgetary circumstances change over the next few years, the question of membership of CERN could be reviewed again but only if there is a compelling business case from a cost/benefit viewpoint. Also, the selected national research priority areas will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure their continued relevance and to also ensure that new opportunities are identified.

JobsPlus Scheme

294. Deputy Derek Nolan asked the Minister for Social Protection if she views the proposed extension of the JobsPlus programme from January 2014 to include those aged under 26 years and more than six months on the live register, to be in conformity with the Employment Equality Act and other such legislative measure designed to prevent employment discrimination on the basis of age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48831/13]

298. Deputy Derek Nolan asked the Minister for Social Protection if employers who hire persons aged under 26 years and who are more than six months on the live register under the proposed extension of the JobsPlus programme from January 2014, will be in violation of the Employment Equality Act and other such legislative measures designed to prevent employment discrimination on the basis of age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48830/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 294 and 298 together.

JobsPlus is a new employer Incentive, from the Department of Social Protection which encourages and rewards employers who offer employment opportunities to the long term unemployed. The Incentive replaced the existing Employer Job PRSI exemption and the Revenue Job Assist schemes with effect from 1st July 2013. JobsPlus takes the form of a cash grant payable monthly in arrears to the employer. The value of the incentive is set at two levels: €7,500 in respect a person 12 months but less than 24 months unemployed and €10,000 for an employee previously over 24 months unemployed. As of the week ending 8th November, 514 previously unemployed people had moved into employment with the support of JobsPlus. Some 1,755 employers have made applications and 1,650 or 94% of these have been approved. Some 3,426 jobseekers have applied of which 75% have been found to be eligible to date. I expect a further 300 or so jobseekers to be matched with employers in the coming weeks. The Government agreed in the context of Budget 2014 to shorten the eligibility period for JobsPlus for younger jobseekers from January 2014. Targeted wage subsidies are a common measure used in other jurisdictions to encourage recruitment of young unemployed people and are one of a number of the measures suggested by the European Commission to member states for inclusion in their national youth guarantee programmes that will be transmitted to Brussels later this year. Issues such as that highlighted by the Deputy are being considered in advance of altering the current eligibility criteria.

Jobs Initiative

295. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she has any statistics regarding the age of persons who are currently managing to gain employment and remove themselves from the live register; those taking up work placement schemes either through Job-Bridge, Tús or similar such schemes; if she will acknowledge that in the current climate there are additional obstacles put in place where a person who is making job applications is of a certain age; her plans to address this issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49311/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): It is recognised that age is a factor impacting on a person's likelihood of exiting the live register.

During the period January-September 2013, persons aged 55-59 years accounted for 7%, and those aged 60-64 for 4%, of those leaving the Live Register to employment. Persons aged 55-60 years accounted for 6%, and those aged 60-64 for 5%, of those leaving the Live Register to take up education, training or work-programme places.

By comparison, some 8% of the Live Register is made up of persons aged 55-59 and 7% of persons aged 60-64.

The Government's approach to tackling the unemployment problem is to focus resources on those individuals most at risk of long-term unemployment. Up to the recent past, this has been based on identifying all persons who remain on the Live Register for three months after first signing on, and referring them for more intensive job-search assistance and guidance, which may in turn lead to referral to a training or employment programme. Increasingly, referral is now based on profiling people at the beginning of a spell of unemployment, so as to focus resources on those most in need at an even earlier stage.

By definition, such an approach focuses resources on those persons who are in most need of assistance. The roll-out of the profiling system at my Department's 'one-stop-shop' Intreo offices will further enhance this effect as one of the main variables in the profiling system is age. In other words, if someone is in an age category that is more likely to experience long-term

unemployment, s/he will, all other things being equal, receive more targeted assistance.

Under-representation of those approaching retirement age on certain programmes may reflect the fact that some programmes involve making a long-term commitment (for example, taking up the Back to Education Allowance to up-skill could involve a commitment of up to 4 years to a third-level course).

Social Insurance Yield

296. Deputy Lucinda Creighton asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated additional PRSI revenue yield between the 1 July 2011 and 31 December 2013 had the halving of the 8.5% employer rate to 4.25% not happened; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48797/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Employer PRSI rate applying to weekly earnings of €356 or less was halved from 8.5% to 4.25% from July 2011 as part of the Jobs Initiative, to fulfil one of the commitments of the Programme for Government. This measure was implemented on a 2½ year time limited basis to apply from 1 July 2011 until 31 December 2013. The 4.25% employer PRSI rate will therefore revert to the original 8.5% rate from 1 January 2014. This is already provided for in legislation.

The additional PRSI revenues that would have been yielded if the halving of the employer rate did not happen are set out in the following table.

PERIOD OF TIME	ANNUAL PRSI REVENUE FOREGONE
1 July 2011 to 31 December 2011	€85 million
1 January 2012 to 31 December 2012	€214 million
1 January 2013 to 31 December 2013	€215 million
1 January 2014 to 31 January 2014*	€15 million

*P30 returns providing remittances to the Collector General, including employer PRSI remittances, are made a month after the month to which they refer. Remittances in respect of December 2013 are therefore received in January 2014.

Carer's Allowance Eligibility

297. Deputy Denis Naughten asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to change the way in which carer's allowance is assessed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48816/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The current assessment arrangements for Carer's Allowance are designed to ensure that individuals requiring full-time care are supported in their own home, and that appropriate income support is provided to carers. The current arrangements allow carers to engage in work, education or training for up to 15 hours per week. There is also a generous means test. In the case of a single person, €332.50 of gross weekly income is not taken into account (or *disregarded*). If you are married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting the first €665 of your combined gross weekly income is disregarded. PRSI, union dues, superannuation (pension contributions) and travel expenses are also deducted. There is no intention to make changes to the assessment criteria for Carer's Allowance at this time.

Question No. 298 answered with Question No. 294.

Question No. 299 withdrawn.

National Internship Scheme Data

300. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide a list of schools currently utilising the JobBridge scheme to employ interns in a teaching capacity. [48862/13]

303. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons who fail to complete JobBridge internships; the number who cease an internship to take up employment; the number who leave for other reasons. [48927/13]

304. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of companies or employers that have been blacklisted from the JobBridge scheme. [48928/13]

305. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of occasions on which the whistleblowing feature of the JobBridge scheme has been invoked; the number of complaints that have been made to the national call centre alleging breaches or abuses of the JobBridge programme; the number of these complaints that relate to displacement, poor quality internships or other breaches of the programme. [48929/13]

364. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons who have participated in the JobBridge internship programme to date broken down by county; the number who have progressed to paid employment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49563/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 300, 303 to 305, inclusive, and 364 together.

The JobBridge Scheme was launched on 1st July 2011. A total of 23,235 placements have commenced to-date. Please see Table 1 for a breakdown by county. The evaluation report conducted by Indecon Economic Consultants found that 61% of all participants progressed into paid employment within 5 months of completing their internship. This is one of the best progression outcomes in Europe for work placement schemes.

While 47% of placements are completed in full, 53% of placements finish early. According to the Indecon evaluation report, the main reason cited by participants for early completion (according to 63.1% of participants) was that they secured employment while 32.7% of participants cited dissatisfaction with their placement as the reason for early completion. The progression outcomes into employment for early finishers are very encouraging. However, in order to address the dissatisfaction levels, I have extended the number of placements available on the Scheme and increased the maximum cumulative duration of internships. This measure has been introduced to give jobseekers that are dissatisfied with their choice of internship more flexibility in finding a suitable alternative placement. I have also increased the number of on-site monitoring visits.

The Department is not in a position to release the names of schools currently participating in the Scheme. However, I can advise the Deputy that while there are currently over 6,300 jobseekers participating on the Scheme, only 22 placements are being undertaken in a teaching capacity.

Questions - Written Answers

Over 10,000 companies have participated in the Scheme, of which, 31 companies have been disqualified from participating due to breaches of the Scheme. The over-whelming majority of companies are abiding by the terms and conditions of the Scheme.

The total number of JobBridge complaints received by the Department since the scheme commenced in July 2011 is 313. These complaints relate primarily to the following areas: - Standard Agreement not completed/adhered to; - Inadequate mentoring/support; - Inadequate training and development; - Displacement related issues; - Poor quality advertisements; - Intern working excessive hours; - Non-compliance with Scheme criteria.

All such complaints are fully investigated. In addition, my Department has conducted over 3,700 monitoring visits to-date. Encouragingly, 98% of these visits are satisfactory. Remedial action is taken in all cases of non-compliance.

Table 1: Breakdown By County

County	Finished	Current	Total
DUBLIN	5848	1998	7846
CORK	1638	566	2204
GALWAY	1116	381	1497
LIMERICK	838	360	1198
WATERFORD	582	209	791
DONEGAL	543	233	776
KILDARE	566	210	776
TIPPERARY	522	214	736
KERRY	476	200	676
WEXFORD	497	178	675
MAYO	381	198	579
LOUTH	408	165	573
WESTMEATH	399	147	546
MEATH	366	161	527
CLARE	355	159	514
WICKLOW	379	104	483
SLIGO	306	136	442
MONAGHAN	261	135	396
KILKENNY	255	81	336
LAOIS	231	92	323
CARLOW	220	86	306
CAVAN	207	99	306
OFFALY	197	81	278
ROSCOMMON	116	59	175
LONGFORD	132	38	170
LEITRIM	75	31	106
Grand Total	16,914	6,321	23,235

Rent Supplement Scheme Eligibility

301. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection if social welfare recipients who have savings of €10,000 to €13,500 may receive a rent supplement allowance;

or if such persons receive a reduced rent supplement allowance. [48874/13]

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 81,000 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €403 million for 2013. Rent supplement is subject to a means test which is normally calculated to ensure that a person, after the payment of rent, has an income equal to the rate of supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) appropriate to their family circumstances less a minimum contribution which recipients are required to pay from their own resources. The weekly minimum contribution is €30 for a single adult household and €35 for coupled households. Many recipients pay more than this amount because recipients are also required, subject to income disregards, to contribute any additional assessable means that they have over and above the appropriate basic SWA rate towards their accommodation costs. As part of the means test, there is a capital assessment completed (including savings, investments, property etc.). Before the assessment is carried out, the capital is rounded down to the nearest €1,000. The first €5,000 of capital is disregarded and the next €10,000 assessed at €1 per €1,000 per week. Therefore an applicant with savings of €10,000 would have means of €5 per week assessed and an applicant with savings of €13,500 would have means of €8 per week assessed.

There are many factors which determine rent supplement entitlement, including the number of hours worked, the level of earned income and any social welfare payments or whether the rent payable is within prescribed limits. Based on the details provided by the Deputy, it is not possible to say for certain if the household would qualify for a rent supplement payment. However, if the person is eligible for rent supplement and the savings are the only additional income, then the person's weekly rent supplement entitlement would be reduced by €5 or €8 as described.

Disability Allowance Appeals

302. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite a disability allowance payment and arrears due in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48913/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an oral hearing of the appeal of the person concerned took place on 07th November 2013 and that the Appeals Officer is now considering the appeal in the light of all of the evidence submitted, including that adduced at the oral hearing. The person concerned will be notified of the Appeals Officer's decision when the appeal has been determined.

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

Questions Nos. 303 to 305, inclusive, answered with Question No. 300.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

306. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection when the review of an appeal will be finalised in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; if an oral hear-

ing will be scheduled in this case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48949/13]

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, decided to disallow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. Under Social Welfare legislation, the decision of an Appeals Officer is final and conclusive and may only be reviewed in the light of additional evidence or new facts.

I am also advised that the person concerned has submitted additional evidence and that the Appeals Officer has agreed to review the case. The person concerned will be contacted when the review of his appeal has been finalised.

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. 307 withdrawn.

Household Benefits Scheme

308. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will review the household benefits scheme in view of changing economic circumstances where adults, returning to live with their elderly parents because of economic difficulties, are preventing householders from getting this support. [48998/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The household benefits package currently comprises the electricity or gas allowances, the telephone allowance and the free television licence. Following the recent Budget announcements, the telephone allowance will end from 1st January, 2014. The package is generally available to people living in the State who are over age 70, carers who live with the person for whom they care and those under age 70 who are in receipt of certain qualifying social welfare payments and who live alone or only with certain excepted people. "Excepted people" include, inter alia, dependent children, carers or people in need of full time care and attention. The requirement to live alone or with only "excepted people" does not apply when a person is over 70.

The package is currently paid to over 415,000 customers and will cost an estimated €284 million in 2013.

The objective of the scheme is to provide additional support for those who are elderly or live alone. Where a member of the household is working or where a number of people in a household are receiving social welfare payments, additional supports through the household benefits scheme are not necessary. I would not regard this as an anomaly but as a targeting of a scheme to particularly vulnerable groups. I have no plans to amend the qualifying conditions for this scheme.

Question No. 309 withdrawn.

Youth Guarantee

310. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of young persons in County Cork who are expected to avail of education or training or employment under the youth guarantee scheme; the funding allocated to same; and if she will make a

statement on the matter. [49010/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): It is not yet possible to outline the level of funding allocated or the numbers expected to avail of education, training and work experience in the context of Ireland's response to the EU Recommendation on a Youth Guarantee.

The Department of Social Protection, working with the support of an interdepartmental group of senior officials is currently developing the implementation plan for the Youth Guarantee.

The implementation plan will be prepared for submission to Government by the end of December and for onward transmission to the EU Commission once approved by Government.

The plan will include estimates of expected take-up of places on a national basis and of the funding costs of that provision.

Funding costs will depend on the take up of places by individual young people. The share of total national costs incurred in any specific area of the country will therefore be determined primarily by the level and trend of youth unemployment and the resulting demand for places, and the programme mix of such places, in each area. Given the number of factors involved, it will not be possible to make detailed advance projections of costs on an area-by-area basis.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

311. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision on a domiciliary allowance appeal will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49015/13]

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 the 10th October 2013. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

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

Social Welfare Appeals

312. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a one-parent family allowance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49018/13]

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 4th September 2013. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary

evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

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

Question No. 313 withdrawn.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Appeals

314. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if supplementary welfare allowance will be approved in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [49050/13]

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 disallow 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.

Disability Allowance Appeals

315. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an appeal for disability allowance will be expedited in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [49051/13]

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 18th 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.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

316. **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 Carlow. [49052/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 30th 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 31st 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.

Rent Supplement Scheme Appeals

317. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an appeal for rent allowance will be expedited in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [49055/13]

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 decided to hold an oral hearing in this case on 18th November 2013. The person concerned was notified of the arrangements for the 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

318. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an appeal for disability allowance will be expedited in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [49056/13]

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 decided to hold an oral hearing in this case on 18th November 2013. The person concerned was notified of the arrangements for the 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

319. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an appeal for disability allowance will be expedited in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow. [49057/13]

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

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

Question No. 320 withdrawn.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

321. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an application for invalidity pension now under appeal will be expedited in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [49060/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 12th September 2013. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

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

Carer's Allowance Appeals

322. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an appeal for carer's allowance will be expedited in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [49061/13]

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 5th 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 21st 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.

Defined Benefit Pension Schemes

323. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of defined benefit pension schemes which were required to submit funding proposals to the Pensions Board by or since 30 June 2013 and which have submitted such proposals; the number of such schemes which have not submitted such proposals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49102/13]

324. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the numbers of defined

benefit pension schemes which have started or completed the process of wind-up to date in 2013; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49103/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 323 and 324 together.

The number of defined benefit schemes that were due to submit funding proposals to the Pensions Board by June 2013 was 217, of which 82 are currently outstanding. The 135 schemes that have responded fall into one of the following categories:

1. Submitted a funding proposal
2. Submitted a positive Actuarial Funding Certificate
3. Have wound up, or have stated that they are going to wind up or that the employer has indicated that the scheme will wind up.

Defined benefit schemes are required to notify the Pensions Board when a scheme enters wind up. The duration for the disbursement of scheme assets in a wind up can vary and the Pensions Board monitors the process. Since 1 January 2013, 96 schemes have commenced wind up or have wound up.

The Pensions Board is in contact with all schemes to ensure compliance. Where schemes that are in deficit have failed to submit a funding proposal, the Pensions Board is assessing on a case by case basis whether to make use of its powers under the Pensions Act. These powers include prosecution of the trustees for non-compliance, issuing a unilateral Section 50 order (reduction in benefits) or ultimately ordering the trustees to wind-up the scheme.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

325. Deputy Pat Breen asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision on a domiciliary care allowance will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49105/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned was informed by the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 20th May 2013 that her appeals in respect of applications for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) for both children had been disallowed. The person concerned submitted new applications for DCA for both children on 25th September 2013. These applications have been forwarded to the Department's Medical Assessors for their medical opinion in relation to eligibility. Upon receipt of a medical assessor's opinion, a decision will issue in relation to each application. It can currently take up to 8 weeks to process an application for DCA.

Fuel Allowance Eligibility

326. Deputy Áine Collins asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on the fact that persons on jobseeker's allowance are losing fuel allowance because they take up a place on a community employment scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49111/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): A Fuel Allowance is a payment under the National Fuel Scheme to help with the cost of heating a person's home. It is paid to people who are dependent on long-term social welfare and who are unable to provide for their

own heating needs. Only one Fuel Allowance is paid to a household at a standard rate of €20 per week.

There are various qualifying conditions to be eligible to receive fuel allowance (detailed in full on the Department's website), e.g. long term receipt of jobseeker's payments (390 days minimum). The person must also satisfy a household income test, and the household must be unable to provide for their own heating needs.

If the applicant and members of his/her household have a combined income of more than €100.00 per week or savings/investments of €58,000 in addition to a Social Welfare Pension, the allowance is not payable.

Persons employed under the Community Employment (CE) scheme who meet the qualifying criteria for receipt of fuel allowance will receive the extra €20 per week during the fuel season while employed on CE. Time spent on CE does not count towards the 390 day qualifying period, so a person must have qualified for fuel allowance in advance of commencing CE.

The person in question did not qualify for fuel allowance because his wife's income from employment puts their household income over the €100 weekly income threshold.

Question No. 327 withdrawn.

Pension Provisions

328. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Protection if there is a pensions framework in place for the next 30 years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49119/13]

337. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will confirm when there will be a White Paper on pensions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49169/13]

340. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the Kiwisaver programme currently operating in New Zealand; her plans to introduce a similar programme here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49176/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 328, 337 and 340 together.

Over the past number of years, pension provision in all its forms in Ireland has experienced considerable challenges and change. The sustainability of the wider system is a particular concern because of the demographic issues Ireland faces and the associated increases in pension (and other age related) costs, and due to investment losses and the deterioration in the public finances since the recession.

Key drivers of reform have included the need to achieve sustainability of our systems over the longer term whilst also striving for adequacy in those systems. This has included reforms to the State pension and public sector pensions and effort to increased supplementary pension coverage whilst working to ensure the continued viability of defined benefit pension schemes.

The National Pensions Framework was published in March 2010 and provided a framework for long term pension reform. It encompassed consideration of all aspects of pension reform including the State pension, supplementary occupational and private pensions and public sector pensions.

Development of the framework was informed by the range of views raised during the Green Paper consultation process. A number of the reforms set out in the National Pensions Framework have been implemented recently, including the increase in the State pension age, and more will be implemented in the coming years. These reforms are designed to enhance the sustainability of the system overall and ensure that people's income in retirement is protected.

Since the publication of the Framework, it became necessary to further consider pension reform given the economic difficulties and deterioration in the public finances. In this regard, and at my request, in 2012 the Government engaged the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to conduct an independent review of long term pensions policy in Ireland.

This review was published in April 2013 and encompasses the totality of pension provision in Ireland – State, private, occupational and public sector. The issues of sustainability; adequacy; modernity; and equity were central to this review. Whilst endorsing pension policy reforms undertaken to date, the report makes a number of recommendations for future reform. The OECD's key recommendation is to improve the adequacy of pensions by increasing coverage in the funded part of the pensions system through a universal mandatory or quasi-mandatory employment based pension system.

In this regard, you will be aware the Programme for Government includes a commitment to reforming the pension system to progressively achieve universal coverage, with particular focus on lower-paid workers. I have previously stated that a soft-mandatory approach such as that envisaged by an auto-enrolment scheme, using scale to achieve greater cost efficiencies for the member, is a very proactive way in which we can increase supplementary pension coverage, though it is recognised that introduction of such an initiative would be best supported by a more favourable economic environment than is currently the case.

The Kiwisaver Programme currently operating in New Zealand is an example of such an auto-enrolment scheme. Studies of this scheme, and others internationally, have shown that significant increases in pensions coverage can be obtained from such systems. In addition, the significantly larger economies of scale that result from such schemes have the capacity to achieve more competitive charging structures, which in turn would lead to improved returns for consumer members. As was highlighted in the Pensions Charges Report 2012, this type of arrangement could assist in resolving the difficulties inherent in the current Irish scheme structure of a proliferation of small schemes paying considerably higher charges than larger schemes, ultimately eroding the value of the pension received by the member.

While it is not planned to publish a white paper on pensions in the near future, analysis of the options available is on-going in my Department and I will be bringing proposals to Government as to how the OECD review will inform further developments in the area of pension policy.

FÁS Training Programmes Provision

329. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Social Protection if and when a place on the Naas technology project FÁS course will be offered in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49122/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned has been interviewed and is awaiting a place on the next available course which is scheduled for May 2014. Priority on such courses is afforded to people under 35 years of age who have no leaving

certificate The person concerned has already achieved a leaving certificate (level 5), therefore there is no guarantee of placement depending on the demands for this course. In the interim, the person concerned may contact her local case officer to discuss other options.

Household Benefits Scheme

330. **Deputy Tom Barry** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will consider an amendment to the decision regarding the removal of the telephone allowance to allow persons on the senior alert scheme to retain this allowance. [49124/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The overall concern of the Government in this and previous budgets has been to protect the primary weekly social welfare rates. Maintaining the rate of the State pension and other core payments is critical in relation to protecting people from poverty. To allow us to protect these core payments, we have had to look very carefully at other additional payments. The cost of the telephone allowance scheme had risen each year with the number of eligible customers also increasing significantly. In 2007 there were some 316,000 people receiving the telephone allowance compared to almost 396,000 at the end of September this year, an increase of 25%. Each year almost 10,000 extra customers become eligible for the allowance because of the increased number of pension recipients.

I am keenly aware of the impact on the Department's customers and particularly those who are living alone. While we are ending the telephone allowance the savings that this will provide means that we have been able to keep at the same rates the other elements of the household benefits package, including the free electricity/gas allowance and the free television licence. We have also retained the fuel allowance, free travel and the living alone increase.

Of course it is important to be aware that Ireland's pensioners as a group have the lowest consistent poverty rate and, as a group compared to the rest of the population, are least likely to be at risk of poverty - pointing to the adequacy and importance of the State pension. Between 2004 and 2011, consistent poverty for older people (those over 65) fell from 3.3% to 1.9%. The 'at risk of poverty' rate for people in that age group also reduced from 27.1% to 9.7% over the same period.

The monthly allowances under the household benefits package are a contribution towards the cost of services; they are not intended to meet those costs in full. The ending of the telephone allowance of €9.50 per month (or about €2.20 per week) will not result in the automatic removal of any landline service linked to a personal alarm. Indeed, since the Budget announcement, I am aware that one telephone company has advertised that they will cover the value of the allowance. I would hope that other telephone companies will consider this.

The telephone allowance was introduced at a time when telephones were expensive and uncommon and a landline service was the only option available to the customer. The market has changed enormously since the introduction of the allowance, with several companies providing a range of services and rates with bundled services including television, telephone and broadband and pay-as-you-go mobiles. There are also personal security services that use mobile technology rather than land lines.

The Department of Environment, Community and Local Government operates the seniors alert scheme which provides grant support for the supply of equipment such as personal alarms, smoke detectors and security lighting to enable older people without sufficient means to continue to live securely in their homes. The budget allocation for 2013 was €2.35 million. There has been no reduction in this funding in Budget 2014.

Question No. 331 withdrawn.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

332. Deputy Michael Creed asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an invalidity pension appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; the reason it took from May until October 2013 for the relevant papers to be forwarded to the independent appeals office; if this decision will be reviewed in view of additional medical evidence; if an oral hearing will be organised in respect of this case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49130/13]

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 24 May 2013. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 21st 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 Department informs me that backlog clearance activity in the Invalidity pension area has increased the number of appeals being dealt with on that scheme. Consequently, there are still some delays occurring there in having papers sent to the Social Welfare Appeals Office for processing. Every effort is being made to ensure that the relevant papers are prepared and submitted to the Social Welfare Appeals Office as quickly as possible.

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.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

333. Deputy Noel Coonan asked the Minister for Social Protection when a domiciliary care allowance appeal will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49143/13]

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 30th 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.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

334. Deputy Noel Coonan asked the Minister for Social Protection when an invalidity pension appeal will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary. [49144/13]

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

30th 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. 335 withdrawn.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

336. Deputy Noel Coonan asked the Minister for Social Protection when a carer's allowance appeal will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49153/13]

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 22nd August 2013. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing. The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

Question No. 337 answered with Question No. 328.

Social Insurance

338. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount in the current account of the social insurance fund for each of the past five years; the projection for the fund for the next five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49171/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Social Insurance spending has traditionally been funded on a tripartite basis – with contributions coming from the Exchequer, employers and employees. Legally, the Exchequer is the residual financier of the SIF and Exchequer contributions were the norm from 1952 up to 1997. No Exchequer funding was required over the period 1997 to 2009 inclusive, as the Fund was in surplus. Since 2010, the SIF has been in deficit and a subvention from the Exchequer has been required each year since then. The first table summarises the funding position of the Social Insurance Fund over the period 2009 to 2012 inclusive as well as the relevant estimates in the Revised Estimates Volume for 2013.

-	2009 Outturn	2010 Outturn	2011 Outturn	2012 Outturn	2013 REV Estimate
-	€000	€000	€000	€000	€000
Income	7,279,601	6,709,681	7,543,883	6,772,286	7,099,840
Expenditure	9,784,225	9,460,835	9,004,245	8,859,686	8,590,416
Operating surplus / Deficit	-2,504,624	-2,751,154	-1,460,362	-2,087,400	-1,490,577

Surplus carried forward from previous year	3,376,969	872,345	-	-	-
Cumulative Surplus/ deficit at end of year	872,345	-1,878,809	-1,460,362	-2,087,400	-1,490,577
Exchequer Subvention to Social Insurance Fund from Vote 37	0	1,878,809	1,460,362	2,087,400	1,490,577

The following table summarises the estimated funding position of the Social Insurance Fund for the period 2014 to 2017, inclusive. The estimate for 2014 is subject to change in the Revised Estimates Volume for 2014 due to be published next month while the estimates of income and expenditure for the period 2015 to 2017 inclusive are provisional and will be subject to change in the years ahead.

-	2014 Budget Estimate	2015 Estimate	2016 Estimate	2017 Estimate
-	€000	€000	€000	€000
Income	7,681,860	7,925,360	8,217,460	8,317,460
Expenditure	8,417,430	8,497,311	8,783,700	8,881,099
Operating surplus / Deficit	-735,570	-571,951	-566,240	-563,639
Surplus carried forward from previous year	-	-	-	-
Cumulative Surplus/ deficit at end of year	-735,570	-571,951	-566,240	-563,639
Exchequer Subvention to Social Insurance Fund from Vote 37	735,570	571,951	566,240	563,639

Defined Benefit Pension Schemes

339. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide an update regarding a new priority order for defined benefit pensions, in view of events at Waterford Crystal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49173/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am very aware of the difficulties facing many defined benefit pension schemes at this time. A range of both legislative and administrative measures have been put in place in recent years to help employers and the trustees of pension scheme respond to the funding challenge. The issue of how the assets of a scheme are distributed on the wind up of a scheme is a sensitive and complex issue. This issue has been examined in some depth and is under consideration at present, along with other defined

benefit issues. It is my intention to report to Government on this and related issues with a view to presenting a wider package of legislative proposals and additional reforms for consideration.

Question No. 340 answered with Question No. 328.

Rent Supplement Scheme Data

341. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons in County Meath in receipt of rent supplement; and the number in each rate category and their place of residence. [49187/13]

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 81,000 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €403 million for 2013. There are currently 1,981 recipients of rent supplement in County Meath. Information on rate categories is not available. A breakdown of recipients by area is provided in the following tabular statement.

Rent Supplement recipients in County Meath by location (October 2013):

Location	Recipients
Navan	701
Kells	293
Trim	154
Ashbourne	138
Athboy	116
Bettystown	95
Ratoath	55
Ballivor	39
Laytown	35
Dunboyne	35
Dunshaughlin	34
Enfield	22
Other Areas	264
Total	1,981

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

342. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an application for a review of a decision to refuse an application for domiciliary care allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49192/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance was received from the person concerned on 11th June 2013. The application was disallowed as the child was not considered to satisfy the qualifying conditions for the allowance. A letter issued on 13th August 2013 advising of the decision. A review of this decision has been requested and additional information on this child's condition/care needs has been

supplied. The person concerned will be notified of the outcome of this review as soon as it is completed.

Question No. 343 withdrawn.

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

344. Deputy John McGuinness asked the Minister for Social Protection if rent allowance will be approved in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if arrears will be paid. [49215/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The client was awarded rent supplement on 12th November to his full entitlement based on his household composition. All arrears will issue accordingly at the end of the month.

Community Work Initiatives

345. Deputy Michael Creed asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will consider amending the terms and conditions of the Tús scheme to allow for the extension of contracts beyond the 12 month limit; if she has received representations from Oireachtas Members and community groups on this matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49272/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Tús, the community work placement initiative introduced during 2011, was set up to provide short-term, quality work opportunities for those who are unemployed for more than a year. This initiative is being delivered through the network of local development companies and Údarás na Gaeltachta. Tús is designed to break the cycle of unemployment, and maintain work readiness thereby improving a person's opportunities in returning to the labour market.

I have received representations from community groups and Oireachtas members on the length of contracts for participants as well as replying to a number of Parliamentary Questions on this matter. The duration of the Tús contract was set to reflect a number of inter-related elements. These include the need to ensure that limited numbers of placement available are opened to those on the live register, that weaknesses identified in other work programmes resulting from longer duration placements are not replicated in Tús, optimisation of the resources available, and how Tús fits with the objectives set out in the Government's activation policies in Pathways to Work. I consider the existing 12-month period on Tús to be adequate to meet the programme's objectives. It also ensures that as many unemployed people as possible are able to benefit from the initiative. There are no circumstances under which a person's term on Tús will be extended beyond 12 months. Opportunities are available on community employment where a person is interested in pursuing a work placement that may have a longer duration in order to complete certified training. Time spent on Tús is considered eligible for accessing community employment. As of the week ending 8th November 2013, 6,961 participants were working and in receipt of a payment on Tús. An additional 359 full-time supervisory/team leader personnel had been engaged by the implementing bodies for Tús. Since its inception in July 2011, some 14,200 participants have completed 12 months on Tús.

Rent Supplement Scheme Administration

346. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Social Protection when she expects

to review the caps for rent supplement in view of the increase in market rental prices which has become evident in the State, particularly in the Dublin area and surrounding commuter belt counties; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49308/13]

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. The overall aim is to provide short term assistance, and not to act as an alternative to the other social housing schemes operated by the Exchequer. There are currently approximately 81,000 persons in receipt of rent supplement for which the Government has provided €403 million in 2013.

Revised rent limits under the rent supplement scheme have come into force with effect from Monday 17 June 2013 and will be in place until 31 December 2014. The new rent limits have been determined following an extensive review of the private rental market based on the most up-to-date data available. The Department currently funds up to 30% of the private rented sector so it is essential that the rent limits are kept under review. The new rent limits have been set using the 35th percentile ensuring that sufficient housing is available for recipients of the scheme.

Under the revised rent limits, there have been increases in the maximum rent limits in Dublin while there have been some reductions across a number of rural counties reflecting the conditions in the rental markets in those counties. Separate to the county limits, higher rent limits have also been provided for in the commuter areas of North Kildare and Bray.

There are properties available within the maximum rent limits for rent supplement recipients. Almost 30,000 persons in receipt of rent supplement reside in Dublin. When the commuter counties of Meath, Kildare, Wicklow and Louth are also included then a total of 41,000 persons are in receipt of rent supplement in this region.

Officials in the Department continue to examine the impact of the rent limits on those who claim rent supplement. It is planned that the next review of rent limits will take place before December 2014.

Question No. 347 withdrawn.

Youth Guarantee

348. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection if the proposed €200 million (details supplied) for the youth jobs guarantee fund over the next two years is certain to be implemented; and the way funding will be obtained. [49372/13]

349. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of jobs and training places that will be created from the proposed €200 million for the youth jobs guarantee. [49373/13]

357. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount of funding provided for youth programmes in 2013; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49463/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 348, 349 and 357 together.

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 Youth 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 support from EU funds, e.g. European Social Fund (ESF) and Youth Employment Initiative (ESF)).

For Ireland this plan will likely require:

- Earmarking a quota of additional places/opportunities for young people on existing schemes.
- Varying 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 shorter spell of unemployment rather than the general requirement of 12 months unemployment.
- Expanding 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.

In 2012, we spent an estimated €170m on participation in employment, training and further education programmes for jobless young people. Significant further amounts were expended on mainstream provision of further and higher education preparing young people for entry to working life. Final estimates of cost and participants for 2013 will be produced at the end of this year when full-year cost and participant estimates (including age-breakdowns) will be available.

As an initial step towards preparing for implementation of the guarantee, provision was made in the 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 mil-

lion. The final amount of expenditure on youth programmes for 2014 cannot be predicted with certainty as it will in part be determined by the level of take-up by young people and the level of funding secured from the EU and on the mix of programmes involved. It is however likely to be significantly up on 2012 levels.

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.

It is estimated that EU funding (ESF and YEI) for these programmes will be of the order of €64 million in respect of each of the years 2014 and 2015. Given the way the funding is structured, in order to recoup these amounts from the EU in due course, it will be necessary that we spend, in the first instance, close to €100 million on relevant programmes each year, or close to €200 million in 2014-2015 overall. As will be clear from the above, it is anticipated that actual expenditure will be significantly in excess of that amount over the period concerned.

Child Benefit Payments

350. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason child benefit has ceased in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49384/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Child benefit is paid up to and including the month of a child's 16th birthday and continues to the month of the 18th birthday provided the child is in full-time education. In order for payment to continue after the age of 16, it is necessary for the school or college to certify that the child is in full-time education and will be until the age of 18.

In the case of the person concerned, a completed application form was received and child benefit was awarded to March 2014, the month of the 18th birthday. The child subsequently left full-time education in October 2013 and as a result payment ceased from November 2013. If the child returns to full-time-education before reaching 18 another application form should be completed.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

351. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason the increase awarded to pensioners when they turn 80 only applies to the primary recipient and not to the payments made to qualified adults. [49396/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The over 80 allowance is an additional payment of €10 per week automatically paid to recipients of State pension on attaining 80 years of age. It is a benefit paid on the basis of the qualification of the primary person in receipt of the pension payment.

An increase for a qualified adult is normally paid where the qualified adult does not have enough contributions to claim a pension in their own right and it is usually paid on the basis of the contribution history of the primary pension recipient. Any additional benefits attaching to State pension are only paid in respect of the primary contributor.

Youth Guarantee

352. Deputy Patrick Nulty asked the Minister for Social Protection the way the interdepartmental youth guarantee implementation group is demonstrating the required transparent planning process in the construction of the youth guarantee implementation plan as defined by the European Commission; if she will furnish details regarding the formal consultation process between each of the sectors and the interdepartmental youth guarantee implementation group, in view of the fact that the Commission states that each youth guarantee implementation plan should set out the roles of public education and employment authorities, youth organisations, employees' and employers' representatives; the amount of funding that is being applied for from the the €6 billion youth unemployment initiative funding stream by 31 December 2013; if she will detail any matched funding at national level; the amount of funding being applied for from the provisional €10 billion European Social Fund for 2014; if she will detail any matched funding at national level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49403/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department of Social Protection has set up an interdepartmental Youth Guarantee Implementation 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. The terms of reference for this group are 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 held a stakeholders' consultation forum in relation to the Guarantee on October 14, and has also invited further submissions from the bodies that attended.

The Department of Social Protection has also requested the assistance of the OECD in developing the implementation plan. In particular the OECD has been asked to identify best international practice and how it might best be applied to implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Ireland. A delegation from the OECD has already met with stakeholders at the forum mentioned above as well as with a range of relevant public bodies.

The development of the plan will also draw on expert work already carried out by the European Commission over the last few years, and in particular the Commission Staff Working Document (SWD) accompanying the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Establishing a Youth Guarantee, published in December 2012.

The Department recently (November 6th) appeared before the Joint Oireachtas Committee (JOC) on Education and Social Protection in order to provide a comprehensive update on the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan. Also present at the JOC were representatives of various Youth Guarantee Stakeholders including the National Youth Council of Ireland and the Union of Students of Ireland. The session was streamed live on the RTE website.

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.

The implementation plan will include estimates of expected take-up of places on a national basis and of the funding costs of that provision. Funding costs will depend on the take up of places by individual young people.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Payments

353. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of claimants who obtain a payment from community welfare officers due to lack of PRSI contributions who are ineligible to claim for illness benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49414/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme provides a “safety net” within the overall social welfare system and provides assistance to eligible people in the State whose means are insufficient to meet their needs and those of their dependants. The main purpose of the scheme is to provide immediate and flexible assistance for those in need who do not qualify for payment under other State schemes.

There are currently over 3,700 clients who have been awarded a weekly SWA payment on the basis that they are ill and are ineligible to claim other social welfare illness related payments. Statistics are not maintained in respect of those customers ineligible for illness benefit due to insufficient PRSI contributions.

Question No. 354 withdrawn.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

355. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection in respect of community employment schemes, if she allows applicants who require Garda clearance to work on a community employment scheme (details supplied) use the statutory declaration form, Appendix 2: to Recruitment Policy R6 Statutory Declaration Act 1938 until they are cleared for the CE scheme until they secure Garda clearance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49439/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Approval to work, or train to work, with children and/or vulnerable adults is granted upon successful completion of the recruitment and selection process which includes appropriate vetting checks with the Garda Central Vetting Unit. No community employment participant may work or train with children and/or vulnerable adults pending the outcome of the Garda vetting process. Applicants already sign a declaration of good character as part of the application process.

Community Welfare Services

356. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will outline the future of community welfare services in the Cabra area, Dublin; the length of time for which the four remaining community welfare officers will operate from the centre in Quarry Road; the way local people will engage with community welfare officers in the future; and the amount that has been spent on this service in Cabra in the past five years. [49454/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department is in the process of major organisational change following the transfer of responsibility for Community Welfare Services and FÁS employment and community employment services. In implementing this challenging programme of change, the objective is to ensure that all services provided are co-ordinated and support customers through the development of improved processes and the concentration of staff and resources in integrated units.

The Department is committed to developing and implementing a case management approach, across the full range of its services, with a focus on working with the person rather than

the scheme. Skilled and knowledgeable case managers will work with individuals in need, to ensure that they not only receive the appropriate income supports but are also helped to find a way in which they can participate to the fullest extent possible in their community, economy and workforce. A case management approach with a focus on the individual, and the development of a tailored plan for each person, produces better outcomes than the traditional transaction focussed delivery of scheme services.

It is in this context that the services provided in Dublin 7 are being reviewed. The office referred to by this question is located in Quarry Road, Dublin 7 and the hours during which the services are provided are Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday 10.00 am to 11.00 am and Friday 10 am to 11 am for emergencies. It is also important to note that this review is ongoing and that no final decision has yet been made on the location and nature of services to be provided. The Deputy can be assured that the overall priority is better customer service and that members of the public and public representatives will be fully informed of the changes being proposed. The intention is to provide service continuity and to utilise available staff to provide a more efficient and streamlined service, and to be in a position to fully align services with the new national employment and entitlement service, Intreo, as it rolls out in the region.

There are no statistics currently available for the amount that has been spent on the service delivered by Quarry Road Health Centre in the last 5 years. Compiling this will involve co-ordination between various organisations due the transferral of responsibility for the Community Welfare Service from the Health Service Executive to this Department, and a response will issue in when this information is to hand.

Question No. 357 answered with Question No. 348.

Question No. 358 withdrawn.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

359. Deputy Sean Fleming asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will reverse her decision to request people at 65 years of age to go on jobseeker's allowance before they are eligible for the State pension; and the arrangements she has in place to ensure that persons of that age who worked all their lives are not put in a difficult position. [49481/13]

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.

These changes are already provided for in legislation. 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. Over time, the age for State pension contributory was reduced to 66 years.

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, just 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.

There are two other related provisions; one provides that in the case of a job seeker's benefit recipient aged under 65 whose claim spans from one benefit year into another, a new relevant tax year requirement is not applied in the case of the job seekers entitlement relating to the second benefit year. A further provision states that 3 waiting days do not have to be served for jobseekers assistance in the case of certain people aged between 65 and 66 years who have been in receipt of job seekers benefit within the past year.

In addition, as part of Budget 2014, I was happy to be able to introduce new arrangements for older jobseekers, i.e. those aged 62 and over who have left work before reaching the State pension age of 66 and who wish to claim a jobseeker's payment.

With effect from 1 January 2014, fully unemployed jobseekers aged 62 or over will be placed on yearly signing and will be given the option of transferring to EFT payments. Furthermore, they will not be subject to mandatory activation measures but may avail of employment supports which will continue to be available to them and they will not be subject to activation-related sanctions.

Finally social welfare supports will continue to be available to those who need it most and 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.

Jobseeker's Allowance Eligibility

360. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Social Protection if there is a different provision made available for part-time firemen when it comes to the issue of drawing their stamps; if she will explain exactly what this is; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49485/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Over 2,000 persons are employed as retained (part-time) fire-fighters, providing services which are vitally important to their communities. Typically, these workers provide services in rural and less densely populated areas but larger urban centres may also have a cohort of part-time workers.

Retained fire-fighters who are otherwise unemployed are entitled to a jobseeker's payment in respect of days that they are engaged in fire-fighting or training. They are, however, required to satisfy the statutory conditions for the receipt of a jobseeker's payment of being available for and genuinely seeking work. Any person who fails to satisfy these conditions is not entitled to

a jobseeker's payment.

Taking account of the unusual circumstances of retained fire personnel the Social Welfare and Pensions (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2013 carried amendments to both jobseeker's benefit and jobseeker's allowance that put the treatment of retained fire fighters on a legislative basis. In bringing these amendments forward I was particularly mindful of the vital service provided by this group, particularly in rural communities where the fire service is almost exclusively staffed by retained personnel.

The legislation and associated regulations will allow retained fire-fighters a reasonable and fair level of access to the schemes.

This legislative package exempts retained fire fighters from having to satisfy the substantial loss of employment condition under jobseeker's benefit. In addition, retained fire fighters will be exempt from suffering a loss of a day of jobseeker's payment for every day of fire fighting employment. Finally the legislation also provides that when a retained fire fighter is on call this will not result in a disallowance on grounds of availability.

Question No. 361 withdrawn.

Departmental Offices

362. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Social Protection the locations at which the Intreo integrated jobseeker service is currently available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49509/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The delivery of the Intreo service comprises a number of elements. The main elements being:

1. The integration of the various welfare decision making processes to speed up decision making and minimise recourse to supplementary welfare payments.
2. The introduction of a profiling process to capture the unique characteristics and service requirements of each jobseeker.
3. The implementation of a systematic group activation engagement and one to one process based on clients' profiles.
4. The delivery of a 'one-stop-shop' service from an integrated office location.

Elements 1 to 3 are being rolled out, are already in place in many offices and will be in place in nearly all offices by the end of the year.

The delivery of over 60 One-Stop-Shop Intreo Offices is a major property project for the Office of Public Works which is responsible for the provision of the Department's property requirements, including refurbishment and fit out works.

The Intreo Project requires the acquisition and development of some new properties and the re-modelling and refurbishment of others. All of this also entails the re-accommodation of staff including the transfer and set-up of IT, furniture and other utilities across multiple locations.

Notwithstanding the complexity of such a large property programme, the Intreo service is fully operational in sixteen offices to date. The sixteen offices are: Achill, Arklow, Ballymun, Blanchardstown, Buncrana, Clifden, Coolock, Dundalk, Finglas, Killarney, Kings Inn Street

(Dublin), Loughrea, Manorhamilton, Newcastlewest, Sligo, and Tallaght.

The Department is working with the OPW towards a target of completing the roll-out of the Intreo service to all offices by the end of 2014.

Question No. 363 withdrawn.

Question No. 364 answered with Question No. 300.

Question No. 365 withdrawn.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

366. Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of reports her Department has commissioned Indecon to undertake and the cost of same. [49565/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The procurement of services is essential to support the Department in providing high quality service to the public in a cost effective and efficient manner and is governed by a comprehensive regulatory, legal and procedural framework.

The Department engages consultants (individuals or organisations) to provide intellectual or knowledge based services (e.g. expert analysis and advice) including the delivery of reports, studies, assessments, recommendations and proposals that contribute to decision making or policy making.

Since March 2011, Indecon International Economic Consultants have been engaged once at a cost of €59,557 to undertake an independent evaluation of the operation and impact of Job-Bridge, the National Internship Scheme, and to make recommendations upon improvements to the operation of the Scheme. This engagement followed an open procurement procedure which was completed in April, 2012. The final report of the evaluation was published on 1st May, 2013.

Question No. 367 withdrawn.

Rent Supplement Scheme Payments

368. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason rent allowance has been withdrawn in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; if it can be reinstated as a matter of urgency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49571/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The client's rent allowance, which is currently in payment, was reviewed on 28th August 2013 to bring it within the maximum limit applicable based on family composition and area of residence. A 12-week period is allowed to reduce rent to the appropriate limit or find alternative accommodation. A reminder outlining the need to adhere to the appropriate rent limit issued from the Department on 12th November 2013. The client must forward evidence outlining what steps have been taken to adhere to the rent limit before the end of November to retain a rent allowance.

Social Welfare Appeals Delays

369. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on the delays in implementing decision of the Social Welfare Appeals Office; if she will provide figures, including the average time that persons have had to wait to receive their payments, including arrears in October 2011, October 2012 and October 2013, following a successful appeal; if she will confirm if the waiting time differs by scheme; and if so, if she will provide details of same. [49573/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): My Department aims to process and pay without delay all successful appeals returned by the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). In general, across schemes, there are no delays in implementing successful appeals.

However, in the disability allowance (DA) area, temporary delays are currently being experienced by some successful appellants. These delays are arising due to the large number of backlogged new claims that have been processed over the last year, resulting in high levels of appeals. There are approximately 1,700 DA cases awaiting payment at present following successful appeals. The majority of these have been received by the scheme area in the past 6 weeks. The Department regrets the inconvenience caused to these customers. Additional staff resources have been assigned to process these appeals and they will be put into payment quickly.

The average processing time for successful appeal cases cannot be provided as such statistics are not specifically captured across the various social welfare schemes. Statistics in relation to earlier years are not available but this situation is a result of the unique circumstance of major backlog clearance.

Employment Support Services

370. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection if time spent on JobBridge goes towards the calculation of a person qualifying for JobsPlus. [49574/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): JobsPlus is a new employer incentive which encourages and rewards employers who offer employment opportunities to the long term unemployed. This incentive replaced the employer Job PRSI Exemption Scheme and the Revenue Job Assist from the 1 July 2013. Regular cash payments are made to qualifying employers to offset wage costs when they engage eligible jobseekers.

Eligible employees must have been in receipt of a jobseekers' payment or signing for jobseekers' credits for at least 12 months. Time spent on JobBridge counts towards the qualifying period and persons pursuing internships under JobBridge who were in receipt of a qualifying payment prior to their internship may be employed directly from this scheme once the required qualifying period and conditions are satisfied. An employer and employee should apply online as normal in these circumstances. Once eligibility has been confirmed employment from directly from an internship can be facilitated.

The incentive provides two levels of payment; a payment of €7,500 over two years to an employer for persons recruited who have been unemployed for between 12 and 24 months and a payment of €10,000 over two years to an employer who recruits a person who has been 2 years or more on the live register. The JobsPlus Incentive is administered by Employment Support Services, Department of Social Protection, Shannon Lodge, Carrick on Shannon, Co Leitrim. You may contact this section at 071 9672597 or by emailing jobsplusinfo@welfare.ie

Questions - Written Answers
Mortgage Interest Supplement Appeals

371. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if and when mortgage interest relief will be paid in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49594/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Following a review in July 2013, the mortgage interest supplement payment to the person concerned was stopped as her means were calculated to be in excess of the allowable interest on the mortgage.

The person concerned has appealed the decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office who will be in touch with her in due course.

Commemorative Events

372. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will provide details of plans to commemorate the centenary of the 1916 Rising; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48902/13]

373. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht further to Parliamentary Question No. 144 of 7 November 2013, if he will provide a detailed report on the major events planned for the 1916 centenary celebrations in County Kerry; if plans are at an advanced stage to mark the anniversary of significant events in Irish history such as Roger Casement at Banna Strand and the tragedy at Ballykissane Pier, Killorglin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49131/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 372 and 373 together.

As I outlined in my reply to Question No. 144 of 7 November last, it is my objective in relation to the 1916 centenary programme that it is comprehensive, authentic and inclusive. That reply also outlined the series of items which are being undertaken by my Department over the broad area of commemorations.

In keeping with the development of an authentic programme, I anticipate that all the principal sites relating to the Rising and ensuing events will feature in the commemorations. Local as well as national events will feature and, in this regard, I would encourage interested parties and community groups to co-ordinate their ideas and proposals so as to ensure the optimal arrangements with regard to the historic events in their areas that should be commemorated. Imaginative ways of undertaking these commemorations should be explored by such interested parties and emphasis placed on local participation.

I particularly wish to encourage Local Authorities to utilise their arts and heritage offices as they support and co-ordinate commemorative activities in their jurisdiction.

As I have previously outlined, the commemorative programme is proceeding on the historic centenary timeline. With regard to the centenary of the founding of the Irish Volunteers, I met a number of local historians on 2 September 2013 at the County Library in Tralee to explore the possibility of arranging a lecture to commemorate the founding. It was decided to arrange a lecture to take place on Thursday 28 November at the County Library in Tralee.

The arrangements in 2014 will include commemorations of gun-running events, the formation of Cumann na mBan as well as the founding of the Irish Citizens' Army. Commemorative

arrangements for 2016 will be announced on a continuing basis over the coming months, to include certain capital projects and events. This process requires consideration about the most relevant type, scope and focus of commemoration for events and how they should be undertaken. As I indicated previously, it is my belief that the Rising can best be commemorated by placing it in the broader cultural and historical context. In this regard, we have brought forward projects such as the *Century Ireland* initiative, in association with RTÉ and Boston College, which is already charting the lives of the participants in the Rising from their first appearances in public life through to the Rising itself.

Clearly, the centenary of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic will be a most important anniversary and I anticipate that the special arrangements for the occasion will be of interest internationally too.

As I mentioned in my earlier reply, I would welcome the Deputies' views on the commemoration of the Rising and would be happy to discuss any relevant proposals submitted.

National Monuments

374. Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when his Department will be in a position to arrange a meeting with his officials regarding a site (details supplied) in County Offaly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49149/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): In 2010, the then Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government recommended that permission be refused by Offaly County Council for the extension proposed in the case referred to by the Deputy. The reason for this recommendation was that the extension would involve groundworks that would impact on a possible early ecclesiastical enclosure within an area of archaeological constraint associated with a recorded monument under the National Monuments Acts.

Representatives of my Department's National Monuments Service will be pleased to meet the committee in question on request.

Forbairt Thionscal na hIascaireachta

375. D'fhiadfraigh Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta cén infheistíocht atá ceadaithe ag Údarás na Gaeltachta don fheirmeoireacht éisc i ngach bliain ó 2011 i leith, an méid airgid a infheistíodh go dtí seo i rith na tréimhse sin, cé na comhlachtaí a bhí i gceist; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [49188/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): Mar go bhfuil eolas cuimsitheach iarrtha ag an Teachta, tuigtear dom nach féidir le hÚdarás na Gaeltachta an t-eolas seo a chur le chéile laistigh den amscála atá ar fáil don Cheist Dála.

Tá iarrtha agam, mar sin, ar Phríomhfeidhmeannach Údarás na Gaeltachta an t-eolas ábhartha a chur ar fáil go díreach don Teachta chomh luath agus is féidir.

Deontais do Comharchumainn

376. D'fhiatraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta cén deontas reáchtála atá ceadaithe do gach comharchumann agus eagraíocht phobalbhunaithe do 2012 agus 2013 arna mhiondealú de réir eagraíochta; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [49189/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): Tá an t-eolas atá iarrtha ag an Teachta agus a cuireadh ar fáil do mo Roinnse ó Údarás na Gaeltachta leagtha amach sa tábla thíos.

Contae	Comhlacht	Iomlán Íoctha 2012	Iomlán Íoctha 2013
Dún na nGall	Comharchumann Oileán Árainn Mhór Teo.	€85,500	€85,500
Dún na nGall	Comharchumann Thoraí Teo.	€85,500	€85,500
Dún na nGall	Comharchumann Forbartha Ghaoth Dobhair	€58,000	€58,000
Dún na nGall	Comharchumann na nOileán Beag Teo.	€38,675	€35,000
Dún na nGall	Lár Chomhairle Paróiste Ghleann Cholm Cille Teo.	€48,000	€48,000
Dún na nGall	Céim Aniar Teo.	€54,000	€54,000
Dún na nGall	Pobal Eascarrach Teo.	€33,000	€33,000
Maigh Eo	Comhlacht Forbartha Áitiúil Acla Teo.	€71,688	€70,000
Maigh Eo	Comhar Dún Chaocháin Teo.	€42,750	€41,000
Maigh Eo	Comharchumann Ionad Deirbhile Teo.	€46,250	€46,250
Maigh Eo	Coiste Cultúr Teanga agus Forbartha Thuar Mhic Éadaigh Teo.	€30,000	€31,350
Gaillimh	Comhar Caomhán Teo.	€90,900	€89,550
Gaillimh	Comharchumann Forbartha Árann Teo.	€94,500	€92,250
Gaillimh	Comharchumann Dhúiche Sheoigheach Teo.	€58,275	€58,275
Gaillimh	Comharchumann Shailearna Teo.	€58,275	€58,275
Gaillimh	Comhairle Ceantar na nOileán Teo.	€56,700	€52,000

Contae	Comhlacht	Iomlán Íoctha 2012	Iomlán Íoctha 2013
Gaillimh	Comharchumann Sliogéisc Chonamara Teo.	€20,000	€15,000
Gaillimh	Forbairt Chonamara Láir Teo.	€52,000	€52,000
Gaillimh	Comharchumann Mhic Dara Teo.	€52,000	€52,000
Gaillimh	Comhar Chuigéal Teo.	€31,350	€31,350
Gaillimh	Forbairt Pobail Mhaigh Cuilinn Teo.	€30,000	€31,350
Gaillimh	Comhlacht Forbartha an Spidéil Teo.	€31,350	€31,350
Gaillimh	Coiste Halla Naomh Eoin	€15,000	€0
An Mhí	Comharchumann Ráth Chairn Teo	€58,275	€58,275
Ciarraí	Comharchumann Forbartha an Leith Triúigh Teo.	€52,725	€52,725
Ciarraí	Comharchumann Forbartha Chorca Dhuibhne Teo.	€76,500	€72,000
Ciarraí	Comhchoiste Ghæltachtaí Chiarraí Theas Teo.	€49,950	€52,000
Ciarraí	Forbairt na Dromada Teo.	€47,500	€47,500
Corcaigh	Comharchumann Chléire Teo.	€94,500	€85,500
Corcaigh	Comharchumann Mhúscaí Teo.	€42,750	€42,750
Port Láirge	Comhlucht Forbartha na nDéise Teo.	€45,000	€50,000
	Iomlán	€1,650,913	€1,611,750

National Monuments

377. Deputy Michael P. Kitt asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he has received a request from the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport offering to transfer the Thoor Ballylee Tower House, County Galway to his Department; if he will consider the re-opening of the tower house; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49231/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): Earlier this year, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport indicated that Fáilte Ireland would be willing to transfer ownership of Thoor Ballylee to my Department as a possible route to having it re-opened to the public. The tower house is owned by Fáilte Ireland but was badly damaged by flooding in 2009 and has since been closed to the public.

The Office of Public Works (OPW) manages and provides visitor services at national monuments in my ownership or guardianship. I initiated discussions with the OPW on foot of Fáilte Ireland's offer to establish the potential for the monument to be added to the portfolio of sites operated by the OPW with visitor facilities. However, having regard to the present condition of the monument and the likely costs of the remedial works needed to allow visitor facilities to be restored; the long-term conservation and maintenance implications; and the much reduced funding currently available to manage the existing portfolio of national monuments my Department and the OPW cannot, in present circumstances, commit the resources needed to allow Fáilte Ireland's proposal to be taken up. On that basis, I have now informed the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport that I am not in a position to accept Fáilte Ireland's offer. The monument will therefore remain in the ownership of Fáilte Ireland.

There may be other viable options available to Fáilte Ireland for bringing Thoor Ballylee back into public use. My Department and the OPW would be happy to provide any advice or guidance to the owner of the monument, Fáilte Ireland, that might be of assistance.

National Archives

378. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the full extent of the backlog of uncatalogued records of all types at the National Archives; the way it is proposed to properly catalogue and itemise these records; when this will occur; the funding required; if he has considered utilising the JobBridge scheme to aid in this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49302/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): As the Deputy is aware, the National Archives is responsible by law for the acquisition of records of permanent value from Departments of State, the courts and 61 named bodies. The National Archives can also acquire archives from other sources such as business, hospitals, charities and voluntary bodies, where it is considered that the archives are of outstanding quality and value. This can, on occasion, entail the rescue of archives that are in danger of destruction.

Cataloguing is one of the core professional duties of archivists in the National Archives, requiring specialist knowledge and in-depth understanding of the content and historical and administrative context of the archives. I am advised that the National Archives has utilised the JobBridge scheme, insofar as it can, to aid in the cataloguing of records. However, because cataloguing work is a specialised activity, JobBridge placements can be employed in a limited way only.

I understand that the National Archives has a historic backlog of approximately 70,000 boxes of archives which need archival and preservation processing to varying degrees. These documents are held in safe and secure conditions but, in light of the pressure on resources, progress on the historic backlog is likely to be slow. As each archival collection will require different levels of work, it is not possible to estimate accurately the funding implications arising.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

379. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht further to Parliamentary Question No. 237 of 12 November 2013, if he will provide the data requested for Departments now under his responsibility that existed between 2003 and the establishment of a single Department on 2 June 2011; if he has no responsibility for this data, if he will indicate which Minister or Ministers have responsibility for providing this information;

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49322/13]

380. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht further to Parliamentary Question No. 238 of 12 November 2013, if he will provide the data requested for Departments now under his responsibility that existed between 2003 and the establishment of his single Department on 2 June 2011; if he has no responsibility for this data, if he will indicate which Minister or Ministers have responsibility for providing this information; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49323/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 379 and 380 together.

The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht was established on 2 June 2011 on foot of a reorganisation of Government Departments announced by the Taoiseach in March 2011. It brought together functions from the former Departments of Tourism, Culture and Sport; Environment, Heritage and Local Government; and Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs.

I am advised that the difficulties in retrieving information of the nature sought by the Deputy for periods prior to establishment date are such that it is not realistically possible to do so. These difficulties include getting access to the relevant records and disaggregating work commissioned in the past to serve wider Departments as then constituted and ascribing it to the specific Divisions subsequently relocated to my Department. It was for these reasons that the relevant information sought by the Deputy was provided from the establishment date of my Department.

Proposed Legislation

381. **Deputy Ann Phelan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the main provisions of the upcoming monuments Bill, and any proposed changes to existing legislation which the Government has scheduled for publication next year. [49332/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): The general scheme of a Monuments Bill to consolidate, update and improve the legislative code governing the protection and regulation of the national archaeological heritage is currently being drafted by the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel.

The key objectives of the Bill are to provide for:

- A consolidated and updated code replacing the National Monuments Acts 1930 to 2004 and a number of related enactments;
- A single Register of Monuments to replace the existing statutory and non-statutory register and records;
- A single, integrated licence system for archaeological related activities;
- A consistent approach to the regulation of archaeological works in relation to all types of development;
- A statutory mechanism to deal with new discoveries of archaeological monuments; and
- The ratification of certain international archaeological conventions.

I intend to publish the Bill as quickly as possible when drafting has been completed.

Questions - Written Answers
Architectural Heritage

382. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will consider the re-introduction and enhancement of the conservation grant scheme to assist in the protection of our architectural heritage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49334/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): I am currently finalising details for a new Built Heritage Jobs Leverage Fund, which I hope to introduce in 2014 to assist with works to safeguard protected structures, in private and civic ownership, protected under the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2012. An allocation of €5 million was announced in Budget 2014 for this scheme as part of the capital stimulus package.

It is intended that this scheme will leverage private capital for investment in a significant number of labour intensive, small-scale renovation projects. Whilst the details of the scheme are yet to be announced, it is envisaged that the local government system will administer the scheme.

Funding for built heritage in 2014 will be subject to final confirmation in the Revised Estimates Volume.

Architectural Heritage

383. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will provide, in tabular form for each year since 2007, the total cumulative amount allocated towards architectural heritage from the joint European support for sustainable investment in city areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49335/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): I understand that the Joint European Support for Sustainable Investment in City Areas (JESSICA) is a financial instrument which offers the managing authorities of EU Structural Funds programmes the possibility to take advantage of outside expertise and to have greater access to loan capital for the purpose of promoting urban development.

My Department does not have information in relation to any amounts allocated under this financial instrument and has not had an involvement with it.

National Lottery Funding Disbursement

384. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will consider the establishment of a heritage lottery fund, similar to the UK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49336/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): The allocation of the proceeds of the National Lottery is a matter for the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

An overall allocation is provided from the National Lottery each year for expenditure through the Votes of various Departments. In 2013 my Department's allocation of funding of €4.446m to the Heritage Council was partially funded by National Lottery funds. In turn, the Heritage Council supports a range of heritage conservation projects.

North-South Implementation Bodies

385. Deputy Gerry Adams asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the total budget for each of Waterways Ireland, Fóras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency for the years 2010 to date in 2013; and any proposed budget reductions to these bodies currently being considered. [49349/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department funds two of the six North South Implementation Bodies established under the 1999 British-Irish Agreement. These are Waterways Ireland and An Foras Teanga (which comprises two agencies - Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency/ Tha Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch). The Bodies are co-funded by my Department (DAHG) and the Department of Arts, Culture and Leisure (DCAL), Northern Ireland. In terms of co-funding, the Ulster-Scots Agency is funded 75% by DCAL and 25% by DAHG; while Foras na Gaeilge is funded 25% by DCAL and 75% by DAHG. As regards Waterways Ireland, current expenditure is funded 85% by DAHG and 15% by DCAL. Capital expenditure by Waterways Ireland is met directly by each jurisdiction.

The North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) approved budget allocations from Sponsor Departments to the Bodies for the years 2010 to 2012 are set out in table below.

-	Waterways Ireland	Ulster-Scots Agency	Foras na Gaeilge
2010	€38.99m (£34.70m)	£3,327,600 (€3,738,876)	€20,643,340 (£18,372,573)
2011	€35.18m (£28.85m)	£3,028,116 (€3,692,824)	€18,785,439 (£15,404,060)
2012	€31.15m (£27.10m)	£2,828,460 (€3,251,103)	€17,546,839 (£15,265,749)

My Department's REV provision for Waterways Ireland for 2013 is €25.463m, a 6% efficiency saving on 2012. My Department's Estimates provision for 2014 is €24.183m, a 5% efficiency saving on 2013.

My Department's REV provision for An Foras Teanga in 2013 is €14.613m, a 5.3% efficiency saving on 2012. My Department's Estimates provision for 2014 is €13.578m, a 7% efficiency saving on 2013. It should be noted that my Department's provisions for An Foras Teanga also include funding in respect of Clár na Leabhar Gaeilge and Colmcille.

The 2013 and 2014 Budget allocations to the Bodies are subject to ongoing discussion by the two Sponsor Departments and will require, of course, formal approval by the NSMC.

National Monuments

386. Deputy John Deasy asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the progress that has been made through mapping and other means by his Department's underwater archaeology unit to establish the location of the estimated 15,000 shipwrecks lying in Irish territorial waters. [49467/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): My Department's National Monuments Service, through its Underwater Archaeology Unit, has been researching shipwrecks in Irish territorial waters since 1999 and, from documentary sources and

local research and knowledge has, to date, built up a database of 17,000 wrecks, of which some 3,000 have been accurately located. With the co-operation and assistance of the Geological Survey of Ireland and the Marine Institute, the identity and location of a further 300 wrecks has been identified and verified through high resolution seabed mapping techniques. Further analysis of data already collected and continuing research is expected to increase the number of known shipwreck sites as time goes on.

Work is currently being finalised on the development of a shipwrecks database for inclusion in the National Monuments Service website, www.archaeology.ie, where it will be available to the general public. My Department has also produced two related publications in recent years: *The Shipwreck Inventory of Ireland: Louth to Wicklow* and *Warships, U-Boats and Liners*, the latter in co-operation with the Marine Institute and the Geological Survey of Ireland.

Prospecting Licences

387. Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will confirm that a prohibition on the process of hydraulic fracturing or fracking exists here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49177/13]

396. Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in view of his decision not to award onshore petroleum prospecting licences due to the failure by companies (details supplied) to comply with the work programmes as set out by his Department, if he will confirm that the companies being in breach of the specific performance of the licensing terms, 2007, have vacated their position and that the licensing options held by aforementioned companies have now lapsed and are of no further effect, have now been revoked; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49178/13]

397. Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources further to Parliamentary Question No. 465 of 19 February 2013 if he will confirm to which specific work programmes proposed he was referring; if he will also confirm what was so unique about the nature of these work programmes which precluded him from granting petroleum prospecting licences to the onshore licensing option holders and on-shore petroleum prospecting licence applicants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49179/13]

398. Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in view of the fact that companies (details supplied) have been granted on-shore licensing options since 1 March 2011, the reason he has not issued failure notices to the companies to hold a petroleum prospecting licence; the reason his Department has not recovered the appropriate penalties from the companies concerned as required by the licensing terms, 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49180/13]

400. Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in view of his decision not to award onshore petroleum prospecting licences due to the failure by companies (details supplied) to comply with the work programmes, as set out by his Department, and the companies having vacated their position, if he will confirm that until the licensing options are put out to tender again, in accordance with Directive 94/22/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, and in the event that a company tenders successfully and is awarded such an option, there are no companies permitted to lawfully operate with a licensing option here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49241/13]

401. Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and

Natural Resources further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 463 to 465, inclusive, of 2 February 2013, in view of the fact that there is a requirement on the part of companies (details supplied) to hold a petroleum prospecting licence during the full period of a licensing option under the licensing terms 2007(13b), if he will explain, following his admission in his answers that the companies concerned do not hold PPLs, the reason he has allowed the companies to continue to hold onshore licensing options when they do not comply with the terms of the onshore licensing terms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49242/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte):
I propose to take Questions Nos. 387, 396 to 398, inclusive, 400 and 401 together.

The three companies referred to in the Questions were awarded onshore Licensing Options in February 2011 for a period of two years from 1 March 2011 to 28 February 2013. While applications for Petroleum Prospecting Licences were submitted by the three companies, no such authorisations were granted due to the limited nature of the work programmes to be carried out under the Licensing Options.

The Licensing Option work programmes allowed the companies to evaluate the natural gas potential of the acreage largely based on desktop studies of existing data. Exploration drilling was not permitted under the Licensing Options. The term of all three Licensing Options expired on 28 February 2013.

Tamboran Resources and Enegi Oil plc have submitted applications for a follow-on Exploration Licence. Both companies have complied with their Licensing Option work programme obligations. My Department has written to the two companies, informing them that further assessment of their applications must necessarily await the outcome of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Research Programme into the use of hydraulic fracturing. This research is expected to conclude in 2015.

With regard to the Deputy's question regarding the further award of petroleum authorisations including Licencing Options, I have confirmed on a number of occasions that I do not propose to consider applications for petroleum authorisations in respect of other onshore areas until the EPA Research Programme has concluded and there has been time to consider its findings.

Post Office Network

388. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on sustaining the post office network (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49062/13]

389. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding the post office network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49063/13]

390. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding the post office network. [49086/13]

391. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding the sustainability of the post office network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49087/13]

392. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding sustainability of the post office network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49099/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 388 to 392, inclusive, together.

Operational matters and the role of developing commercial strategies for the post office network are a matter for the management and Board of An Post and one in which I have no statutory function. As shareholder, however, I have a strong concern in relation to the ongoing commercial position of the Company and I regularly liaise with the Company in this regard.

An Post has many strengths and has the largest retail presence in the country. I have been supportive of its attempts to diversify its income streams and to win a wider range of commercial contracts offering higher margins.

I read the Irish Postmasters' Union report on The Future of the Post Office Network and earlier this year I emphasised to the IPU the intrinsic strengths of the network and the opportunities for new developments.

I have welcomed the selection of An Post as the provider of over the counter cash services for social welfare customers. The social welfare contract is the largest contract held by the post office division of An Post. The Department of Social Protection intends to implement a strategy whereby the bulk of social welfare payments will be made electronically. I understand An Post will pitch strongly for the social welfare e-payment business when it is put out to tender by the Department of Social Protection.

Having invested in the computerisation of all post offices, An Post is well positioned to become the front office provider of choice for Government and financial services sector. Progress towards diversification within the financial services sector is already underway with the enhanced arrangement with AIB and the agreement with Aviva for the transfer of their branch offices personal insurance business to One Direct.

In the context of the public sector transformation agenda I will continue to engage with my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to consideration, as appropriate, of the post office network for transactional elements of the business of Government Departments and Agencies and have stressed to my Government colleagues that the network is ideally configured for over the counter transactions. I see a strong future for the network by using its existing strengths to remain a significant player as a front office for Government services. In this connection, An Post has secured over the counter Local Property Tax payments. Garda fixed fines, TV licences and passports can all be paid or purchased at the post office as well as dog licences and toll fees. I also see a strong role for the post office network in the next phase of the standard bank account project as the target segment for this project are already comfortable in using post offices for financial transactions.

Overall, it is Government policy that An Post remains a strong and viable company, in a position to provide a high quality, nationwide postal service and maintain a nationwide customer focussed network of post offices.

Semi-State Bodies

393. Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide any assistance in relation to the difficulties being

experienced by workers (details supplied) in County Offaly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49114/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte):
This is a matter for Bórd na Mona and one in which I, as Minister, have no function.

Public Broadcasting Charge Introduction

394. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources with regard to the new licensing fee which is replacing the television licence, if he will give consideration to allowing some of the additional €30 million, which is anticipated to be collected from the new fee, to be distributed to the independent broadcasters who provide a valuable service to our local communities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49137/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte):
I refer to the reply to Question No. 6 of 17 July 2013

Broadband Service Provision

395. Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to improve the broadband service in Cloghan, County Offaly and the surrounding area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49142/13]

404. Deputy Dominic Hannigan asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the action he will take to improve broadband in an area (details supplied) in County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49341/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte):
I propose to take Questions Nos. 395 and 404 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 Counties Meath and Offaly, can be found on ComReg's website at www.callcosts.ie.

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 Counties Meath and Offaly. 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. ComReg has put in place a new regulatory regime for fixed line Next Generation Access and for service bundles, both of which are designed to incentivise the rollout of services by service providers. ComReg's multiband spectrum auction, completed in 2012, is also enabling the rollout of advanced mobile broad-

band services.

The State can only intervene to ensure access to broadband services in areas where the competitive market fails to deliver such 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.

Questions Nos. 396 to 398, inclusive, answered with Question No. 387.

Inland Fisheries Ireland

399. Deputy Gerald Nash asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if his Department, in consultation with Inland Fisheries Ireland, has completed a review of the provisions of the Fisheries Acts dating back to 1959, with particular reference to the licensing regime; if IFI has made any particular recommendations on future licensing regimes for all types of angling in respect of any proposed legislation; if he will confirm that the Government will not introduce a general angling permit, or rod licence by any other name; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49185/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Fergus O'Dowd): My Department, working closely with Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI), is finalising a wide-ranging and comprehensive review of the 1959 Fisheries Act with a view to introducing Heads of a new Inland Fisheries Bill as soon as possible. The aim is to ensure that the sector, valued at €755m annually to the national economy and supporting 10,000 jobs in rural and peripheral areas, is underpinned by a robust and modern legislative code. As part of this review, I organised a series of public information and consultation meetings and attended these meetings accompanied by senior officials from the Inland Fisheries Division of my Department and Inland Fisheries Ireland. Those meetings, which were held on a regional basis in Drogheda, Carrick-on-Shannon, Tuam, Clonmel and Dublin, were well attended and laid out transparently the principal themes to be considered in the context of new legislation. There was widespread positive reaction to proposals at the public meetings and I am happy to advise the Deputy that a significant number of angling representative bodies have expressed their support to me for the broad proposals. The submissions received in the course of the public consultation sessions are available on the Department's website, www.dcenr.ie. The themes which were the subject of the consultation process included:

- proposals to address the complex fishery ownership and title issues and to reform the fisheries rates system;
- the funding needs for the sector including provisions to enable the possible introduction of

a single angling contribution to the development and protection of the resource;

- the introduction of an angler identification system;
- simplification of offences provisions in existing legislation;
- the establishment of an Inland Fisheries Reserve to replace the current water-keeper system.

I am arranging for a copy of the document covering these themes to be forwarded to the Deputy for his information and I will be happy to arrange a full briefing for him on any aspects of the proposals.

Questions Nos. 400 and 401 answered with Question No. 387.

Broadband Service Provision

402. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the level of broadband service currently available to residents in a rural area (details supplied) in County Donegal; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the service currently provided is inadequate; the measures in place to improve the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49265/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Ireland's telecommunications market has been fully liberalised since 1999 in accordance with the requirements of binding EU Directives. The market has since developed into a well-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 Donegal, 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). My Department entered into a contract in late 2008 with Hutchison 3G Ireland Ltd ("3") for the delivery of the NBS to certain designated Electoral Divisions. The areas referred to by the Deputy are covered under the NBS. The broadband service contracted under NBS is a basic, affordable, scalable product in keeping with EU State Aid clearance for the Scheme in September 2007. 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 Donegal. 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. ComReg has put in place a new regulatory regime for fixed line Next Generation Access and for service bundles, both of which are designed to incentivise the rollout of services by service providers. ComReg's multiband spectrum auction, completed in 2012, is also enabling the rollout of advanced mobile broadband services.

In order to progress the State-led investment for areas where it is not commercial for the

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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.

Broadcasting Sector Regulation

403. Deputy Patrick O'Donovan asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his legislative plans to introduce guidelines to cover the area of programme sponsorship to the public service broadcaster; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49271/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): This is not a matter in which I, as Minister, have a function. In accordance with section 42 of the Broadcasting Act 2009, all commercial communications by broadcasters are subject to codes established by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI). In particular, the BAI General Commercial Communications Code sets out the rules in respect of sponsorship of news and current affairs programming. I understand that the code prohibits the sponsorship of news and current affairs programmes on television and of news programmes on radio.

Question No. 404 answered with Question No. 395.

North-South Implementation Bodies

405. Deputy Gerry Adams asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the budget for Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission for the years 2010 to date in 2013; and any proposed budget reductions to these bodies currently being considered. [49352/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The Loughs Agency of Foyle Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (FCILC) is jointly funded by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for Northern Ireland (DARD) and my Department. The total funding provided by both Departments for the years in question is set out in the following table.

Annual State Grants Provided to the Loughs Agency of the FCILC.

Year	Grant £	Grant €
2010	4,831,700	5,428,876
2011	4,688,700	5,717,927

2012	4,545,700	5,224,943
2013	4,402,700	5,369,146

The Loughs Agency met its required saving targets as set down in an Efficiency Savings Delivery Plan targeting 3% annual savings from its baseline 2010 budget. As regards future funding, it has been agreed by the North South Ministerial Council that North South Bodies including the Loughs Agency would operate Efficiency Savings Delivery Plan targeting 4% annual savings from their baseline 2013 budgets.

Broadcasting Service Provision

406. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when he expects to meet any of the applicants who put forward an expression of interest in providing new TV channels through Saorview in 2011. [49388/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): At my request, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland undertook an Expressions of Interest process in 2011 in order to identify parties interested in providing new services on the SAORVIEW DTT network. Following completion of this process and subsequent engagement between my Department and the BAI, I wrote to the Authority in 2012 confirming my acceptance of its recommendations in regard to those channels that should be designated for carriage on SAORVIEW and requesting the Authority to contact the relevant applicants to confirm their continued interest in the matter. I am informed that, as a result of these contacts, it was confirmed to the Authority that none of the relevant applicants were in a position to proceed with their proposed new services at that time and the process has not advanced since then. In the meantime, UTV has recently announced the development of a new channel for the Irish market, with the intention that, subject to reaching the necessary commercial agreements, this service would be carried on as many platforms as possible, including DTT. In addition, I can confirm that, as part of its 2013 workplan, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland is currently undertaking an analysis of the prospects for developing a commercial DTT offering and work on this is expected to be completed by year-end.

Ministerial Meetings

407. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources from whom or from where he received a request to meet with UTV on the day of the UTV launch of its new services here; and if he agreed to attend this meeting. [49389/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): My Department received an invitation from UTV Media for my attendance at a meeting with some of the company's representatives in order to discuss the proposed new television service which it plans to launch in 2015. I accepted the invitation as it afforded me a good opportunity to hear from its television management representatives on their plans for the introduction of the service in this jurisdiction.

Broadcasting Service Provision

408. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and

Natural Resources when a decision will be made by RTE to move all children's programming to RTEjr from RTE Two. [49393/13]

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

Section 103 of the Broadcasting Act 2009 provides that a corporation requires my consent for new services and variations in channels. I have received a submission from RTÉ in respect of the proposal to which the Deputy refers and it is currently being examined by my Department in order to consider its public value. My Department has also consulted with the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland in respect of the sectoral impact of this proposal. I expect to be in a position to make a decision in the matter shortly.

Broadcasting Service Provision

409. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on the recent closure of Dublin Community TV. [49398/13]

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

Community media is an important and distinct third strand of Irish broadcasting, sitting alongside commercial and public service broadcasting. Community television and radio stations provide a social benefit to the communities they serve, allowing for community access and participation. They are uniquely situated so that the output of each station reflects the special interests and needs of its intended listenership. While I am very disappointed to hear of the difficulties being encountered by DCTV and of the station's impending closure, I understand that the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland remains in a process of engagement with DCTV on this matter.

Public Broadcasting Charge Introduction

410. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when he will make an announcement on the details of the broadcasting levy consultation process. [49401/13]

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

I assume the Deputy is referring to the public consultation on the introduction of a Public Service Broadcasting Charge which I launched on 26th August and which closed on 8th October. 385 submissions including 59 from stakeholders were received during this process and my Department is currently reviewing their contents. Once I have considered the outcome of the consultation process I will publish my response along with the key stakeholder submissions on the Department's website. I expect to be in a position to do this before year end.

Offshore Exploration

411. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the latest estimates regarding the potential oil and gas reserves within Ireland's 652,000 sq. km of offshore; and his plans to encourage greater exploration. [49468/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Fergus O'Dowd): While petroleum systems assessments for the Irish offshore frontier basins based on geological criteria and regional comparisons may indicate significant potential reserves, I must stress that the only commercial discoveries of petroleum made in the

Irish offshore since exploration began in the early seventies are the three producing gas fields in the Kinsale area, along with the Corrib Gas Field which is currently being developed. To date, there have been no commercial discoveries of oil in the Irish offshore. Extensive exploration, including the drilling of hundreds of exploration wells, would be necessary in order to be able to quantify, or at least get a better understanding of the extent of our reserves.

Government policy in this area is directed at maximising the benefits to Ireland from exploration and production of our indigenous oil and gas resources, while ensuring that activities are conducted safely and with due regard to their impact on the environment and other land/sea users. To this end my Department encourages exploration investment through an active and targeted promotion campaign, regular licensing rounds, supporting petroleum research projects that deepen knowledge of the petroleum potential of the Irish offshore and by maintaining an appropriate fiscal regime. In that regard I recently announced the headline details for the next licensing round to be held in Ireland's Atlantic Margin, with a closing date of September 2015. Providing advance details of the round will encourage industry to devote resources to preparing for participation in the round.

Conscious that the existence of quality data is key to encouraging exploration, last June my Department, in conjunction with exploration company Eni launched a major seismic acquisition programme to provide a regional grid of high quality seismic data over our Atlantic frontier basins, particularly in the Southern Porcupine, Rockall and Hatton basins. It is by far the largest regional seismic survey to be acquired in the Irish offshore and was designed to complement existing datasets and to fill data gaps that exist. The survey will add to the understanding of the petroleum potential of our frontier basins and should provide a boost to our efforts to attract international mobile exploration investment to Ireland in the next licensing round.

Broadcasting Sector Regulation

412. Deputy John Deasy asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the position regarding the advertising rates charged to registered charities by RTE television and radio; and the State subsidy, if any, that is given towards the cost of suicide prevention and awareness campaigns on RTE. [49469/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): RTÉ is an independent national public service broadcaster whose remit and obligations are set out in the Broadcasting Act 2009, and, as such, I, as Minister, have no role in its day-to-day operations including in relation to RTÉ's pricing of its advertising rates. Furthermore, neither I or my Department has any role or responsibility in the provision of subsidies for health promotion and awareness campaigns.

SEAI Wind Atlas

413. Deputy Michael Colreavy asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources further to Parliamentary Question No. 408 of 4 October 2011, the status of the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland wind atlas; if the update to the wind atlas is now complete; if the semi-State energy companies in his remit supplied their wind data to SEAI for inclusion in the updated atlas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49480/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): On 25 August 2011 the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) advertised a Request for Tenders on the Government eTenders website for Provision of Services to Update the Wind

Atlas for Ireland. Arising from this process, UK Met Office Consulting Services were selected to carry out the work and issued with a contract in May 2012. To support the execution of the contract, SEAI requested Bord na Móna and ESB to provide meteorological mast monitoring data from their wind farm sites to UK Met Office Consulting Services. This data was used by the contractor in the validation of the remodelled wind atlas datasets.

SEAI is currently in the process of updating its online Geographical Information System to make the wind atlas available to the public. This is expected to be completed in Q3 of 2014. In the interim, SEAI has made the new wind atlas datasets available on request to professional Geographical Information Systems users, in Local Authorities and other organisations. The wind atlas was primarily intended as an information tool for Local Authorities in identifying areas suitable for renewable energy development within County Development Plans. Local Authorities have subsequently utilised the SEAI wind atlas as a basis for developing county wind energy strategies.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

414. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he is satisfied with ComReg's monitoring of the implementation of the national broadband scheme; if his attention has been drawn to the number of complaints received by public representatives on this matter; if he will take action on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49495/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The broadband service contracted under National Broadband Scheme (NBS) is a basic, affordable, scalable product in keeping with EU State Aid clearance for the Scheme in September 2007. Under the terms of the contract which my Department has in place with Hutchison 3G Ireland Ltd (trading as "3"), the NBS mobile wireless service currently offers minimum download and upload speeds of 2.3Mbps and 1.4Mbps, respectively, subject to a maximum contention ratio of 18:1. The NBS satellite service, which is utilised in a small number of cases for technical reasons associated with the location of the premises, offers minimum download and upload speeds of 3.6Mbps and 384 kbps respectively, subject to a maximum contention ratio of 48:1.

My Department has well-established monitoring arrangements in place to ensure that the NBS delivers the minimum specified service or better to all users. Throughout the contract period, network utilisation and performance data is submitted by "3" to my Department on a monthly basis. The NBS contract guarantees service levels and imposes a service credit regime on "3", with significant financial consequences in the event that minimum specification service levels are not met. The NBS contract also provides that where NBS customers do not receive the minimum guaranteed service, as set out in the terms and conditions of their contract, they are entitled to service rebates. My officials operate a dedicated NBS mailbox, which NBS customers, who have fully utilised 3's established complaints process and consider that their complaint has not been resolved, can contact by email at nationalbroadbandscheme@dcenr.gov.ie. My Department will then liaise with "3" personnel at its Head Office in Dublin to remedy any service performance issues.

Since the Scheme began, my Department has dealt with individual complaints from a small number of NBS customers. In overall terms, the number of complaints received from public representatives in relation to the Scheme remains low.

Motor Tax Issues

415. Deputy Heather Humphreys asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding tax requirements for agricultural quad bikes; if he will consider introducing a similar system to the UK where farmers can register quads as light agricultural vehicles when using them on the road to travel distances of less than 1.5 km between sites; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49367/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The registration of vehicles is a matter for the Revenue Commissioners. If a quad bike is not used in a public place, motor tax is not payable. When used in a public place, quad bikes do not fall within the definition of agriculture tractor for motor tax purposes and are taxed at the private rate of motor tax, based on engine capacity. The rate of motor tax for a quad with engine capacity of less than 1,000cc used for private, domestic or pleasure purposes, and not used for haulage, is €199 per annum. If the vehicle is being used to haul another vehicle or trailer, it then becomes taxable at the general haulage tractor rate, currently €333 per annum.

I have no plans to introduce a category of light agricultural vehicle for motor tax purposes.

Local Authority Housing Maintenance

416. Deputy Tom Barry asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide the latest figures on the cost per county of repairing vacated social housing. [48818/13]

417. Deputy Tom Barry asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if there are incentives for maintaining the standard of housing or sanctions if houses are left in serious disrepair. [48819/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 416 and 417 together.

The management and maintenance of the local authority housing stock, including the compilation and implementation of planned maintenance programmes and the carrying out of responsive repairs and pre-letting repairs to vacant properties, is a matter for each individual local authority under Section 58 of the Housing Act, 1966. My Department is committed to supporting local authorities in maintaining and improving the quality of the national social housing stock through a range of measures including large-scale urban regeneration programmes, estate-wide remedial works and improving the standard and energy efficiency of individual dwellings.

Over the period 2011-2012, my Department's retrofitting programme had a particular focus on returning vacant properties to productive use. During that time, some 4,774 vacant properties were refurbished at an overall cost of some €52.6 million. Details of the numbers of vacant units refurbished in each local authority in 2012 together with the average cost per unit are set out in the following table.

County/City Council	RECOUPED in 2012	TOTAL UNITS	Average Cost per unit
Carlow	€136,685	24	€5,695.21
Cavan	€518,080	39	€13,284.10
Clare	€455,145	60	€7,585.75

County/City Council	RECOUPED in 2012	TOTAL UNITS	Average Cost per unit
Cork County	€710,727	80	€8,884.09
Cork City	€1,198,370	187	€6,408.40
Donegal	€563,428	88	€6,402.59
Dublin	€3,991,502	253	€15,776.69
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown	€658,504	71	€9,274.70
Fingal	€769,599	64	€12,024.98
Galway City	€239,426	18	€13,301.44
Galway County	€336,274	61	€5,512.69
Kerry County	€615,570	67	€9,187.61
Kildare	€468,204	63	€7,431.81
Kilkenny	€458,238	51	€8,985.06
Laois	€218,592	23	€9,504.00
Leitrim	€198,943	15	€13,262.87
Limerick City	€705,365	68	€10,373.01
Limerick County	€1,212,501	114	€10,635.97
Longford	€206,884	13	€15,914.15
Louth	€409,128	128	€3,196.31
Mayo	€349,967	26	€13,460.27
Meath	€519,410	45	€11,542.44
Monaghan	€380,333	75	€5,071.11
Offaly	€152,736	20	€7,636.80
Roscommon	€276,527	20	€13,826.35
Sligo	€231,671	19	€12,193.21
South Dublin	€339,800	31	€10,961.29
Tipperary North	€501,864	49	€10,242.12
Tipperary South	€566,870	69	€8,215.51
Waterford City	€365,904	60	€6,098.40
Waterford County	€392,370	42	€9,342.14
Westmeath	€209,468	15	€13,964.53
Wexford	€463,231	91	€5,090.45
Wicklow	€1,028,112	66	€15,577.45
Total	€19,849,428	2,115	

Local Authority Finances

418. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Sligo County Council is the only local authority in the State that has consistently, year after year, produced a deficit in its revenue account; if it is his intention to provide the council with a bailout when the new county manager takes office in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48837/13]

419. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that for the past number of years the majority of members of Sligo County Council have adopted annual budgets recommended

by the Sligo county manager that have led to massive deficits in the council's revenue budget each year; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the accumulated debt of Sligo County Council is currently in excess of €80 million; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that because of its grave financial position, the council's bank has refused to increase its overdraft limit notwithstanding that such increase was approved by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48838/13]

421. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Sligo County Council is the worst performing council in the country in terms of the management of its finances; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the council produces a deficit in its revenue account each year; that earlier this year, as in previous years when the council's bank overdraft limit had been reached, the elected council, on the recommendation of the county manager and his management team, converted the overdraft to a term loan; his views on whether the ongoing conversion of Sligo County Council overdrafts to term loans is sustainable; the action he will take to stop this practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48840/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 418, 419 and 421 together.

I refer to the reply to Questions Nos. 118 and 119 of 14 November 2013 in which I stated that it is a matter for each local authority, including Sligo County Council, to manage its own day-to-day finances in a prudent and sustainable manner. The Action Programme for Effective Local Government, Putting People First, which was published in October 2012, sets out Government policy in terms of a comprehensive range of reforms in relation to local government structures, functions, funding, governance and operational matters. A key objective of the local government reform programme is to address weaknesses in the existing system, including greater financial discretion for local authorities. These issues are being addressed in the reform programme, particularly in the context of the Local Government Bill 2013, which is currently on Second Stage in the Dáil.

It is necessary that local authorities have recourse to overdrafts from time to time as capital spending is funded in arrears and the timing of local authority income such as commercial rates, charges, and rents will not always match expenditure. The requirement for Sligo County Council to continue to deal in a prudent manner with its finances, to find expenditure savings and efficiencies, particularly in the context of its 2014 budget, and to deal with the accumulated revenue deficit, remains.

Local Authorities Management

420. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the outgoing Sligo county manager (details supplied) is a member of the finance and audit committee of the Local Government Management Agency; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a function of that committee is to act as a source of independent advice on matters relating to financial management and control; if the Sligo county manager will continue to be a member of the finance and audit committee following his retirement from Sligo County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48839/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Following his retirement the outgoing Sligo Manager will no longer be a member of the Board or the Finance committee of the LGMA. The Sligo manager is not a member of the

separate Audit Committee of the LGMA.

Question No. 421 answered with Question No. 418.

Local Authorities Management

422. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the majority of Sligo borough councillors boycotted the retirement function for the outgoing county manager on Friday, 1 November; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that an official from his Department who spoke at the function conveyed his thanks and those of the Department to the outgoing county manager in respect of what was described as the latter's effective role in delivering local government; if his Department official acted with his approval; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48841/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I refer to the reply to Questions Nos. 116, 117, 125 and 126 of 14 November 2013. It is appropriate for an official of my Department to extend thanks on the occasion of the retirement of a County or City Manager.

Local Authorities Management

423. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a spokesperson for the trade union IMPACT, representing the majority of staff in the Sligo local authorities, said that recent statements by the outgoing Sligo county manger demonstrated just how out of touch he was with both local citizens and staff; if his Department will consider providing training courses for county and city managers and members of local authority management teams to ensure they recognise the importance of keeping in touch with council staff and local citizens; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48842/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I am not aware of the comments made and the issue has not been drawn to my attention by the trade union in question.

Property Taxation Yield

424. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government how the local property tax collected in 2013 was spent; what the local property tax in 2014 will be spent on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48846/13]

426. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the specific services that will be funded by the local property tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48894/13]

436. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 108 of 6 November 2013, which states that the establishment of Irish Water presents local government with significant organisational and financial challenges in 2014 and, in this context, it has been necessary to defer defining a certain proportion of the proceeds of the local property tax to be retained in each

local authority until 2015, if he now intends to reduce the proposed retention of local property tax receipts to below 80% to support those local authorities with weaker funding bases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48980/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 424, 426 and 436 together.

In 2013, revenue from the Local Property Tax has accrued to the Exchequer. Questions concerning usage of this revenue should be directed to my colleague, the Minister for Finance. The local government funding model will change considerably in 2014. Under the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012, commencing in 2014, the Minister for Finance will pay into the Local Government Fund an amount equivalent to the Local Property Tax paid into the Central Fund during that year; this revenue will be allocated to local authorities from the Fund. In addition, the establishment of Irish Water and its financial relationship with the local government sector will have a considerable impact on local authority financing.

The Government has indicated an intention to move to 80% retention of all Local Property Tax receipts within the local authority area where the Tax is raised. The establishment of Irish Water presents local government with significant organisational and financial challenges in 2014. Service provision responsibilities will shift from the local authorities to Irish Water, infrastructure will be transferred, financing arrangements will alter and local authorities will operate on behalf of Irish Water under Service Level Agreements. These changes must be managed.

In this context, it has been necessary to defer defining a certain proportion of the proceeds of the Local Property Tax to be retained in each local authority until 2015. This approach allows maximum flexibility in allocating Local Property Tax in 2014 in the form of General Purpose Grants, with the priority to support those local authorities with weaker funding bases. This decision has been taken in the context of Budget 2014. The 2014 Local Government Fund General Purpose Grants will be announced in due course. It will be a matter for each local authority to determine how best to use General Purpose Grant revenue.

I expect the Local Property Tax to have multiple benefits, including a more sustainable and resilient system of funding for local authorities and therefore a sounder financial footing for the provision of essential local services; greater local scope for financial decision-making concerning service provision - in particular, the inclusion of the local variation mechanism from 2015 will further increase the autonomy of local authorities; and a strengthening of democracy at local level with a more active relationship between local authorities and local electorates. A stronger democratic relationship and clearer lines of accountability can only have a beneficial impact on service provision from the perspective of the service user.

Leader Programmes Funding

425. Deputy Michael McCarthy asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when additional funds will be made available for redistribution to Leader companies that have approved ready-to-go projects; the amount of Leader funding ring-fenced for projects in the areas serviced by WCDP; when he will make a decision on the funding for such projects, including an indication of the additional budget likely to become available as well as details on the process for reallocation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48859/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):

gan): West Cork Development Partnership are contracted on behalf of my Department in relation to the implementation of the LEADER elements of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013. On 20 May 2013, WCDP were awarded a revised allocation of RDP funding of €12,645,076.00 which includes €245,697 ring-fenced for Gaeltacht areas.

During 2011, the European Commission approved a change in the maximum co-funding rate from 55% to 85% in relation to LEADER. This had the effect of reducing the available funding under the Programme from €427 million to an estimated €370 million. It was therefore necessary to carry out a comprehensive review of the level of commitments and expenditure across the Programme in order to apportion the remaining funds among the Local Development Companies (LDCs), taking into account the level of commitments already entered into. The redistribution of funding was conducted in as fair and equitable a manner as was possible.

I am committed to the continued monitoring of this situation and my Department is reviewing all commitments and expenditure levels to ensure, in so far as is possible, that all available Programme funding is committed by end December 2013. Allocations will again be revised before the end of the year if there is funding available for re-distribution.

Question No. 426 answered with Question No. 424.

Local Authority Funding

427. Deputy Brian Stanley asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in view of the fact that local authorities have now begun their pre-budget deliberations, when he will make known the allocation from the local government fund to each local authority. [48911/13]

433. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in view of this year's earlier budget, when he will be in a position to announce funding for local authorities, including funding relating to the establishment of Irish Water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48944/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 427 and 433 together.

I assume that the Questions refer to general purpose grants from the Local Government Fund. General purpose grants are my Department's contribution towards meeting the cost to local authorities of providing a reasonable level of services to their customers. 2014 general purpose grant allocations will be announced in due course.

Separately, local authorities will receive funding from Irish Water for the provision of water services under Service Level Agreements. 2014 Local Government Fund income and expenditure will be available on publication of the Revised Estimates Volume for Public Services 2014.

Social and Affordable Housing Applications

428. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide in tabular form the number of outstanding applications for social housing on a county basis; if he will provide details on the specific steps being taken by his Department to reduce the waiting times for applications for social housing on a county basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48916/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My Department does not hold information on the number of outstanding applications for social housing support received by housing authorities. The assessment of such applications is a matter solely for the housing authority concerned in accordance with the Social Housing Assessment Regulations, 2011.

Regulation 12 of the 2011 Regulations prescribes the timescales for the processing of applications by housing authorities. In general, a housing authority should not take more than 12 weeks from the time of a valid application to complete its assessment of same. However, different timescales may apply where the housing authority requires additional information from the applicant within the relevant period, as defined in the Regulations, thus leading to possible extensions to the 12 week deadline in terms of completing the application process.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

429. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the steps being taken to reduce the six-year waiting list for local authority housing in the south Meath area; if he appreciates the undue hardship that such lengthy waiting lists place on families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48917/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Government’s housing policy statement confirms that the priority for Government is to meet the most acute needs of households applying for social housing support. To achieve this objective we need to ensure that the social housing programme optimises the delivery of social housing and the return for the resources invested. It is essential that we tailor the use of available Exchequer supports to prevailing conditions and explore the full range of solutions holistically to address housing needs.

In July 2012 I announced details of a three-year funding programme of €100 million to deliver some 800 new units of voluntary and local authority owned social housing. In 2014, almost 70% of the budget for my Department will go directly to support housing. The 2014 estimate for housing programme expenditure is €575.8 million which includes €302.7 million for current, and €273 million for capital, expenditure. These resources for 2014 include €50 million to fund infrastructural investment in the housing area, which includes €30 million to recommence a State house building programme; €10 million for an unfinished housing estate resolution pilot project; and €10 million for housing adaptation grants.

Delivery of social housing continues to be significantly facilitated through more flexible funding models such as the Rental Accommodation Scheme and leasing but the Government is also committed to developing other funding mechanisms that will increase the supply of permanent new social housing. Such mechanisms include options to purchase, build to lease and the sourcing of loan finance by approved housing bodies for construction and acquisition. In addition, my Department and the Housing Agency are engaged with NAMA to ensure continued delivery of housing units for social purposes. Approved Housing Bodies will also play a key role in the delivery of social housing and in particular in its capacity to attract external financial investment.

In spite of the financial constraints within which we are required to operate, I expect the final output across all social housing programmes for 2013 to be in the region of 5,000 new housing units, and it is provisionally estimated that in the region of 5,000 units will be provided for social housing in 2014.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

430. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide in tabular form, for each local authority, the number of social housing units commenced and the number of units constructed in each area during 2012 and 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48940/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department collates and publishes a wide range of housing and planning statistics that inform the preparation and evaluation of policy, and those data are available on my Department's website www.environ.ie. Data on the number of social housing units constructed are included in this range and are broken down by local authority area. While my Department funds the provision of social housing units, specific data on commencement notices in respect of these units are not collated by my Department.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

431. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the capital allocation he is making available for social housing in 2014; the number of housing units that will commence construction in 2014 in each local authority area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48941/13]

464. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government how the lottery funding for social housing will be distributed around the country; the specific factors that will be taken into consideration in respect of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49300/13]

465. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the planned projects that will now not go ahead considering that capital funding for social housing has been reduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49301/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 431, 464 and 465 together.

In July 2012 I announced details of a three-year funding programme of €100 million to deliver some 800 new units of voluntary and local authority owned social housing. In addition, Budget 2014 provides for the allocation of a further €50 million from the sale of State assets to fund infrastructural investment primarily in the housing area, including €30 million to recommence a State house building and refurbishment programme; €10 million for an unfinished housing estate resolution project; and €10 million for housing adaptation grants. When this is taken into account, funding for housing for next year is effectively maintained at 2013 levels.

It is provisionally estimated that some 5,000 units will be provided for social housing in 2014 through leasing and existing capital programmes. This includes some 175 new units for people with special housing needs, which will be funded under the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS). It is expected that 200 new units will be delivered under the Social Housing Investment Programme (SHIP). Furthermore, I expect the recently announced €30 million additional Exchequer investment in social housing to deliver up to 500 local authority homes for families on the housing waiting list. Approximately half of this investment will facilitate the construction of new infill housing developments in areas with a high demand for social housing. It is

intended that €15 million will be invested in bringing vacant and boarded-up local authority houses back into productive use.

The detailed arrangements for the implementation of the housing construction and refurbishment measures are being developed by my Department at present and I intend to announce these as soon as possible with a view to having the investment programme up and running as early as possible in 2014. My Department will be requesting local authorities to submit proposals for inclusion under both measures in due course.

Security of the Elderly

432. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of funding he is making available for the senior alert schemes in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48942/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Seniors Alert Scheme aims to encourage community support for vulnerable older people in our communities by providing grant assistance towards the purchase and installation of personal monitored alarms to enable older persons, of limited means, to continue to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind. The Scheme is administered by local community and voluntary groups with the support of my Department. The allocation for the Seniors Alert Scheme for 2014 is €2.35million which is sufficient to meet current demand levels for this important scheme.

Question No. 433 answered with Question No. 427.

Irish Water Establishment

434. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide the projected costs for the establishment of Irish Water; if he will use the borrowing provisions of the Water Services Act 2013 to repay the full establishment costs of Irish Water into the local government fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48967/13]

435. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the annual costs of water provision, in addition to the establishment costs of Irish Water, are to be paid out of the local government fund in 2014 and if this represents a double payment for water services by local authorities and local communities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48968/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Fergus O'Dowd): I propose to take Questions Nos. 434 and 435 together.

The Water Services Act 2013 which provided for the establishment of Irish Water as a subsidiary of Bórd Gáis Éireann, to be formed and registered under the Companies Act, also provides for the normal governance arrangements for a commercial State body in relation to its financial sustainability. Bord Gáis has put in place appropriate programme management arrangements to establish Irish Water, prepare for the transfer of assets, liabilities and functions from local authorities from 1 January 2014, provide for customer service and billing and implement the domestic water metering programme. Expenditure on this programme is a matter for Bord Gáis/Irish Water. The costs are not being funded from either the Exchequer or the Local

Government Fund. In relation to other costs arising for Irish Water in 2014 I refer to the reply to Questions Nos. 111 and 113 on 14 November 2013.

Question No. 436 answered with Question No. 424.

Local Government Fund

437. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government notwithstanding the decision not to make allocations from the local government fund at a municipal district level, if for the purposes of transparency and if he will further strengthen democracy at a local level; if he will provide a breakdown of local property tax revenues on a municipal council level for 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48981/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Revenue Commissioners have responsibility for the collection of the Local Property Tax and, as such, detailed queries concerning anticipated revenue in 2014 should be directed to my colleague, the Minister for Finance. In any event, the Municipal Districts will not be determined until after the enactment of the Local Government Bill 2013.

The Local Government Bill 2013 provides that members of municipal districts will have input to the development of the local authority budget. In broad terms, the Bill provides that a single budget will be adopted for the overall local authority. The initial draft budget will include estimated expenditure on services as well as a proposed total amount of commercial rates to be levied. It will also include a proposed amount to be made available to the municipal district members by means of a General Municipal Allocation (GMA). To inform the decision on the final GMA, draft budgetary plans for each municipal district will be adopted by the municipal district members, setting out the proposed use of the GMA within their district, having regard to local needs and priorities and based on a prioritised schedule of works for the district. This element of funding will predominantly relate to discretionary areas of expenditure.

Agreement on the final amount of the GMA will be a reserved function of the elected members acting in plenary. Municipal district members may also increase the amount of funding available to them in their draft budgetary plan by increasing certain local charges. Conversely a reduction in those local charges will see a reduction in the amount the municipal district members have available to spend. The manner and format of the local authority budget, including in relation to the GMA, will be provided for in regulations.

Pyrite Remediation Programme Implementation

438. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the date on which pyrite remediation will commence; if there is a panel of contractors who check the houses for pyrite; if the occupants of the houses will have to leave the house whilst repairs are under way; the terms of the compensation package; and if house owners have tenants what happens in this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48987/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The legislation needed to provide for the operation of a pyrite remediation scheme and the establishment of the Pyrite Resolution Board (PRB) on a statutory basis is currently in preparation and my Department is working closely with the Office of the Parliamentary Coun-

sel to ensure that the Bill is published at the earliest possible date; I hope to bring the legislation to the Oireachtas in this term. The Board is working on developing appropriate systems and procedures, including an online application and processing system, to ensure that it will be in a position to accept applications as soon as the legislation is enacted.

The PRB will be responsible for overseeing the delivery of the remediation scheme and will be supported in this endeavour by the Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency. I understand that panels for contractors and other professionals will be established by the Housing Agency; in addition a register of competent persons, who have undertaken appropriate training, has been established by Engineers Ireland to undertake Building Condition Assessments.

Pyrite remediation is an intrusive process and it would not be feasible for homeowners to remain in a dwelling while it is being remediated. While the Board has published an outline of the proposed scheme the full details of the scheme must await the enactment of the legislation. However, it is intended that the vouched costs for alternative accommodation and for the temporary removal, storage and return of furniture and other household items, subject to maximum limits, may be recouped to approved applicants.

Property Taxation Exemptions

439. Deputy Tom Fleming asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will exempt local authorities from having to pay the local property tax as housing budgets are already under severe pressure (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48990/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Local Property Tax will provide a more sustainable funding model for local government, will devolve greater responsibility for financial decisions to the local level, and will help renew the relationship between the citizen and his or her local authority. The Government has been keen to ensure that equity is seen to be preserved in terms of the operation of the Tax and that therefore all sectors of society are required to make a fair and equitable Local Property Tax contribution. In that regard, the relationship between the value of a residential property and the amount of the Local Property Tax liability is important, as is liability for certain categories of social housing.

The Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 sets out the position concerning residential properties and liability for the Local Property Tax. Under the Act local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies are, in general, liable for residential properties under their ownership. I am aware of the financial challenges facing local authorities. However, I am confident that the overall mix of central and local funding provided to the local government sector has been and will continue to be sufficient for the sector to deliver on its responsibilities.

Local Authority Housing

440. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will consider providing funding to local authorities that would allow for the conversion in council homes away from solid fuel fireplaces towards the installation of more heat efficient stoves (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49004/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Gov-

ernment (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Under section 58 of the Housing Act 1966, the management and maintenance of the local authority housing stock, including the compilation and implementation of ongoing maintenance programmes and the carrying out of responsive repairs and alterations to rented properties, is a matter for individual authorities. In addition to revenue funding, local authorities may also use available internal capital receipts to fund improvement works to houses, including the replacement of open fires with stand-alone stoves for space heating where appropriate.

Commercial Rates

441. Deputy Brendan Ryan asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of revenue raised from 50% rates in place on vacant buildings for Dublin City Council, Cork City Council and Limerick City Council in 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49038/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The information requested is not available in my Department.

Local Authority Staff Recruitment

442. Deputy Seán Kenny asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of requests received in the period 1 July 2013 to 11 November 2013 from Dublin City Council seeking sanction to fill positions at the local authority; the outcome of each of these requests; the nature of each of the positions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49080/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): My Department received sanction requests in respect of 16 staff from Dublin City Council in the period 1 July 2013 to 11 November 2013 . The information in relation to these sanction requests is set out in the table.

Local Authority	Date of Staffing Request	Title of Post(s)	Number of Post(s)	Type of Contract sought	Outcome
Dublin City	03/09/2013	Assistant Intelligent Transporta-tion Systems (ITS) Officer	1	Contract	Approved
Dublin City	03/09/2013	Executive Intelligent Transporta-tion Systems (ITS) Officer	2	Contract	Approved
Dublin City	01/10/2013	Executive Manager (Engineering)	1	Permanent	Approved
Dublin City	02/10/2013	Senior Engineer	2	Permanent	Approved

Local Authority	Date of Staffing Request	Title of Post(s)	Number of Post(s)	Type of Contract sought	Outcome
Dublin City	08/10/2013	Area Maintenance Officer	1	Permanent	Approved
Dublin City	14/10/2013	Third Officer - Fire Brigade	2	Permanent	Approved
Dublin City	03/09/2013	Senior Executive Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Officer	1	Contract	Approved
Dublin City	26/07/2013	Assistant Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Officer	1	Permanent	Pending
Dublin City	09/09/2013	Assistant Traffic Officer	1	Permanent	Pending
Dublin City	12/09/2013	Superintendent (Roads Maintenance)	1	Acting	Pending
Dublin City	17/09/2013	Inspector (Roads Maintenance)	1	Acting	Pending
Dublin City	30/10/2013	Superintendent (Building Works)	1	Permanent	Pending
Dublin City	02/08/2013	Senior Engineer	1	Acting	Withdrawn

Noise Pollution Legislation

443. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update on the current legislation on noise pollution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49106/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Programme for Government includes a commitment to take further steps to address noise pollution, *inter alia*, through the introduction of fixed payment notices (also known as on-the-spot fines). The development of new noise legislation by my Department is being considered in the context of this commitment. It is expected that the Draft General Scheme of Bill will be submitted to Government for consideration in 2014; however, as indicated in the Government Legislation Programme published on 18 September 2013, it is not possible at this time to

indicate when the Bill will be published, having regard to other priorities in the area concerned and the broader range of legislative priorities to be progressed across my Department's remit.

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

Housing Issues

444. Deputy Tom Barry asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when Cork County Council will take over an estate (details supplied) in County Cork; if he will confirm that it is a legal issue that is impeding this taking in charge. [49120/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The taking in charge of an estate is a matter for the planning authority concerned and I have no function in the matter.

Property Taxation Exemptions

445. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if an unfinished estate (details supplied) in County Tipperary is exempt from the local property tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49133/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Under Section 10 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 a waiver from liability can arise for properties located in developments prescribed on a list made by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government where the Minister is satisfied that the developments on the list are incomplete to a substantial extent, having regard to the condition of public infrastructure and amenities, including access, water services, public lighting and amenity areas. The function of designating developments eligible for the waiver is reserved to the Minister. 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. Longfield Park, Boherlahan, Cashel, Co. Tipperary was not included in the list of developments deemed by South Tipperary County Council to be in a seriously problematic condition in its February 2013 return to the Department and, as such, is not eligible for an exemption from the Local

Property Tax.

Household Charge Collection

446. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the household charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49148/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Local Government (Household Charge) Act 2011 provides the legislative basis for the Household Charge. Under the Act, an owner of a residential property on the liability date was liable to pay the Household Charge in 2012, unless otherwise exempted or entitled to claim a waiver. The Charge has operated on a self-assessment basis; it has been a matter for an owner of a residential property to determine liability and pay the Charge. Local authorities, assisted by the Local Government Management Agency on a shared services/agency basis, have administered the Household Charge system. Household Charge operational matters are a matter for the relevant local authority or for the Agency. If it is the case that incorrect advice was provided to a liable owner by an employee of a local authority, then that owner should engage with the local authority to resolve the matter.

Water Charges Administration

447. Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to compensate persons who have installed water softeners in their home to improve the quality of water in view of the introduction of water charges in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49150/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Under the European Communities (Drinking Water) (No. 2) Regulations, 2007, a copy of which is available in the Oireachtas library, suppliers of drinking water are required to ensure that the water supplied is wholesome and clean. Water which is wholesome and clean is defined as water which is free from any micro-organisms and parasites and from any substances which in numbers or concentrations constitute a potential danger to human health, and which meets the quality standards specified in the Schedule to the Regulations. Hard water and the minerals associated with hard water, such as calcium and magnesium, are not included as parameters in the quality standards specified in the Regulations as they do not pose as a threat to human health. Even though hard water is safe to drink and meets the required drinking water standards, some households may choose to soften their supply but this is a matter of personal choice. There is no provision in my Department's Vote for the provision of financial assistance in respect of the installation of water softeners.

Building Regulations Compliance

448. Deputy Simon Harris asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the measures in place to ensure that building regulations are enforced and that persons purchasing their homes will be assured that rigorous building standards are in place and inspected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49155/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Ho-

gan): The Building Control Acts 1990 to 2007 set out a clear statutory framework for construction activity based on:

- clear legal standards as set out in the Building regulations;
- detailed Technical Guidance Documents to outline how these standards can be achieved in practice;
- the burden and responsibility for compliance resting first and foremost with developers/builders;
- a statutory responsibility for professionals who are engaged by developers to ensure that construction at least meets the legal minimum standards; and
- the responsibility for enforcing compliance with the building regulations resting with the 37 local building control authorities.

Where a contract exists between the owner of a building (including a local authority in the case of certain publicly owned buildings) and the relevant builder/developer, the resolution of problems is a matter for the parties concerned, namely the building owner, the relevant developer and the builder's insurers and where a resolution cannot be achieved through dialogue and negotiation, enforcement may become a civil matter.

In relation to enforcement, local authorities have extensive powers under the Building Control Acts of 1990 and 2007 which include the powers to scrutinise proposals and inspect works in progress (in this regard an inspection target is in place requiring that inspections take place on 12% to 15% of new buildings for which valid commencement notices are lodged); to serve enforcement notices for non-compliance; to institute proceedings for breaches of regulatory requirements; and to seek High Court injunctions if non-compliance poses considerable and serious danger to the public.

While a robust system of building control does exist, there are steps that can and must be taken to strengthen the system. Earlier this year, I signed into law the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2013. Under these regulations all new building projects commencing on and from 1 March 2014, when the new regulations take effect, will require design drawings and particulars to be lodged with the local building control authority, inspections during construction overseen by a registered construction professional known as the Assigned Certifier and certificates of compliance to be signed by the lead designer, the builder and the assigned certifier. The new regulations will require Building Control Authorities to develop a risk-based approach to inspection and compliance checking, having regard to their experience of industry activity within their functional area. The new regulations are designed to ensure that competence and professionalism become part and parcel of building projects generally and will usher in a new era of quality in our construction industry.

Water Meters Installation

449. Deputy Barry Cowen asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the total number of water meters installed to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49157/13]

456. Deputy Barry Cowen asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of contractors and sub-contractors undertaking the roll out of water metering across the country; the number of companies identified as compliant with the roll out

scheme criteria and placed on a secondary list of contractors; the number of unemployed persons taken off jobseeker's benefit and jobseeker's assistance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49164/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 449 and 456 together.

The Water Services Act 2013 designated Irish Water as the metering authority. Numbers of water meters installed, employees and contracts are operational matters for Irish Water. I also refer to the reply to Question No. 115 of 14 November, 2013.

Water Charges Introduction

450. Deputy Barry Cowen asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his Department has contacted the water services section in each local authority with regard to the collation of information on a water infrastructure national audit; the current status of the national audit of the water infrastructure; the timeframe for its completion and publication; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49158/13]

460. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if money for the first fix free policy on behalf of Irish Water in respect of water leaks was included in the recent budget allocation for Irish Water; if so, the amount; if this facility will be introduced in advance of water metering and charging; the way the scheme will operate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49296/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 450 and 460 together.

The Programme for Government sets out a commitment to the introduction of water charges based on usage above a free allowance. The Government considers that charging based on usage is the fairest way to charge for water and it has, therefore, decided that water meters should be installed in households connected to public water supplies. The Water Services Act 2013 provides for the establishment of Irish Water as an independent subsidiary within the Bord Gáis Éireann Group and assigns the necessary powers to allow Irish Water to undertake this metering programme. A pre-installation survey is currently being conducted by the local authorities to provide further information on the scope of the metering programme, such as the identification of those properties which already have boundary boxes and meters installed. Over 1.2m properties have now been surveyed. As part of the metering programme, my Department, in conjunction with Irish Water, is currently working on a proposal regarding customer-side leakage. Implementation arrangements have yet to be worked out with Irish Water.

Local Authority Staff Numbers

451. Deputy Barry Cowen asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the total number of local authority staff engaged in water services broken down on a county basis in 2010 to 2012, inclusive, and to date in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49159/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): My Department gathers quarterly data on staff numbers in local authorities. The data gathered do not provide detail in respect of individual grades or job titles within each local au-

thority, and accordingly, the information requested is not available in my Department. As part of the engagement process between local authorities and Irish Water current staffing numbers, working in each local authority in the water services area, are being examined.

Irish Water Staff

452. Deputy Barry Cowen asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the total number of staff currently employed by Irish Water and the estimated total staff when its reaches full capacity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49160/13]

454. Deputy Barry Cowen asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of local authority and Civil Service staff serving secondments in Irish Water and the transition board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49162/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Fergus O'Dowd): I propose to take Questions Nos. 452 and 454 together.

The Water Services Act 2013 which provided for the establishment of Irish Water as a subsidiary of Bórd Gáis Éireann to be formed and registered under the Companies Act. Irish Water is currently recruiting to build up the internal capabilities required within the organisation and the numbers of staff employed is an operational matter for the organisation. It was agreed by the Steering Group for the Water Sector Reform programme that, to ensure skills within the sector were fully availed of in building up the new organisation, competitions for positions in asset management, capital delivery and operations would be restricted to staff in the partner organisations i.e. Bord Gáis Éireann, local authorities and my Department in the first instance. Open competitions are held for all other positions and details of these are available on Irish Water's website www.water.ie. Data supplied by Irish Water indicates that at present 183 staff have been recruited to the Irish Water organisation with 103 having taken up duty and 80 due to start.

Bórd Gáis has put in place appropriate programme management arrangements to establish Irish Water, to prepare for the transfer of assets, liabilities and functions from local authorities from 1 January 2014, provide for customer service and billing and implement the domestic water metering programme. As part of this programme, there are currently 80 people seconded from Local Authorities and 4 seconded from my Department, on the Irish Water Programme, 44 of whom are involved in the Metering Programme. The Water Services Transition Office is currently staffed by 15.5 people seconded from Local Authorities.

Proposed Legislation

453. Deputy Barry Cowen asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the current status of the Water Services Bill 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49161/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Water Services Act 2013 provides for the establishment of Irish Water as an independent subsidiary within the Bord Gáis Éireann Group and assigns the necessary powers to allow Irish Water to undertake this metering programme. The Water Services (No. 2) Bill 2013 is currently in preparation, and will provide for the transfer of responsibility for the delivery of water services from the water services authorities to Irish Water. The Bill will also provide for the establishment of an economic regulator for water services within the Commission for Energy Regulation. I expect to publish the Bill in the coming weeks.

Question No. 454 answered with Question No. 452.

Irish Water Establishment

455. Deputy Barry Cowen asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of service level agreements between Irish Water and local authorities; if local authorities will be paid a block grant to operate water services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49163/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Fergus O'Dowd): The Water Services Act 2013 provided for the establishment of Irish Water as a subsidiary of Bord Gáis Éireann, to be formed and registered under the Companies Act. Further proposed comprehensive legislation will transfer statutory responsibility for water services to Irish Water and will provide for local authorities to act as agents for Irish Water, with this relationship being expressed through Service Level Agreements. These agreements are at present being developed between Irish Water and the local authorities with a view to them being in place for 1 January 2014. Local authorities will be paid by Irish Water for the services provided under these agreements and I do not anticipate such payment to be way of block grant for the operation of water services.

Question No. 456 answered with Question No. 449.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

457. Deputy Barry Cowen asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the consultants that have been hired by Irish Water to date; the length of their engagement and the total costs to date and final estimated costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49165/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Fergus O'Dowd): The Water Services Act 2013 provided for the establishment of Irish Water as a subsidiary of Bord Gáis Éireann, to be formed and registered under the Companies Act. Bord Gáis has put in place appropriate programme management arrangements to establish Irish Water, to prepare for the transfer of assets, liabilities and functions from local authorities from 1 January 2014, provide for customer service and billing and implement the domestic water metering programme. Expenditure on this programme, including details of consultancy costs, is an operational matter for Bord Gáis-Irish Water as these costs are not being funded from the Exchequer. I am asking Irish Water to liaise directly with the Deputy.

Local Authority Housing Maintenance

458. Deputy Sandra McLellan asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when works will be carried out in a housing estate (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49266/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The properties in question are owned by Cork County

Council and are managed and maintained by Tuath Housing Association under a leasing arrangement. I understand that Cork County Council is in contact with the developer, Brompton Homes, with a view to progressing remedial works to the affected properties. While the fitting of stoves was identified as a possible solution to the smoke issue, so far it has not been possible to progress a resolution of the problem under the terms of the Council's contract with the developer.

Water Services Provision

459. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if, in respect of the recent incident at the Ballymore Eustace water treatment plant, the notice he received regarding the shortages; the engagement he made with the authorities at the plant; the additional funding that has been allocated to alleviate the problem; the long term solutions he is advocating to address this type of issue from repeating; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49295/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): On 30 October 2013 my Department was notified by Dublin City Council that problems were being experienced with the treatment process at the Ballymore Eustace Water Treatment Plant. Contact between my Department and the City Council continued over subsequent days and I visited the plant on 4 November to see, at first hand, the issues involved and how the matter could be resolved.

The problems experienced at Ballymore Eustace were plant operational and management issues. While no specific capital funding was required to resolve these problems, my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2010 - 2013 provides for planning of a large number of schemes and contracts in the Greater Dublin Area, including a scheme to provide a new long-term water source to service the future needs of the area. In addition to this scheme, a series of watermain rehabilitation contracts to reduce leakage have been undertaken in the Dublin area and more are to follow.

The completed contracts have delivered over 120 kilometres of rehabilitated mains, resulting in savings of over 7.8 million litres of water per day. Contracts to increase the supply capacity in the region through the expansion of existing water treatment plants in Ballymore Eustace and Leixlip are nearing completion and a new treatment plant at Srowland, Athy, County Kildare, that abstracts water from the River Barrow, has recently come on stream. I understand that the Ballymore Eustace plant is now back to full treatment output and that the water restrictions in the Greater Dublin Area have been lifted.

Question No. 460 answered with Question No. 450.

Housing Issues

461. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will list the total number of tier three housing associations here; the number of which that are allowed to raise finance themselves; the number which must get approval to bid for external sources of funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49297/13]

462. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when he will reform the rules governing access to external funding by tier

three housing associations to allow greater funds be leveraged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49298/13]

463. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if a new regulatory framework is being prepared for the operation of tier three housing associations; if he has looked to the Welsh model as a model of best practice; if any other countries are being investigated for regulatory examples; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49299/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 461 to 463, inclusive, together.

Approved housing bodies are organisations approved under section 6 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992 to provide social housing support in conjunction with local authorities. There are just over 500 organisations currently listed as approved housing bodies. My Department is currently developing a regulatory framework for the sector. A landmark first step in this regard was the publication on 15 July 2013 of Building for the Future, a voluntary regulation code for the sector that is available on my Department's website at www.environ.ie. The code proposes three tiers or organisational classifications, of which tier 3 includes the largest organisations, i.e. those bodies with more than 300 housing units or with development plans in place to provide significantly more units. To date, just under 70 approved housing bodies have signed up to the voluntary regulation code, of which five would be classified as tier 3. My Department does not impose restrictions on approved housing bodies seeking to raise finance from external sources. However, the development of a regulatory framework is expected to facilitate enhanced access to external funding sources. The voluntary regulation code sets out key governance, management and financial principles that apply to approved housing bodies. Organisations signing up to the code must sign a Charter of Commitments relevant to their scale and development plans. My Department is also working in partnership with the sector to develop a specific additional financial chapter to be appended to the VRC that will, *inter alia*, set out key financial management rules and principles. The Department, together with the Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency, is working with the Irish Council for Social Housing and NABCO, the National Association of Building Co-operatives, to maximise engagement with the voluntary process. In the final analysis, the voluntary regulation code constitutes a foundation for the development of a statutory regulatory system, and my Department is working with partners in the sector in that regard. As part of this work, models of best practice for regulation of the sector are being examined, including those in place in the UK.

Questions Nos. 464 and 465 answered with Question No. 431.

Local Authority Housing Eligibility

466. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to instances where individuals may not be permitted entry onto a local authority housing waiting list due to the failure by their existing landlord to register with the Private Residential Tenancies Board; his views that this represents an unfair burden upon the applicant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49305/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department is not aware of any particular instances whereby applicants are being denied access to local authority waiting lists due to unregistered landlords. Such a criterion is not relevant in terms of eligibility, as set down in the Social Hous-

ing Assessment Regulations 2011 and associated guidance issued to housing authorities.

Irish Water Funding

467. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the total amounts to be retained from property tax receipts in 2013 and 2014 for the express purpose of funding the establishment and operation of Irish Water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49307/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The local government funding model will change considerably in 2014. Under the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012, commencing in 2014, the Minister for Finance will pay into the Local Government Fund an amount equivalent to the Local Property Tax paid into the Central Fund during that year; this revenue will be allocated to local authorities from the fund. The funding to be provided to local authorities for the provision of water services in 2014 will be governed by Service Level Agreements between Irish Water and individual authorities. In 2013, revenue from the Local Property Tax has accrued to the Exchequer. Questions concerning usage of this revenue should be directed to my colleague, the Minister for Finance.

Departmental Expenditure

468. Deputy Lucinda Creighton asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 281 of 12 November 2013, if he will provide the data requested between 2003 and 2008 as specified in the original question and as other Departments have provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49319/13]

469. Deputy Lucinda Creighton asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 282 of 12 November 2013, if he will provide the data requested between 2003 and 2008 as specified in the original question and as other Departments have provided; if, further to Parliamentary Question No. 282 of 12 of November 2013, he will include the costs associated with the planning tribunal as it relates to moneys paid to companies (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49320/13]

470. Deputy Lucinda Creighton asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 283 of 12 November 2013, if he will now provide the cumulative amount paid by his Department to senior counsel from 2003 to 2008 as requested and as other Departments have provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49321/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 468 to 470, inclusive, together.

The information requested is being compiled in my Department and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Planning Issues

471. Deputy Alan Farrell asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will consider the potential to apply reductions or waivers from planning

application fees or rates to protected structures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49339/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department's Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Development Contributions state that waivers from development contributions should be given in respect of works on protected structures where such works substantially contribute to the restoration or protection of the protected structure. I would not therefore propose to reduce the planning application fee in respect of works to a protected structure. As regards commercial rates, 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.

Water Charges Introduction

472. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the membership and work of the water affordability working group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49343/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Programme for Government sets out a commitment to the introduction of water charges based on usage above a free allowance. The Government considers that charging based on usage is the fairest way to charge for water and it has, therefore, decided that water meters should be installed in households connected to public water supplies. Following discussions of water affordability issues which may arise with the introduction of domestic water charges, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Infrastructure agreed that an inter-departmental working group should be established to advise the Government on the appropriate method for addressing water poverty issues.

The Water Affordability Working Group comprises officials of my Department and the Departments of the Taoiseach, Social Protection, Public Expenditure and Reform and Finance. The Group is to prepare a report for consideration by the Government to enable decisions on the proposed approach to be taken in advance of proposed public consultation by the Commission for Energy Regulation on the approach to the design of domestic water tariffs in early 2014.

Departmental Expenditure

473. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of funding provided to each organisation in the community and voluntary pillar under the fund to facilitate engagement in the social partnership process in the years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49344/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): My Department provides funding to member organisations of the Community and Voluntary Pillar to cover costs directly related to their contribution to policy-making in the social partnership process that was not funded by any other source. The funding provided each year

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from 2007 to 2012 to each organisation under the fund to facilitate engagement in the social partnership process is outlined in the following table.

Srowland-Organisa-tion	-	-	Funding Provided €000	-	-	-
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Social Jus-tice Ireland (CORI)	110	110	105.6	97.1	80	78
The Wheel	110	110	105.6	97.1	80	78
INOU	55	55	52.8	48.6	47	44
St Vincent de Paul	55	55	52.8	48.6	47	44
Disability Federation of Ireland	55	55	52.8	48.6	34	32
The Carers Associa-tion	55	55	27.5	24.3	34	32
Irish Council for Social Housing	55	55	52.8	48.6	34	32
Age Action Ireland	55	55	52.8	48.6	34	32
Irish Rural Link	55	55	52.8	48.6	20	78
National Asso-ciation of Build-ing Co-Operatives (NABCO)	30	30	28.8	26.5	20	20
National Women's Council of Ireland	55	55	52.8	48.6	20	20
Children's Rights Al-liance	55	55	52.8	48.6	20	20
National Youth Council of Ireland	55	27.5	52.8	48.6	20	20
Communi-ty Platform	0	55	52.8	48.6	20	20

Srowland-Organisa-tion	-	-	Funding Provided €000	-	-	-
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Irish Senior Citizens Parliament	82.5	55	27.8	48.6	15	15
Protestant Aid	30	30	28.8	26.6	15	15
Congress Centres Network	55	55	52.8	48 . 6	0	20
Total	967.5	967.5	904.6	854.5	540	600

Waste Disposal

474. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the regulatory procedures in place to control private waste operators; if there is any mechanism in place to require private waste operators to seek approval in advance on whether they may increase the price and collection practices for their waste collection services. [49412/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): A waste collector must comply with the conditions attached to their waste collection permit, issued under the Waste Management (Collection Permit) Regulations 2007, as amended, which set out the environmental standards in relation to the collection of waste. Waste collection in individual local authority areas may also be subject to local bye-laws. The charges applied by waste management companies are a matter between those companies and their customers, subject to compliance with all applicable environmental and other relevant legislation.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Provision

475. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when progress will be made in respect of the regional water supply scheme in Lanesboro, County Longford, in respect of which a preliminary report was submitted to the Department by Longford County Council in May 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49425/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Lanesborough Regional Water Supply Scheme is listed in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2010 – 2013 (WSIP) as a scheme to progress through planning.

I recently approved the Preliminary Report for the Lanesborough Regional Water Supply Scheme along with the inclusion in the current WSIP of two contracts to start which will allow the scheme to be advanced. It is now a matter for Longford County Council to proceed with the preparation of Contract Documents for the scheme.

Local Authority Funding

476. Deputy Willie Penrose asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the level of loss of income that will arise for the local authorities in counties Westmeath and Longford as a result of the planned abolition of the non-principal private residence charge; the way this will be compensated for by the local property tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49427/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Local Government (Charges) Act 2009 broadened the revenue base of local authorities by introducing a charge on non-principal private residences. The self-assessed charge is set at €200 and liability for it falls, in the main, on owners of rental, holiday and vacant properties.

I understand that the Non Principal Private Residence Charge has raised in excess of €1.37 m in respect of 2012 liabilities to date in Westmeath and €0.67m in respect of 2012 liabilities to date in Longford. As such, were the Charge to continue to operate in 2014, I would anticipate combined revenue in both Counties in excess of €2m. However, 2013 will be the final year of the operation of the Charge.

Under the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012, commencing in 2014, the Minister for Finance will pay into the Local Government Fund an amount equivalent to the Local Property Tax paid into the Central Fund during that year; this revenue will be allocated to local authorities from the Fund. The 2014 Local Government Fund General Purpose Grants will be announced in due course. I am confident that the overall mix of funding provided to the local government sector has been and will continue to be sufficient for the sector to deliver on its responsibilities.

Fire Stations Upgrade

477. Deputy Willie Penrose asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when the extension to Longford fire station will be sanctioned, as the local authority is ready to proceed once sanction is received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49428/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The provision of a fire service in its functional area, including the establishment and maintenance of a fire brigade, the assessment of fire cover needs, the provision of a premises and the making of such other provisions as it considers necessary or desirable, is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under the provisions of the Fire Services Act 1981 and 2003.

My Department supports fire authorities through the setting of general policy and guidance and the provision of capital funding, including the recoupment (within the overall funding available) of costs incurred by fire authorities in relation to approved construction projects and the purchase of fire appliances and equipment.

Approval in principle was conveyed to Longford County Council in 2007 for an extension to Longford fire station. However, in 2010 the Council indicated to my Department that a new fire station for Lanesboro was the number one priority for capital investment. My Department has recently issued approval to accept a tender for this project.

Further investment to support the redevelopment of Longford fire station will be considered under future capital programmes, within the constraints of reduced public finances, and will have regard to the priorities of Longford County Council, the value-for-money offered by proposals, the level of investment to date and the totality of demands from fire authorities countywide for the limited funding available.

Anti-Social Behaviour

478. Deputy Willie Penrose asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when section 62 of the Housing Act will be amended to enable more effective and focused action to be taken by local authorities to help combat anti-social behaviour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49430/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Work is proceeding in my Department on the preparation of the General Scheme of a Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill which will provide, among other things, for a revised procedure to replace section 62 of the Housing Act, 1966 that will enable housing authorities to recover possession of their dwellings from households in serious breach of their tenancy agreements, including engaging in anti-social behaviour. The General Scheme will also include provisions to strengthen the existing powers of housing authorities to seek excluding orders against persons in local authority housing engaged in anti-social behaviour.

The General Scheme is expected to be submitted for Government approval before the end of the year with publication of Bill envisaged by end of quarter 1, 2014 and enactment as soon as possible thereafter.

Housing Assistance Payments Implementation

479. Deputy Willie Penrose asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when the housing assistance payment will be introduced and if deduction at source has been agreed with all stakeholders; his plans to defray the additional costs that will be incurred by local authorities who will have to implement same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49431/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): In March 2012, the Government approved in principle the transfer of responsibility for recipients of rent supplement with an established housing need from the Department of Social Protection (DSP) to local authorities using a new Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). On 18 July 2013, the Government approved the introduction of HAP including the provision of funding to the local authorities to cover the costs of accommodating HAP claimants. It was also agreed that the DSP would provide for the implementation of the mandatory direct deduction of rental contributions from the welfare payments of HAP recipients and local authority tenants. My Department and the DSP continue to work closely on the legal, policy and operational issues involved in developing and introducing HAP.

My Department is also working closely with the County and City Managers Association in overseeing plans for the implementation of HAP, but more specifically at this stage in relation to the test phase, which is planned for 2014 (subject to the enactment of the relevant legislation). It has not yet been finally decided how local authorities will deliver HAP; however, potential costs and efficiencies in respect of identifying the optimal solution for delivery are currently being considered.

Local Authority Housing Maintenance

480. Deputy Willie Penrose asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Lo-

cal Government if he will provide details of the money allocated for the upgrading and renovation of local authority houses in counties Westmeath and Longford; the amount of moneys under each appropriate head that will be allocated to each local authority in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49433/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Under my Department's Social Housing Investment Programme, funding is provided to local authorities for a range of measures to improve the quality and standard of the social housing stock, including the regeneration of disadvantaged estates and flat complexes, estate-wide remedial works, the energy retrofitting of older properties and the provision of extensions and adaptations to meet the specific needs of tenants. Details of the funding allocated under such measures to Westmeath and Longford County Councils for 2013 are set out in the following table:

Measure	Westmeath County Council	Longford County Council
Energy Efficiency	€ 718,447	€ 4 62,812
IWILS, DPG s & Extensions	€ 236,232	€ 49,066
Remedial Works Scheme	Nil	€ 1, 280,800

I intend to announce details of the capital allocations to local authorities in respect of the various measures under my Department's Social Housing Investment Programme early in 2014.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Funding

481. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will reconsider the decision not to allow certain works be included in a contract (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49437/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Laois Grouped Towns Sewerage Scheme – Network Contract is listed in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2010 – 2013 as a scheme to start during the life of the programme. The contract, which has an estimated cost of €11.6m, consists of a number of works to service the towns of Abbeyleix, Clonaslee, Durrow, Mountrath, Rathdowney and Stradbally. Approval was granted in August 2011 to proceed with the works following an examination of contract documents by my Department. The Council tendered for this work, and last month I approved funding of €7.3m to allow construction to start.

The Council had sought to have additional works included in the contract. However, these works were not included in the tender process and are therefore outside the scope of the approved scheme and not eligible for funding.

Irish Water Funding

482. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the level of investment which will be required in Irish Water in order to fully comply with the EU water framework directive; the way the present funding arrangements for local government can be expected to shoulder this expense without a significant deterioration in the funding of other essential services; if it is expected to rely more on the central fund to meet these expenses in advance of the coming onstream of revenue from water charges; if so, the way this is planned to happen and the time period of same; and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [49452/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The overall strategy of investment in water services to date has been to ensure that the timing and scale of investment facilitates economic and other development, achieves compliance with statutory requirements and promotes environmental sustainability objectives, including meeting the requirements of relevant EU Directives. The main vehicle for achieving these objectives for public domestic water supplies is the multi-annual Water Services Investment Programme (WSIP). The current Programme runs to the end of 2013. From 1 January 2014 Irish Water will be responsible for the delivery of water services capital infrastructure and is currently preparing a Capital Investment Plan for 2014-15. This Plan will include taking account of the transition of projects that are included in the current WSIP.

The Exchequer proposes a direct equity investment of €240m towards the capital funding of Irish Water in 2014. This will support projects to be included in Irish Water's Capital Investment Plan and will ensure that the entity is in a position to take on the water services investment programmes of the 34 water services authorities, including some 80 projects currently in progress. Irish Water will also finance some of its costs and the liabilities transferred from local authorities through borrowings in 2014.

Work is under way on the funding model for Irish Water's operational costs, to ensure that it can fund the Service Level Agreements being put in place with local authorities for the delivery of water services in 2014. Irish Water is working with local authorities to finalise the 2014 budgets associated with the proposed Service Level Agreements. In parallel with this process, the Department has sought the advice of the Commission for Energy Regulation in relation to anticipated new operational costs associated with new functions for the entity which are likely to arise in 2014. The outcome of these processes will determine the overall funding requirement of Irish Water in 2014 from the Exchequer, Local Government Fund, borrowing and charges.

Local Authority Services

483. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if there is anything in legislation that prevents local authorities from including an e-mail address on all public notices that involve inviting public submissions including, for example, Part 8 planning proposals, notices under road traffic legislation, derelict sites notices and so forth; his views on whether it is good practice for local authorities to facilitate submissions by e-mail from members of the public in such instances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49456/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Section 12 of the Electronic Commerce Act 2000 provides that where a person is permitted by law or otherwise to give information in writing (whether or not in a form prescribed by law), the person may give the information in electronic form provided that:

(a) if at the time the information was given it was reasonable to expect that it would be readily accessible to the person or public body to whom it was directed, for subsequent reference,

(b) where the information is required or permitted to be given to a public body or to a person acting on behalf of a public body and the public body consents to the giving of the information in electronic form, whether as an electronic communication or otherwise, but requires---

(i) the information to be given in accordance with particular information technology and

procedural requirements, or

- (ii) that a particular action be taken by way of verifying the receipt of the information, then the public body's requirements at (i) and (ii) have been met.

Section 248 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 contains a similar provision.

Local Authority Expenditure

484. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on the role out of one-stop-shops in local authorities and the savings that have been made over the past two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49502/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I assume the Question is referring to the former one-stop-shop initiative, launched in 1998. I have no information with regard to the operational costs of these offices as this is a matter for each local authority concerned.

Current policy is set out in the Government's Action Programme for Effective Local Government; this addresses a range of local government reform measures, and in relation to service delivery, provides for an increased emphasis on identifying customers' expectations, requirements and experiences. The proposals are designed to promote both increased operational efficiency and value for money through more integrated administrative and implementation arrangements and also to enhance the capacity of local authorities to achieve their broader role of promoting the sustainable development of their areas, the welfare of local communities and the quality of life of individual citizens by virtue of the effectiveness with which they perform their entire range of regulatory, representational and service delivery functions.

Internal organisational arrangements, including utilisation of any existing one-stop-shops , are a matter for individual local authorities to decide.

Local Authority Expenditure

485. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on the roll-out of shared services in local authorities and the savings that have been made over the past two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49505/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Local authorities have identified total savings of €839m since 2008. In the period since the preparation of the Local Government Efficiency Report, from 2010 to end 2012, the savings achieved are reported at €561m.

Shared services have been identified in the Local Government Efficiency Review and the Public Service Reform Plan as an important opportunity to make further savings in administrative costs, while streamlining and improving service delivery without impacting on front line services.

To drive the reform agenda, and in particular shared service initiatives, in the local government sector, a dedicated Programme Management Office (PMO) has been established which

reports to a high-level Oversight Group.

Overall, 32 operational areas are being examined for potential as a shared service or other collaborative approach that may provide efficiencies. The PMO has adopted a comprehensive methodology for the development and evaluation of projects including, gathering and analysing baseline data, business case preparation and peer review of business cases.

Treasury Management, Payroll/Superannuation and Procurement have been prioritised in the shared services programme in the short to medium term. It is estimated that annual savings of the order of €5.6 million could be achieved (excluding procurement) from these projects; the figures for savings in individual areas are subject to on-going validation as individual projects progress.

It is necessary to invest in these projects in the initial phase and returns accrue over time. The business cases are based on evaluation over the medium term with returns generally beginning to accrue after the shared service is operational for a number of years.

Following competitive bidding processes this year, Laois County Council was selected to provide Shared Payroll and Superannuation services on behalf of all local authorities while Cork County Council are the lead local authority for Treasury Management.

In relation to procurement, the project is being led and co-ordinated by Kerry County Council as the lead authority in the Local Authority National Procurement Office. Since 2010, local authorities have reported procurement efficiency savings of €109 million, exceeding the sector's 2010 target of €70m by 55%. The local authority sector is working with the Chief Procurement Officer in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and, in this regard, further savings of €58.5 million have been targeted for the sector by 2016.

Further savings can be anticipated in the medium term as other shared services projects progress towards implementation.

Planning Issues

486. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he has had any contact with the Department of Justice and Equality regarding interpretive difficulties arising from the language used in section 1 of the Multi-Unit Developments Act 2011; in particular the wording used to define the terms "multi-unit development" and "residential unit" which has resulted in difficulties where such estates require taking in charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49590/13]

488. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government which local authorities, if any, will not consider the taking in charge of a housing estate where a management company exists and further requires the management company to be removed or dissolved before it considers taking the estate in charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49595/13]

489. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if Departmental Circular PD 1/06 which provides that the existence of a management company to maintain elements of common buildings, carry out landscaping and so on must not impact upon the decision by the planning authority to take in charge roads and related infrastructure where a request to do so is made, has been amended in any substantial way since the circular was issued in 2006; if the definition of a house in the Planning and Development Act 2000 continues to apply to both houses and apartments; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [49607/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 486, 488 and 489 together.

Departmental Circular PD 1/08 of February 2008 updated the earlier policy guidance issued by my Department and replaced Circulars PD 1/06 and 5/06. Circular PD 1/08 required all planning authorities to develop or update, as appropriate, their policy on taking in charge by the end of June 2008 on the basis of the framework, and wider housing and planning policy guidance, as set out at the annex to the circular. One of the core principles underpinning the framework for taking in charge - which must be reflected in each planning authority policy on this matter - was that where there are core facilities in existing residential developments which were approved by the planning authority on the basis that they would remain private and be maintained by a management company, these must be taken in charge if the majority of residents request it, subject to the requirements of section 180.

This policy guidance was incorporated into the Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas Guidelines for Planning Authorities which were issued by my Department in May 2009 under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000.

I am not aware of planning authorities failing to comply with requests to take estates in charge nor am I aware of difficulties of interpretation in this regard.

Section 3 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 defines a house as “a building or part of a building which is being or has been occupied as a dwelling or was provided for use as a dwelling but has not been occupied, and where appropriate, includes a building which was designed for use as 2 or more dwellings or a flat, an apartment or other dwelling within such a building.” This definition has not been amended since its enactment.

Planning Issues

487. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if local authorities have statutory immunity in situations where development bonds have been allowed to lapse; if he will specify in what circumstances that immunity applies; in the absence of immunity what sanctions do local authorities have to ensure such development bonds do not lapse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49592/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Planning authorities may attach a condition to a planning permission under section 34(4)(g) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, for the giving of an adequate security for satisfactory completion of the proposed development.

My Department advised planning authorities of recommended arrangements in relation to the framing of such conditions under Circular PD 1/08. In particular, this circular advised planning authorities against accepting time limited planning securities.

It is a matter for planning authorities to enforce the terms of any such conditions attached to planning permissions, including the obligations on developers to maintain an adequate security over the relevant period of the development until such time as it is satisfactorily completed.

Questions Nos. 488 and 489 answered with Question No. 486.

Insolvency Service of Ireland Administration

490. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there are plans to increase the household monthly expenditure allowance for persons who enter an insolvency arrangement with the Insolvency Service of Ireland (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48960/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): One of the functions of the Insolvency Service of Ireland (ISI) under the Personal Insolvency Act 2012 is to prepare and issue guidelines as to what constitutes a reasonable standard of living and reasonable living expenses.

Initial guidelines were published as part of the ISI information campaign in April 2013 and an update guide issued in June 2013 which reflected adjustments for inflation (up until March 2013). The guidelines produced by the ISI are a modified version of the consensual budget standards model originally developed in Ireland by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice which has conducted research in Ireland for over 12 years on developing necessary expenditure figures for different types of households. The guidelines received a general welcome from debtor advocacy groups for offering insolvent debtors protection in negotiations with creditors.

It should be borne in mind that the guidelines set a base level for a reasonable standard of living and reasonable living expenses. Where either a Debt Settlement Arrangement or a Personal Insolvency Arrangement is proposed, the decision on the reasonableness or otherwise of living expenses will be a matter for the creditors to determine on a case-by-case basis with the Personal Insolvency Practitioner acting to facilitate debtors and creditors in working out an arrangement which is acceptable to both.

The ISI is required under the provisions of the Personal Insolvency Act 2012 to update the guidelines at least once a year so the next iteration of the guidelines would be due to be issued in June 2014. I am advised by the ISI that there are no immediate plans to update the guideline figures, which are available on the website of the ISI, www.isi.gov.ie.

Insolvency Service of Ireland Funding

491. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will confirm the budget for the Insolvency Service of Ireland for the next three years; the number of staff that will be employed in the Insolvency Service of Ireland for the next three years and costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48961/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The specific budget for the Insolvency Service of Ireland (ISI) for 2014 will be published as part of the upcoming Revised Estimate Volume.

It is not possible to provide budgetary estimates for 2015 or 2016. Budgetary allocations for future years will take in to account the annual business requirements of the Service at that time.

The ISI currently has 88 staff members. The total approved staff allocation for the ISI is 91. Recruitment is ongoing to complete the sanctioned staff allocation.

Insolvency Service of Ireland Application Numbers

492. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will pro-

vide estimates for 2014 and 2015 of the number of persons that will have entered into personal insolvency arrangements with the Insolvency Service of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48963/13]

493. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of cases that have been handled by the Insolvency Service of Ireland since September 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48965/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 492 and 493 together.

The Insolvency Service of Ireland (ISI) is currently processing a number of applications and has stated that, in the interest of confidentiality it will not be providing details or breakdowns of number of applications for the various debt relief solutions received or being processed at this time. The ISI fully intends to provide quarterly statistics once a statistically meaningful number of applications have been processed.

Currently it is not possible to provide the Deputy with estimates of the number of persons that will have entered into personal insolvency arrangements for the years 2014 and 2015. During the course of the Personal Insolvency Bill's passage through the Oireachtas, I originally indicated provisional estimates of applications in one full year of operation of the three new debt relief solutions to be 15,000 for Debt Settlement Arrangements and Personal Insolvency Arrangements and 3,000 to 4,000 Debt Relief Notices.

I understand that there is a good level of activity and cases are at different stages of progress through the ISI's system. The first Protective Certificate was granted by Monaghan Circuit Court on 21 October 2013 and two more were issued by Dublin Circuit Court on 14 November 2013.

It is expected that the number of applications will increase over time but as these are real time applications, it is not possible, nor would it be helpful, to speculate on projected numbers of applications or arrangements for 2014 or 2015. The ISI intends to commence issuing regular statistical reports in 2014 which will include the number of applications that have been made for debt relief arrangements.

In the interim, the ISI has added a statistics page to its website (www.isi.gov.ie) which provides details of key information such as the number of approved practitioners, information requests to the ISI and associated pertinent information. The statistics page is updated on a monthly basis.

Insolvency Service of Ireland Administration

494. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the delays in appointing personal insolvency practitioners (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48982/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Insolvency Service of Ireland (ISI) is the statutory body with responsibility for the authorisation of individuals to carry on practice as a personal insolvency practitioner (PIP). The process for authorising practitioners is rigorous and is based on a series of important considerations such as educational and professional qualifications, relevant knowledge and experience, and the completion of a course of study - by passing an exam - on the laws and practice generally, as they apply in the State, in relation to the insolvency of individuals and knowledge of the Personal Insolvency Act 2012.

Applicants also have to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the ISI that they are fit and proper persons, that they are financially sound, and that they have the organisational capability and the resources to carry on the practice of being a practitioner. They also have to hold professional indemnity insurance as well as being tax compliant.

I am advised by the ISI that there are currently 76 PIPs authorised and that a number of applications for authorisation are under review. A number of individuals have been notified that the ISI is proposing to authorise them and they have been requested to submit the prescribed application fee. In other cases there are applicants who are not meeting the qualifying criteria or necessary requirements for authorisation.

Insolvency Service of Ireland Staff

495. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the salaries of each member of staff at the Insolvency Service of Ireland (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48983/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The salary details sought by the Deputy in respect of the Insolvency Service of Ireland (ISI) are set out in the table.

Salary Band	No of staff
Less than € 10, 000	0
€10, 001 - € 20,000	0
€ 20,001 - € 30,000	13
€ 30,001 - € 40,000	20
€ 40,001 - € 50,000	21
€ 50,001 - € 60,000	17
€ 60,001 - € 70,000	8
€ 70,001 - € 80,000	3
€ 80,001 - € 90,000	2
€ 90,001 - €100,000	2
€ 100,001 - €110,000	1
€ 110,001 - €120,000	0
€ 120,001 - €130,000	1

Staff of the Office of the Official Assignee in Bankruptcy, who continue to be staff of the Courts Service pending the statutory transfer of functions of the Official Assignee to the ISI, are included in the table.

Insolvency Service of Ireland Administration

496. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason there is no service level agreement between the Insolvency Service of Ireland and personal insolvency practitioners; his plans to implement a service level agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49005/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): In accordance with the provisions of the Personal Insolvency Act 2012, the Insolvency Service of Ireland (ISI) has a regulatory function in relation to the authorisation and supervision of personal insolvency practitioners. I have been advised by the ISI that there are no plans to implement a service level

agreement between the ISI, the regulator, and personal insolvency practitioners.

Data Protection

497. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a company (details supplied) involved in a recent data security breach, involving the credit card details of two companies (details supplied), is a regulated entity of the Central Bank of Ireland; the role the Central Bank has in investigating or following up on the affair; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49095/13]

498. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if third party companies that hold credit card details on behalf of other companies are regulated entities under the Central Bank of Ireland; the legal requirements governing any company that wishes to hold credit card details for a period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49096/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 497 and 498 together.

I have been informed by the Central Bank that third party companies holding credit card details on behalf of other companies are not regulated by the Central Bank and that it has no role, therefore, in investigating such security breaches. The law relating to the protection of personal data, including the credit card data of individuals, is set out in the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003. This legislation requires, for example, that personal data are obtained for one or more specified, explicit and legitimate purposes; that they are not further processed in a manner inconsistent with that purpose or those purposes; that they are not excessive in respect of that purpose or purposes; and, importantly, that they are not kept for longer than is necessary. The legislation also requires that appropriate security measures be taken to guard against unauthorised access to, as well as any unauthorised alteration, disclosure or destruction of, such personal data. Moreover, it allows the Data Protection Commissioner to carry out investigations of infringements of the legislation on receipt of a complaint or on his or her own initiative. In 2011, the Data Protection Commissioner introduced a Code of Practice on Personal Data Security Breaches under section 13(2)(b) of the Data Protection Act 1988. The Code provides guidance on good practice in dealing with data security breaches, including the reporting of such breaches to the Commissioner's Office.

I am informed by the Data Protection Commissioner that his Office was notified of the data security breach referred to by the Deputy in accordance with this Code of Practice. In light of the seriousness of the breach, the Commissioner sent an inspection team to investigate it as soon as possible. I understand that the Commissioner has received a preliminary report on the findings of the inspection team. I also understand that the Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigations has received a report on the matter and is investigating the issue further. The European Commission published a Proposal for a General Data Protection Regulation in January 2012. The Proposal includes specific provisions, which I fully support, requiring the notification of certain personal data breaches to relevant supervisory authorities and, in serious cases, to individuals who may be affected by them. Negotiations on the Commission's proposals are ongoing at EU level.

Search and Rescue Service

499. Deputy Peadar Tóibín asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide direction for a safety procedure (details supplied) to be enforced; if this procedure has been

enforced in any other region or in respect of any other community organisation; if he will reverse this decision and allow for Meath river rescue to operate in a fully integrated and efficient manner. [49230/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): This question is a repeat of the Deputy's Question No. 317 of the 12 November 2013. As I stated in my reply to that question I have requested further information from the Garda authorities in relation to this matter and I will contact the Deputy again as soon as I have received the Garda report.

Mortgage Arrears Issues

500. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the new arrangements that are planned to facilitate faster repossession by financial institutions of commercial properties and buy-to-let homes where the mortgage holder has fallen into significant arrears; the elements of the present code of conduct on mortgage arrears that will apply in these cases where families are threatened with serious poverty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49449/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The rules of court governing repossession proceedings in the High Court (Order 38 of the Rules of the Superior Courts) and the Circuit Court (Order 5B of the Circuit Court Rules (Procedure in Certain Actions for Possession and Well Charging Relief) 2009) are intended to facilitate fair and efficient case management of such proceedings. Such rules are drawn up by the respective Court Rules Committees and any new arrangements in respect of such proceedings will be a matter, in the first instance, for these Committees. I should add that the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2013 contains two important new provisions which will be of benefit to borrowers with arrears: section 2 provides that in any future repossession proceedings in respect of the borrower's principal private residence, the court may adjourn proceedings so that a proposal for a Personal Insolvency Arrangement (PIA) under the Personal Insolvency Act 2012 may be fully explored as an alternative to repossession; section 3 introduces a new requirement whereby repossession actions in respect of mortgages on principal private residences and family homes which were created prior to 1 December 2009 must be commenced in the Circuit Court.

As regards the Central Bank's Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears, the position is that it applies to the principal private residence of the borrower. Commercial properties come within the terms of the Central Bank's Customer Protection Code. This Code, which was revised in 2012, contains provisions on how lending institutions must deal with consumers who are in arrears on other loans, including personal loans and buy-to-let mortgages. While the September 2013 Update on the EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support contains a commitment to examine the possibility of introducing tight deadlines on plenary repossession proceedings for non-principal private residences, current arrangements appear appropriate to deal with current demand and the Government is not considering any new arrangements at present in relation to this matter.

Court Accommodation Refurbishment

501. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current status of the development of Waterford city courthouse; when works are due to start; the proposed timeframe for the completion of works; when the new court house will be operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48798/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): In July 2012 the Government announced an investment package which includes seven courthouse projects, including Waterford. As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts, including the provision of accommodation for court sittings, is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions. In order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that discussions are ongoing with the Office of Public Works and the National Development Finance Agency in order to progress the projects. The projects are to be procured and delivered through a Public Private Partnership.

I am informed that the Office of Public Works has recently completed a design for the extension and refurbishment of Waterford Courthouse. The development will include 6 courtrooms, replacing the current 2 courtrooms, and improved facilities for all court users. The Part 9 Planning process for the courthouse extension and refurbishment commenced on 7th November 2013. The PPP procurement process will be commencing shortly. Construction is expected to commence during 2015 with the project being completed and the courthouse becoming operational during 2016 or early in 2017.

Naturalisation Applications

502. Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when he will introduce an appeals system for refusals in naturalisation cases; the reasons such a process does not exist at present in view of the financial outlay by applicants for citizenship. [48800/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): 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 there is no right to citizenship through naturalisation under Irish law, irrespective of how long an applicant has resided in the State. The Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended provides that the Minister for Justice has absolute discretion to grant an application for a certificate of naturalisation where certain conditions for naturalisation are satisfied.

There is no provision under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 as amended for appeal of a decision to refuse an application. However, the appropriate remedy for an applicant, whose application for a certificate of naturalisation has been refused, and who wishes to provide additional supporting information is to lodge a new application. That may be done at any stage. The application fee of €175 payable upon lodging an application for a certificate of naturalisation is designed to recoup some of the costs associated with the application process which arise whether the application is successful or not.

Crime Data

503. Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of tiger kidnappings that occurred per annum from 2005 to 2012, inclusive, and to date in 2013. [48852/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda Authorities that the number of tiger kidnapping incidents involving staff of companies signed up to the Tiger Kidnapping Protocols which have occurred between 2005 and to date in 2013 is as set out in the following table.

Year	No. of incidents recorded
2013 to date	2
2012	1
2011	7
2010	8
2009	6
2008	2
2007	5
2006	4
2005	1

Magdalen Laundries

504. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the way recommendations and entitlements regarding health care needs of the survivors of the Magdalen laundries will be met, particularly for those who live outside the jurisdiction. [48860/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Legislation is required in order to implement Judge Quirke's recommendation with regard to the provision of medical services to the women who were admitted to and worked in the relevant institutions. My Department, in consultation with the Department of Health, are working on the preparation of the necessary legislation. In line with the recommendation of Judge Quirke these services will be provided in the State.

Magdalen Laundries

505. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide a breakdown of applications to the Magdalen laundries scheme following Justice Quirke's report and recommendations by country of residence. [48861/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The following table sets out the breakdown of applications to the restorative justice ex-gratia scheme as recommended by Mr. Justice Quirke.

Country of residence	Number
Australia	4
Cyprus	2
England	116
Germany	1
Ireland	486
Northern Ireland	5
Scotland	2
Switzerland	1
USA	9
Wales	3
Total	629

Visa Applications

506. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason a person (details supplied) was refused a visa to visit family here; the next step available for them to take; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48876/13]

507. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason a person (details supplied) was refused a visa to visit family here; the next step available for them to take; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48877/13]

508. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason a person (details supplied) was refused a visa to visit family here; the next step available for them to take; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48878/13]

509. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason a person (details supplied) was refused a visa to visit family here; the next step available for them to take; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48879/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 506 to 509, inclusive, together.

The visa applications referred to by the Deputy were received in the Visa Office, Abu Dhabi on 22 September 2013. Following full consideration, the Visa Officer decided to refuse the visas on 6 October 2013 and letters providing the reasons for this were issued to the applicants. The Visa Officer did not consider that the family concerned provided sufficient evidence of their obligations to return following a visit to Ireland and had concerns that they would not observe the conditions of the visas were they to be approved. In addition, insufficient documentary evidence was submitted to indicate adequate levels of available finances or income in respect of either the family concerned or the reference in Ireland. This increases the likelihood that the granting of the visas in this case could result in a cost to state funds/resources. Furthermore there was insufficient documentary evidence of the link to the reference in Ireland.

It is a fundamental consideration in any visa application that the deciding visa officer is satisfied that the conditions of the visa will be abided by including that the applicant will return home at the expiry of the permission to remain in the State. At the core of this consideration is an assessment of the applicant's obligations to return to their home country. It is open to the family concerned to appeal the decisions of these applications within two months of the date of refusal, should they so wish. Where doing so, they should be in a position to address the reasons for the refusal. Guidelines regarding the visa application procedure are available on the website of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service - www.inis.gov.ie.

Queries in relation to general immigration matters 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.

Prison Staff

510. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if, in the context of a recent internal competition within the Irish Prison Service for promotions to work training officers, his attention has been drawn to an information memo of 23 August 2013 circulated during the process in respect of applicants who did not have the higher certificate in custodial care; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that, owing to this note, those applicants who

possessed higher qualification for the advertised posts were not given any extra credits for these higher qualifications; if this is an acceptable policy for a State body to pursue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48893/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised by the Director General of the Irish Prison Service that the Service recently held a competition to fill vacancies in the Work Training Officer grade. On conclusion of the short listing stage, an error in the manner in which marks were awarded for educational qualifications was identified. Some staff who had completed the level 6 Higher Certificate in Custodial Care (HCCC) were awarded 25 marks. Since September 2007, all Recruit Prison Officers are required to complete this certificate, which provides a mix of professional and vocational training that enhances the skills and knowledge of Prison Officers, as a condition of service. As this certification was not a condition of service for officers recruited prior to September 2007, to award marks for this qualification would unfairly disadvantage such staff. Accordingly, in order to ensure that officers who were recruited before the introduction of the HCCC would not be disadvantaged, these officers were also awarded 25 marks, equivalent to their HCCC-qualified colleagues. In many cases these officers already had a level 6 or higher relevant qualification and were not awarded any additional marks.

It is not the case that applicants who possessed higher qualifications for the advertised post were not given extra credit for the higher qualifications. Any applicant who had a relevant qualification at a higher level than the HCCC received the appropriate score for that qualification in line with the marking scheme outlined in the competition circular (see the following table).

National Framework of Qualifications	Marks awarded
Levels 1 - 3	15
Levels 4 - 5	20
Level 6	25
Level 7	30
Level 8	35
Level 9	40
Level 10	50

For example, an applicant for Work Training Officer - Integrated Sentence Management (ISM) and Work Training Officer - Catering posts with an honours degree (level 8) in Criminology would have been awarded an extra 10 marks (35 marks in total) for the ISM post but no extra marks for the Catering post. A qualification in Criminology is considered relevant for ISM and not for Catering. Applicants also had an opportunity during the competitive interview process to elaborate and show how their qualifications would be relevant to the posts sought.

I am satisfied that this is an acceptable scoring policy as part of a competitive merit-based promotion competition.

Road Safety

511. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will allocate a speed van to an accident black spot (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48896/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The deployment of speed cameras is an operational matter for the Garda authorities, and is based on the identification of sections of road which have a history of collisions where speed was a contributory factor. The

locations of these speed enforcement zones, which are kept under review by the Garda authorities, are in the public domain and are available on the Garda website www.garda.ie. I have no role in the identification of these zones or the deployment of resources to these locations, but have brought the Deputy's concerns regarding the particular location in question to the Commissioner's attention.

Subsidiary Protection Applications

512. 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 Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48908/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned is a failed asylum applicant. Arising from the refusal of his asylum application, and in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned was notified, by letter dated 21st June, 2010, that the then Minister proposed to make a Deportation Order in respect of him. He was given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of making written representations to the then Minister setting out the reasons why a Deportation Order should not be made against him. In addition, he was notified of his entitlement to apply for subsidiary protection.

The person concerned submitted an application for subsidiary protection and in this regard I recently signed into law an S.I. to introduce new procedures for the processing of subsidiary protection cases under the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner. When consideration of this application has been completed, the person concerned will be notified in writing of the outcome. In the event that the application for subsidiary protection is refused, the position in the State of the person concerned will then be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement. 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.

Visa Applications

513. Deputy Patrick Nulty asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding visa applications in respect to relatives of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; when a decision will be made on the applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48924/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The visa applications referred to by the Deputy were received in the Visa Office, Abuja on 11 June 2012. A decision has been made in these cases and the people concerned will be notified shortly.

Queries in relation to general immigration matters 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.

Military Aircraft Landings

514. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 727 of 5 November 2013, in relation to his statement that US military aircraft passing through Shannon have sovereign immunity, the other States that have been granted such immunity; the reason the Gardai think that they have a role in relation to these aircraft. [48926/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised that the sovereign immunity accorded to certain aircraft arises under international law and accordingly the matter of granting this to specific States, as set out in the question, does not arise. The Gardai do of course have powers in relation to aircraft which are not subject to immunity.

Garda Vetting Applications

515. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason an Irish dance group (details supplied) in County Leitrim has been waiting since for 2011 for Garda vetting clearance; and when this group may expect to hear from the vetting unit in Tipperary. [48985/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Garda Central Vetting Unit (GCVU) provides Garda Vetting disclosures to organisations registered with it for that purpose. There are currently in the region of 20,000 such organisations and the current average processing time for applications is 7-9 weeks. I am informed by the Garda authorities that it is not possible to advise on the status of any specific vetting applications in the absence of the names and dates of birth of the individuals concerned. If the Deputy will provide that information, I will have the matter examined further.

Proposed Legislation

516. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the date on which he proposes to implement the Coroners Bill 2007; when he will bring the matter of payment of coroners' fees and expenses under the remit of his Department; his views on whether local authorities should be responsible for these payments in view of the fact that the role of coroners has clearly nothing to do with the workload of local authorities in the first instance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48993/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Coroners Bill 2007 is before the Seanad having been restored to the Order Paper on my initiative. The Bill is in the course of being reviewed with a view, among other matters, to making it as cost-effective as possible. All governance and administrative matters in regard to coroners, including the historic role of the local authorities, are being examined in the context of the review. I appreciate

that issues of funding are of importance to local authorities at this time. It would be the broad intention that ultimately reform in this area should be broadly cost neutral. While it would be my wish to be in a position to progress this important Bill, it is not possible to indicate with any certainty at this point, the likely timetable in that regard.

The Deputy will be aware that a number of early reform measures in regard to the coroners service have been taken. The Courts and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2013 included amendments to the Coroners Act 1962 and the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995 to provide for the provision of legal advice and legal aid in respect of certain inquests. The Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2011 provided for some early reforms in coronial matters, including an amalgamation of the Dublin County and City coronial districts.

Judicial Appointments

517. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of judges that have been appointed to handle personal insolvency cases; the work they are involved in on a day to day basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49006/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Six Specialist Judges of the Circuit Court were appointed in July in accordance with Part Six of the Personal Insolvency Act 2012 which provided for the amendment of the Courts Acts to create a cadre of Specialist Judges of the Circuit Court to facilitate the speedy consideration of insolvency applications by that Court. It is also my intention that these new judges will also be given jurisdiction to deal with applications to the Circuit Court under the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Bill 2013. The scheduling of court cases and the allocation of court business is a matter for the President of the Circuit Court who is under the Constitution independent in the exercise of his judicial functions.

Residency Permits

518. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed to renew a Garda National Immigration Bureau card in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49017/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned was granted temporary permission to remain in the State on 8 November, 2005 for an initial two year period, under the revised arrangements applicable to the non-EEA national parents of Irish born children born in the State before 1 January, 2005, more commonly known as the IBC/05 Scheme. This permission was renewed for a further three years in 2007. Subsequently the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) renewed his permission to remain in the State in 2010 until 8 November, 2013.

I am informed that on 6 November, 2013, the person concerned sought to have his permission to remain renewed for a further period. However, his renewal of permission request to the GNIB was not processed on that occasion as he was not in a position to meet the necessary requirements. In the circumstances, I would advise the person concerned to submit a written request for renewal of permission to remain to the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department, at PO BOX 10003, Dublin 1, outlining his current family circumstances.

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.

Naturalisation Applications

519. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 24; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49032/13]

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

As the Deputy will appreciate, 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. I am informed that this application is now at an advanced stage of processing and the applicant will be informed of my decision in due course.

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.

Crime Data

520. Deputy Seán Kenny asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount of alcohol seized by An Garda Síochána from persons in a public place in the years 2011 and 2012; the monetary value of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49079/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda authorities that in 2011, 486 incidents were recorded where alcohol was seized by An Garda Síochána. In 2012, 354 incidents were recorded. The estimated monetary value of alcohol seized in 2011 and 2012 is €60,516 and €20,463, respectively. Figures provided are operational and liable to change.

Garda Deployment

521. Deputy Tom Fleming asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the vacant position of juvenile liaison officer will be filled in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49104/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel among the Garda Regions, Divisions and Districts, the various Garda national units and of course Garda Head-

quarters. Garda management keep this distribution under continuing review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. This necessary ongoing flexibility in the distribution of personnel means that it is not feasible to identify specific vacancies within specific areas of the Force.

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the strength of the Kerry Division on 30 September 2013, the latest date for which figures are readily available was 298 Garda members, 35 Garda Reserves and 32 civilians. There are 4 Juvenile Liaison Officers attached to the Kerry Division.

Garda Vetting Applications

522. Deputy Tom Fleming asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will simplify vetting for community volunteers, that is, one vetting procedure should suffice for volunteers carrying out different roles; if he will put in place a set time period and simplify the process for volunteers who will be reapplying, having previously satisfied the vetting process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49110/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Vetting procedures in this country are in place to protect children and vulnerable adults. As such they demand rigorous procedures to ensure their integrity and to maintain the highest level of confidence by the public and organisations availing of them.

To achieve these aims, a vetting disclosure is made in response to a written request and with the permission of the person who is the subject of that request. Garda vetting disclosures are issued to specified organisations registered with the Garda Central Vetting Unit (GCVU) for that purpose in respect of a particular post or employment. The Unit processed approximately 328,000 vetting applications on behalf of these organisations in 2012 and expects to receive in the region of 350,000 applications by the end of 2013. The average processing time for vetting applications is seven to nine weeks.

A full vetting check is conducted for each new application received to ensure that the most recent data available is taken into account. The non-transferability and contemporaneous nature of the certificate protects against the risk of fraud or forgery and is a guarantee of the integrity of the vetting service. It also affords the registered organisation the facility to assess suitability based on the most up to date information available on the applicant. The Deputy will appreciate that the safety of children and vulnerable adults is the primary consideration and this must remain the case.

The Deputy may also wish to note that elements of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 are under review at present and a number of amendments are planned to the legislation prior to its commencement early next year. In the context of making those amendments, I will also be seeking to amend the Act to minimise the extent of duplicate vetting. In that regard I will be seeking to make explicit in the Act that where more than one organisation shares the services of the same volunteer/employee, they can share a vetting disclosure, with the consent of the person who has been vetted.

Naturalisation Applications

523. Deputy Willie O'Dea asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason his Department has requested proof of evidence for the past three months to be provided again when

it had previously been provided to the citizenship unit in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49145/13]

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 from the person referred to by the Deputy.

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. In accordance with the requirements for applications made under Section 15A of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, the applicant was asked, via their solicitor, to submit proof of residence for the last three months which should include the applicant's and his spouse's name and address. The most recent of the documents submitted by the applicant was over six months old and therefore did not meet the requirements as specified in the guidance provided with the application form.

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.

Citizenship Applications

524. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the options open to a person (details supplied) to apply for Irish citizenship; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49191/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned, having been born outside of Ireland to parents who were born outside Ireland but whose grandparent was born in Ireland, may apply for Foreign Births Registration. The application form is available on the Department of Foreign Affairs website www.dfa.ie and must be forwarded with required supporting documentation to the Irish Diplomatic and Consular Mission nearest to where the applicant normally resides.

Land Transfers

525. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if an application to transfer land will be expedited in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [49220/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I can inform the Deputy that under the Registration of Deeds and Title Act 2006, the Property Registration Authority (PRA) was established as and from 4 November 2006. The PRA replaces the Registrar of Deeds and Titles as the registering authority in relation to property registration in Ireland and, subject to the above Act, is independent in the performance of its functions.

The Deputy will be aware of the service to TDs and Senators which provides information on the current status of applications, such as the subject of this question, which was introduced

in May 2006. The service provides a speedier, more efficient and more cost effective alternative to submitting Parliamentary Questions. It is operated by the PRA and is available all year round.

I can further inform the Deputy that his query has been forwarded to the PRA for attention and direct reply via the above mentioned service.

Garda Recruitment

526. Deputy Dan Neville asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when Garda recruitment will commence; and when is it expected that the first students will be entering the Garda College in Templemore. [49309/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I recently announced that a recruitment competition for An Garda Síochána is to commence shortly and it is expected that the first batch of new recruits will enter the Garda college in mid-2014.

There are a number of procedural issues that need to be finalised prior to the formal commencement of that competition and these are expected to conclude in the coming weeks. A further announcement will be issued as soon as recruitment starts, both on the Public Appointments Service website and directly to those who have registered an expression of interest in joining the Garda Síochána.

Immigration Policy

527. Deputy Niall Collins asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will consider introducing new medium to long-term visas for non-EU persons of independent means who wish to spend their retirement here, taking into account the contribution that such persons could make to the Irish economy and acknowledging that the current arrangements whereby they can only get renewal annual stamp O visas until they meet the five year residency requirement is a disincentive to retirees to move here as it does not provide them with the certainty they need to feel comfortable buying a house and making other investments here. [49310/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have no plans to create a new immigration programme specifically for retirees of independent means. It is already open to any person to make application for residence in the State and for that application to be considered on its merits. Cases involving self-sufficient retirees arise from time to time and are evaluated by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department.

This sort of migration is far from straightforward and involves potential significant financial risks to the State. For example, while the requirement to have full medical insurance is a sine qua non, in these cases this of itself is no guarantee of such an application not being a burden on the State. In some jurisdictions inward immigration of this nature is prohibited entirely and in others lengthy waiting periods are involved or large financial investments are required prior to any definitive relocation taking place. For approval to be given to an application therefore the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service would have to be fully satisfied that no costs to the State will arise at any point from that person's residence here. Therefore the person would need to have a guaranteed and sustainable annual income sufficient for their foreseeable needs and have full medical cover. The immigration status granted is stamp 0 which is specifically aimed at providing an opportunity to remain in the State but to confer no expectation of eligibility for State funds or that is should be a pathway to long term residence or citizenship. Stamp 0

permission is made conditional on not becoming a burden on the State and for it to be renewed this condition must continue to be met.

There are also other avenues available to self sufficient retirees. The Immigrant Investor Programme offers a range of qualifying investment options and an enhanced immigration status (Stamp 4) to the successful applicant and his/her spouse or partner, and minor children. The financial thresholds for this programme have been lowered from July of this year following a review by the Government. Details of this programme are available on the INIS website www.inis.gov.ie.

Departmental Legal Costs

528. Deputy Lucinda Creighton asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 327 of 12 of November 2013, the reason his Department's computer records relating to legal fees do not allow his Department to disaggregate the expenditure between senior counsel and junior counsel when all other Departments were able to furnish this Deputy with the figures for senior counsel in the same time period requested; if he will now provide the cumulative amount paid by his Department to senior counsel each year since 2003 as requested; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49318/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I wish to inform the Deputy that in my previous reply I was referring to my Department's Financial Management System (FMS). My Department's FMS disaggregates information in a manner appropriate to the management of my Department's finances. The details requested by the Deputy are not at present captured in every case when processing payments to persons who happen to be senior counsels as it is not a necessary requirement to facilitate such payments.

As was pointed out in my earlier reply, in the majority of cases legal advice is provided for my Department by the Office of the Attorney General and/or the Office of the Chief State Solicitor and as such the costs incurred are borne by those Offices. The primary example of where costs are managed by my Department would be in the Criminal Legal Aid area. If it would be of use to the Deputy it may be possible to extract details for some of the more recent years of senior counsel expenditure in this specific area.

Such information would only provide a partial reflection of the senior counsel costs arising for my Department but as I have already indicated it is not possible to provide a more comprehensive picture without a disproportionate allocation of resources to extract the information.

Visa Applications

529. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date regarding an application for a visa in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49371/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The visa application referred to by the Deputy was received in the Visa Office, Abuja, on 29 August 2013.

Following full consideration, the Visa Officer decided to refuse the grant of the visa on 8 October 2013. The specific reasons for the application being refused are contained in the refusal letter, which has issued to the person concerned.

It is open to the person concerned to appeal the decision to refuse the visa. An appeal must

be made within two months of the date of refusal, in this instance before 8 December 2013. Where doing so, the applicant should be in a position to address the reasons for the refusal. Guidelines regarding the visa appeals procedure are available on the website of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service - www.inis.gov.ie.

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

Garda Investigations

530. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason, in view of allegations that have arisen from a television programme (details supplied), no investigation or lines of inquiry have taken place by the relevant authorities. [49374/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): As the Deputy will appreciate I have no role in the investigation of criminal matters, which are a matter for An Garda Síochána, who have previously indicated that they have no record of any complaint or investigation arising from the programme referred to.

Naturalisation Applications

531. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide an update on an application made for citizenship by a person (details supplied) in Dublin 4; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49435/13]

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

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. A letter has issued to the person concerned requesting certain information. Upon receipt of this information the case will be submitted to me for decision.

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 Retirements

532. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí who have applied under each early retirement scheme introduced in the past five years by location and grade; the number of gardaí who have voluntarily retired by location and grade;

the number of compulsory retirements by location and grade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49458/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the number of members who have retired under the Cost Neutral Early Retirement (CNER) scheme, broken down by rank, on 31 December 2009 to 2012 and on 1 November 2013, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was as set out in the table hereunder:

Rank	31/12/09	31/12/10	31/12/11	31/12/12	1/11/13
Commissioner	-	-	-	-	-
D/Commissioner	-	-	-	-	-
A/Commissioner	-	-	-	-	-
C/Superintendent	-	-	-	-	-
Superintendent	-	-	-	-	-
Inspector	-	-	-	-	-
Sergeant	-	1	1	1	2
Garda	-		1	1	3
Total	0	1	2	2	5

In general, members of An Garda Síochána may retire on a voluntary basis once they have reached 50 years of age and have accrued 30 years service. Members must retire on compulsory age grounds on reaching the age of 60.

I have further been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the number of members who have either retired or applied to retire by 31 December 2013, both compulsory and voluntary, broken down by rank for 2013 was as set out in the table hereunder:

Rank	Vol	Comp
Commissioner	0	0
D/Commissioner	1	0
A/Commissioner	0	1
C/Superintendent	0	1
Superintendent	16	0
Inspector	12	1
Sergeant	68	0
Garda	168	8
Total	265	12

The information requested in relation to location is not readily available and would require a disproportionate amount of time to collate in relation to the information sought.

Garda Transport Data

533. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide detailed up to date information on the current Garda vehicle fleet, including the manufacturer, model and current distribution of vehicles by district and division; the number of vehicles that are approaching the upper acceptable mileage and upper acceptable age for use as Garda vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49459/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The provision and allocation of Garda resources, including transport, is a matter for the Garda Commissioner. In turn, the deployment of Garda vehicles is kept under on-going review by the Garda authorities and revised in response to policing demands.

This flexibility in allocating and re-allocating vehicles, so as to best match the allocation of resources with priorities, is crucial to the efficient management of the Garda fleet. As a consequence, the Deputy will appreciate that it is not practicable to provide these figures at District level. However, I am informed by the Garda authorities that the current Garda fleet consists of 2,459 vehicles, comprised of a number of makes/models, including: Ford, Toyota, Honda, Opel, Fiat, Citroen, Volvo, Renault, Nissan and others.

In that context, I am advised by the Garda authorities that the number of Garda vehicles by Division at the end of October 2013 is set out in the table.

Division	No.
CAVAN-MONAGHAN	49
CLARE	44
CORK CITY	113
CORK NORTH	39
CORK WEST	46
DMR EAST	52
DMR NORTH	109
DMR NORTH CENTRAL	65
DMR SOUTH	78
DMR SOUTH CENTRAL	68
DMR TRAFFIC	61
DMR WEST	106
DONEGAL	58
GALWAY	79
KERRY	38
KILDARE	46
KILKENNY/CARLOW	51
LAOIS-OFFALY	47
LIMERICK	70
LOUTH	45
MAYO	52
MEATH	53
NATIONAL UNITS	768
ROSCOMMON-LONGFORD	40
SLIGO-LEITRIM	48
TIPPERARY	50
WATERFORD	50

Division	No.
WESTMEATH	42
WEXFORD	42
WICKLOW	50
TOTAL	2,459

Garda vehicles are retired for a variety of reasons, including where vehicles are considered beyond economic repair or as a result of accidents. I understand from the Garda authorities that the relevant manufacturers have indicated that, for safety reasons, patrol cars should be withdrawn from service when the odometer reading reaches 300,000 kilometres. Accordingly, this is the operational policy that is applied by the Garda authorities. Based on current usage, it is estimated that 93 vehicles may be retired between now and the end of the year.

I am conscious of the continuing pressures on the Garda fleet and, in that regard, I am very pleased to have secured a further €9m for investment in the fleet, made up of €5m in 2013 and a further €4m in 2014. At this stage, arising from the additional €5m which has recently been made available, the Garda authorities have arranged for the delivery of 305 new vehicles by the end of 2013. These are in addition to the 133 new Garda vehicles already made available during the year.

The most recent investment will bring to €18m the total amount spent on the Garda fleet for the three years 2012 to 2014. This represents a very considerable financial investment in Garda transport, particularly at a time when the level of funding available across the public sector is severely limited. It is a clear indication of my commitment to ensure that, to the greatest extent possible, An Garda Síochána are provided with sufficient resources to enable them to deliver an effective and efficient policing service.

Garda Deployment

534. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the numbers of gardaí available in each region who have been trained to conduct specialist child interviews as part of the joint protocol with the Health Service Executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49460/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel among the Garda Regions, Divisions, and Districts, the various Garda national units and of course Garda Headquarters. Garda management keep this distribution under continuing review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources.

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the number of Gardaí, in each region, trained to conduct specialist child interviews, are as set out in the table:

Region	Garda
Dublin Metropolitan Region	21
Northern Region	11
Eastern Region	9
Western Region	11
South Eastern Region	11
Southern Region	10

Questions - Written Answers
Ground Rents Payments

535. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps he will take to address the issue of ground rents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49501/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The position is that section 2 of the Landlord and Tenant (Ground Rents) Act 1978 introduced a prohibition on the creation of new leases reserving ground rents on dwellings. As regards existing ground rents, Part III of the Landlord and Tenant (Ground Rents) (No. 2) Act 1978 contains a statutory scheme whereby a person may, at reasonable cost, acquire the fee simple in their dwelling. To date, over 80,000 applicants have acquired freehold title to their property under this scheme. In the case of property other than dwellings, the Landlord and Tenant (Ground Rents) Act 1967 contains provisions which facilitate acquisition of the fee simple subject to agreed terms or on terms set out in an arbitration carried out by the County Registrar.

The general position regarding ground rents was considered by the All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution in its 2004 Report ‘Private Property’. The Committee took the view that a ground landlord’s ground rent is a form of property right which is constitutionally protected and that abolition of such rents would be unconstitutional in the absence of adequate monetary compensation. The Committee also noted that where leases were approaching expiry, any legislation providing for the abolition of ground rents would have to provide for the payment of enhanced compensation by the ground tenant. In light of the foregoing, I have no immediate plans to introduce further legislation in this area. However, operation of the existing law continues to be kept under review by my Department.

Immigration Policy

536. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if an earned regularisation scheme for undocumented migrants currently living in Ireland, for example, based on a points system, will be included in the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill. [49513/13]

537. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will bring forward a regularisation scheme for undocumented migrants here similar to the undocumented workers scheme bridging visa that was in place from October to December 2009; if there are other schemes planned to address the plight of the estimated 30,000 so called undocumented individuals, including children and families, who have been in the State for four years or more; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49514/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 536 and 537 together.

I have no plans to introduce any form of earned regularisation scheme, based on a points system or otherwise, in the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill, nor do I intend to do so on an administrative basis. It is the responsibility of all non EEA nationals who are resident in the State to ensure that they have an appropriate permission from the Minister for Justice and Equality and the majority of migrants comply with this condition.

I understand that the programme introduced in 2009 related to a very specific subset of the overall population of illegally present foreign nationals, namely those who had previously held an employment permit but had since, through no fault of their own, become undocumented. It provided, subject to a requirement that each case be considered on its merits, for a short term

bridging permission to allow the person to apply for a new employment permit. I also understand that currently where similar cases are presented to the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service they are dealt with in the same way as under that programme.

Broad regularisation programmes are problematic. They could give rise to unpredictable and potentially very costly impacts across the full range of public and social services. At EU Level, the Member States, in agreeing the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum at the European Council in October 2008 made specific commitments “to use only case-by-case regularisation, rather than generalised regularisation, under national law, for humanitarian or economic reasons”. While the Pact is not legally binding, the political commitment among Member States, then and now, is clearly against any form of process that would in any way legitimise the status of those unlawfully present without first examining the merits of their individual cases. In our case there are also considerations based on maintaining the integrity of the Common Travel Area with the UK which must be taken into account.

Clearly, all illegal migration cases are not the same and must be dealt with on a case by case basis taking account of their individual circumstances. At one end of the scale are those where the person’s illegal status is through no fault of their own. However there are also much more egregious instances of immigration abuse, often at considerable expense to the State and it does not follow that such persons should profit from their conduct.

Sometimes case by case consideration will result in a positive outcome for the applicant. However, in other cases this may result in a decision by the Irish authorities, subject to the oversight of our Courts, that the person has to go home. That decision should be respected.

Finally, I should point out that in relation to the estimate given by the Deputy of some 30,000 undocumented migrants in Ireland, and while I have seen the same figure quoted myself, I am unaware of the statistical basis for this figure and accordingly am not in a position either to endorse it or propose an alternative. Illegal migration is inherently extremely difficult to measure.

Court Records

538. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to make audio recordings of court proceedings available to the public in an accessible manner in view of the fact that substantial investment took place in all courthouses to make this possible. [49520/13]

539. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the fact that it is private companies which operate the stenographer system in the courts; and the remedies that are open to citizens when the accuracy of a transcript is disputed. [49521/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 538 and 539 together.

As the Deputy will be aware the courts are, subject only to the Constitution and the law, independent in the exercise of their judicial functions, and the conduct of any case is a matter entirely for the presiding judge.

All Court records, including recordings of court proceedings, are under the control of the presiding Judge, as provided for in section 65(3) of the Court Officers Act, 1926. As I previously informed the Deputy in response to Parliamentary Questions No. 444 and 445 of 25 June 2013 and No. 897 to 899 of 16 July 2013, the relevant Rules of the District Court, Circuit Court and Superior Courts (S.I. Numbers 99/2013, 100/2013 and 101/2013) came into effect on 8 April 2013. The instruments regulate the procedures whereby parties or other persons wishing

to have access to records of court proceedings, including audio recordings, may apply to the court concerned for access to such records. The instruments also set out the terms on which such access may be granted. A party to a case may apply to the court to access the recording however, the granting of access and the terms under which such access is granted is a matter for the court. In common with all court rules these instruments are available on the Courts Service website.

Stenography services have now been replaced by the Digital Audio Recording system which enable the provision of high quality transcripts from the digital recording of the court proceedings. Where a transcript is prepared for a case in the Court of Criminal Appeal it is in the first instance reviewed by the Judge who presided over the original trial and is approved by the presiding Judge before release to the parties for the appeal.

Where the accuracy of a transcript is disputed, it would be a matter for the party to raise the issue either at the appeal hearing or with the office of the Court of Criminal Appeal in advance of the appeal hearing. All recordings of proceedings are centrally stored and where a dispute arises, the transcript can be checked against the original recording for accuracy.

The position in regard to civil proceedings is that any stenographers that appear in the civil courts are there at the request of the parties. They are paid for by the parties and the Courts Service has no function in relation to them. The accuracy of a transcript in such cases is a matter for the parties.

Cash for Gold Trade

540. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has considered introducing legislation to regulate the cash for gold outlets in view of the increase in burglaries and the amount of gold being stolen and sold on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49558/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I published a report in June, 2012 on the criminal justice aspects of the cash for gold trade. The Report prepared by my Department is available on www.justice.ie. I requested the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Equality and Defence to consider the content of the report, to ensure that it obtains the views of all relevant interested parties and that it makes such report and recommendations to the Houses of the Oireachtas and to Government as it deems proportionate and appropriate in the public interest. I received the Committee's response on 30 May, 2013, and it is currently under consideration.

The Deputy might also note that the latest CSO figures show that burglary offences decreased by 8.9%, continuing the trend observed since the introduction of Operation Fiacla.

Residency Permits

541. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the options available to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare who wishes to renew their Stamp 4 status but is unable to afford the associated fee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49587/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned was granted permission to remain in the State on 5 October, 2005 under the revised arrangements

for the non-EEA parents of children born in Ireland prior to 1 January, 2005, known as the IBC/05 Scheme. This permission was renewed with the most recent permission expiring on 5 October, 2013. I would advise the person concerned to submit a written request for renewal of permission to remain to the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department, at PO BOX 10003, Dublin 1.

The introduction of the registration fee in May, 2006 resulted from a policy decision that the fee income was required for the ongoing development of immigration services (both in the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) and the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB). Our migrant population have made a valuable contribution to the economic, cultural and social life of Ireland and will continue to do so. However, I believe that it is not unreasonable to ask those who benefit from the immigration system to make a reasonable contribution to the cost of services. It is common practice throughout Europe to charge a fee for immigration services. By comparison with many jurisdictions the current registration fee represents very good value.

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.

Court Orders

542. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if, under section 24(5)(g) of the Multi-Unit Development Act 2011, an order amending the covenants contained in an agreement, including a lease between the developer, owners' management company and the unit owners, has ever been availed of; if he will provide instances where this provision has been applied; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49593/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have been advised by the Courts Service that the information sought by the Deputy in respect of court orders under section 24 of the Multi-Unit Developments Act 2011 is not available since court records are not maintained in a manner which identifies such cases according to the types of orders granted.

Crime Data

543. Deputy Niall Collins asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of hit and run incidents that have occurred here from 2005 to date in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49597/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the information sought by the Deputy is not readily available. Due to the manner in which collision statistics are recorded, it would require a disproportionate expenditure of Garda time and resources to compile the information requested.

Crime Data

544. Deputy Niall Collins asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of drink

driving incidents that occurred here per annum from 2005 to date in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49598/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Garda Síochána Act 2005 makes provision for the compilation and publication of crime statistics by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose.

I have requested the CSO to provide statistics directly to the Deputy relating to the number of recorded offences in respect of incidents of driving in charge of a vehicle while over the legal alcohol limit.

Crime Data

545. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of drug or other substance abuse driving incidents that occurred here per annum from 2005 to date in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49599/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Garda Síochána Act 2005 makes provision for the compilation and publication of crime statistics by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose.

I have requested the CSO to provide statistics directly to the Deputy relating to the number of recorded offences in respect of incidents of driving in charge of a vehicle while under the influence of drugs.

Garda Deployment

546. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the total number of staff in the Garda bureau of fraud investigation unit in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013 broken down in tabular form by the following units, fraud assessment unit and commercial fraud investigation unit, money-laundering investigation unit including the financial intelligence unit, cheque, payment card, counterfeit currency and advance fee fraud investigation unit, computer crime investigation unit; and the number of secondments to the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement. [49600/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have requested the detailed information sought by the Deputy from the Garda Commissioner and as soon as it is to hand I will pass it on to the Deputy.

Legislative Programme

547. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps being taken to tackle cybercrime here; if a strategy has been developed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49601/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I can inform the Deputy that significant steps are being taken to tackle cybercrime.

Among the Bills promised in the Government Legislation Programme is the Criminal Justice (Cybercrime) Bill. The Bill was originally intended to enable ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime (the ‘Budapest Convention’) and the transposition of the 2005 EU Framework Decision on attacks against Information Systems. Drafting had been at an advanced stage when the European Commission presented a proposal for a Directive on Attacks on Information Systems which would repeal and replace the 2005 Framework Decision. Work on the Bill was put on hold pending finalisation of the Directive so that Ireland will have a single comprehensive piece of legislation dealing with cybercrime.

The Directive has recently been formally adopted and a review of the Bill is being carried out in my Department to assess what further provisions, if any, may be necessary to ensure that the Bill gives full effect to the Directive and the Convention.

An Garda Síochána have also undertaken a number of initiatives which have sought to strengthen the law enforcement response to cybercrime. The strategy of An Garda Síochána in this regard focuses on a number of key elements including prevention, detection and training.

The Computer Crime Investigation Unit (CCIU) of the Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigation is the primary Garda unit responsible for investigating computer crime in Ireland.

While the investigation of certain aspects of computer crime is undertaken directly by the CCIU, the Unit also provides expert assistance to Senior Investigating Officers and Investigation Teams tasked with the investigation of this type of criminality on a District and Divisional basis.

Members of the CCIU also provide warnings to the public in relation to various types of Cyber Crime, including Computer viruses, Denial-of-service attacks, Malware (malicious code), Fraud and identity theft and Phishing scams. The CCIU is also represented on the Irish Payment Card Service Organisation and the Irish Banking Federation High Tech Crime Forum.

In addition, a member of the CCIU is on full time secondment with CERT (Computer Emergency Response Team). The role of CERT, which was established under the auspices of the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources as part of a series of initiatives to deal with the general issue of cybersecurity, is to prepare and manage cyber incidents in conjunction with relevant stakeholders.

I can also inform the Deputy that members of the CCIU continue to be trained in the techniques necessary to counter cybercrime, in partnership with the Centre for Cybercrime Investigation at University College Dublin.

Finally, the Deputy might also be interested to note that cybercrime and organised crime were considered during the public consultation on the forthcoming White Paper on crime and that these subjects will be addressed in the White Paper.

Computer Crime Investigation Unit

548. Deputy Niall Collins asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí tasked with co-operating with the European Cybercrime Centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49602/13]

549. Deputy Niall Collins asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí who have taken part in Europol’s European cybercrime training and education group per annum from 2005 to date in 2013. [49603/13]

550. Deputy Niall Collins asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the cybercrime training courses for gardaí that have been developed at the Garda training college in Templemore, County Tipperary. [49604/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 548 to 550, inclusive, together.

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the Computer Crime Investigation Unit is part of the Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigation.

While the investigation of certain aspects of computer crime is undertaken directly by the Computer Crime Investigation Unit, the Unit also provides expert assistance to Senior Investigating Officers and Investigation Teams tasked with the investigation of this type of criminality on a District and Divisional basis.

There are currently twenty-five Gardaí allocated to the Computer Crime Investigation Unit.

The Computer Crime Investigation Unit liaise with the European Cybercrime Centre both directly and via the Europol Office at the Liaison & Protection Section at Garda Headquarters.

The European Cybercrime Training and Education Group (ECTEG) was formed in 2007 for the development and delivery of cybercrime training courses. Since its inception training courses have been successfully delivered by associated agencies and Member States including Ireland.

Two members of An Garda Síochána have been members of the board of the Group since its formation. To date twenty-eight members of An Garda Síochána have received ECTEG training in computer forensics and cybercrime investigations.

While no cyber crime training courses have been developed at Templemore for delivery to members of An Garda Síochána, members of the Computer Crime Investigation Unit have received cybercrime training courses delivered by a number of agencies including the following:

- CEPOL - European Police College
- OLAF – The European Anti-Fraud Office
- ECTEG - European Cybercrime Training and Education Group
- UCD Centre for Cyber Crime Investigation
- Masters in Forensic Computing & Cybercrime Investigation at UCD

Garda Investigations

551. Deputy Billy Timmins asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if an investigation was ever carried out into the allegations outlined in a book (details supplied); and if not, his plans to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49608/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am not aware of any such investigation and I do not consider that, as Minister for Justice and Equality, I have any function in relation to the investigation of anonymous claims of the kind referred to by the Deputy.

Garda Investigations

552. Deputy Billy Timmins asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding a cold case investigation (details supplied); if he will provide the details including location, circumstances and items of evidence that were missing in the case of the person; the investigations, if any, that took place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49609/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Deputy may wish to be aware that I met with the family of Chief Officer Brian Stack on 3 May this year and attended a memorial service in Portlaoise Prison where a bust in Chief Officer Stack's honour was unveiled.

As I have previously said, Chief Officer Stack was a dedicated and committed servant of the Irish State and a loyal husband and father. His murder was not only a tragedy for his family but an attack on the foundations of this State.

I have been aware from the Garda Commissioner that the case has been the subject of a review by the Serious Crime Review Team and is with the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation which, as a matter of course, liaises with families.

I have sought information from the Garda authorities on the specific matters raised by the Deputy and will contact him when I have received this.

Overseas Missions

553. Deputy Lucinda Creighton asked the Minister for Defence if the Defence Forces deployment with the EU Training Mission in Somalia is to continue in 2014 and beyond; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49089/13]

558. Deputy Lucinda Creighton asked the Minister for Defence the way deployment to the Somalia EU Training Mission for Irish Defence Forces is determined; the level of interdepartmental consultation with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on such decisions; the reason the total number of Defence Forces deployed in Somalia fell between June 2013 and November 2013 from 11 to eight; if this was a strategic redeployment of Defence Force members to other jurisdictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49041/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 553 and 558 together.

EUTM Somalia, which was launched on 7 April 2010, aims to strengthen the Somali National Government as a functioning government and to empower the institutions to serve the Somali citizens, by providing military training to members of the Somali National Armed Forces. The mission is part of the EU's long term strategy for the Horn of Africa. EUTM Somalia has contributed to the training of approximately 3,600 Somali soldiers to date.

Following Government approval, five (5) Defence Forces personnel were deployed in April 2010 to the EU-led Training Mission, EUTM Somalia, providing a training team and certain staff posts. Ireland took over operational command of the mission in August 2011, with the appointment of Colonel Michael Beary of the Defence Forces as Mission Commander and deployed additional staff to support the role of Mission Commander. On 1 February 2013, Brigadier General Gerald Aherne took up the appointment of Mission Commander.

On 22 January 2013, the European Council adopted a decision extending the mandate of EUTM Somalia until March 2015. The new EUTM Somalia mandate involves a significant change of focus of the mission from Uganda to Somalia. In this regard, the European Council

has gradually been moving the mission's training activities from Uganda to Mogadishu in Somalia. The move is expected to be completed in early 2014, but this is dependent on security conditions in Somalia.

Ireland currently has eight (8) personnel serving with the mission including the Mission Commander. The recent reduction in the number of Defence Forces personnel deployed to EUTM Somalia from eleven (11) to eight (8) was as a result of the completion of that training phase of the mission to which Ireland contributed three (3) personnel. With Italy taking over the role of Mission Commander, Ireland will draw down the Defence Forces personnel associated with Ireland having held that post. Ireland's participation in the mission beyond 31 December 2013 will be considered by the Government shortly when the mission comes up for review.

Departmental Properties

554. Deputy Dara Calleary asked the Minister for Defence if Lifford Army Barracks and Rockhill Army Barracks in County Donegal were sold to Donegal County Council on a bundled basis at the request of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48829/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): As I have stated in the House previously agreement was reached some time ago for the sale of both Lifford and Rockhill to Donegal County Council. My Department has been pressing the Council for completion of the transfer and the Council has promised progress on this matter by early December.

Departmental Properties

555. Deputy Timmy Dooley asked the Minister for Defence the position regarding the disposal of lands in his ownership at Lahinch, County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48901/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): Following a re-organisation of the Reserve Defence Force Lahinch Camp closed in March of this year. The property is surplus to my Department's requirements and in accordance with normal procedure was offered for sale to other Government Departments and Public Bodies. Discussions have taken place with Clare County Council and local community groups in relation to the property and these are now nearing completion. If the property is not sold through this process it will be disposed of by public auction in early 2014.

Civil Defence Training

556. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Defence if any grants are available from his Department in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48910/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): Dublin Civil Defence has over 650 active volunteer members. It also has a large fleet of vehicles including ambulances and fire tenders. There are two Road Safety Authority approved driving instructors within Dublin Civil Defence. These instructors provide the required driving lessons to ensure that Dublin Civil Defence has an adequate number of appropriately qualified drivers. Dublin Civil Defence also pays for the required driver tests. It is an operational matter for Dublin Civil Defence to select which volunteer members are provided with this driver training.

In view of these arrangements, the issue of my Department providing grants for driving lessons does not arise.

Departmental Bodies

557. Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl asked the Minister for Defence the names and qualifications of all those appointed by him to serve on his Department of Defence working group on Lariam; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49040/13]

561. Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl asked the Minister for Defence if his Department has secured expert advice on the development of an anti-malaria policy; the names and qualifications of those providing such advice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49511/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 557 and 561 together.

The Working Group on Malaria Chemoprophylaxis in the Defence Forces was convened in the context of current and potential litigation. The group comprises of representatives of the Defence Forces, the Department of Defence, State Claims Agency and the Chief State Solicitors Office. The group includes representatives of the Medical Corps, and persons dealing with Human Resources and litigation management in the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces. The report of the group is legally privileged, as is information about the working group and its membership.

I can confirm that the Group investigated all the various allegations surrounding the use of Lariam and obtained advice from leading medical experts. These experts concur with the practices followed by the Defence Forces in prescribing Lariam.

Question No. 558 answered with Question No. 553.

Defence Forces Deployment

559. Deputy Lucinda Creighton asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide in tabular form the total number of Defence Forces personnel deployed to the Golan Heights since March of 2011; if he will breakdown the figures by each six month deployment during that period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49042/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): A total of one hundred and twenty-six (126) members of the Permanent Defence Force are currently deployed to the Golan Heights in Syria. Full details of all personnel deployed to the Golan Heights since March 2011 are listed in the tabular statement attached. The main Defence Forces deployment is with the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in Syria. The Irish 43rd Infantry Group comprises one hundred and nineteen (115) personnel and was deployed to UNDOF in September 2013. The Irish 43rd Infantry Group is tasked primarily to serve as the Force Reserve Company within the UNDOF Area of Responsibility on the Golan Heights. Their duties include the provision of a Quick Reaction Force which is on standby to assist with on-going operations within the UNDOF Area of Responsibility. The Force Reserve Company also carries out patrols and convoy escorts as necessary. Four (4) members of the Permanent Defence Force are also deployed at UNDOF's Headquarters.

Major General Michael Finn was seconded to the United Nations to fill the post of Head of Mission and Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO)

with effect from 1 July 2013 for an initial period of one year. There are a total of twelve (12) members of the Permanent Defence Force serving with UNTSO, seven of whom are currently based in Syria as part of Observer Group Golan (OGG).

Defence Forces personnel deployed to the Golan Heights in Syria

UN Mission	Average Number Serving	Length of Deployment
UNTSO United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation - Observer Group Golan (OGG)	Since March 2011 an average of between 6 and 8 personnel have been serving with UNTSO's OGG.	Irish personnel are deployed with UNTSO for 12 months initially with possible extension of up to 24 months
UNDOF United Nations Disengagement Observer Force	3 personnel serving since June 2013 1 personnel serving since September 2013. All 4 personnel are based at UNDOF HQ at Camp Faouar in the Golan Heights	12 month deployment
	115 personnel are serving since 28 September 2013 as members of the 43rd Infantry Group UNDOF	6 month deployment

Defence Forces Recruitment

560. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Defence if he expects recruitment for the armed forces to recommence; the date on which this might happen; the application process involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49078/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised by the Military Authorities that the strength of the Permanent Defence Force, at 30 September 2013, the latest date for which details are available, was 9,188 comprising 7,379 Army, 784 Air Corps and 1,025 Naval Service personnel. The September 2013 strength figures have been calculated on the basis of actual numbers serving on that date, excluding those members who are on secondment to, and being paid by other organisations, or on career breaks. All future strength figures will be calculated on this basis. General Service recruitment recommenced in September 2013, from the existing competition panels, from which it is expected there will be an intake of approximately 400 recruits. In addition 20 Apprentices for the Air Corps and 15 Engine Room Artificers for the Naval Service are due to be recruited from current competitions. As the Permanent Defence Force is currently below the agreed stabilised strength of 9,500, it is my intention that targeted recruitment will continue within the resource envelope allocated to Defence. It is planned to run a new General Service recruitment competition in the first half of 2014. Details will be made available on the Defence Forces website www.military.ie when the competition commences.

Application for recruitment to the Defence Forces is conducted on-line and all correspondence is conducted via e-mail. Candidates must successfully complete psychometric testing, fitness testing, and interview in order to progress through the competition. Following these stages of the recruitment process, successful applicants may be placed on panels and offered a position, subject to successfully completing a medical examination and obtaining Garda Siochána Security Clearance.

Animal Welfare

562. Deputy Michael Colreavy asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the docking of dogs' tails will still be permitted, even though section 16 of the Animal Welfare Act would appear to prohibit such practices for cosmetic purposes. [48825/13]

563. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will ensure that draft regulations under the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013, will not allow the docking of tails and removal of dew claws of dogs under four days old without anaesthetic for cosmetic purposes, as this is completely prohibited by the Veterinary Council of Ireland. [48843/13]

609. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the concerns, raised by the ISPCA and others, that the provision to allow for the docking of tails and dew claw removal by non-veterinary trained persons for cosmetic reasons should be excluded from the Animal Health and Welfare Act regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49497/13]

614. Deputy Finian McGrath asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will consider ending the unnecessary cruel practice of tail docking and dew claw removal in certain dogs. [49606/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 562, 563, 609 and 614 together.

The Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 (Section 16) prohibits the carrying out of procedures that may cause pain/suffering to animals, including certain husbandry related procedures, unless provided for under Regulations to be made under the Act. I propose to commence the Act shortly and, in this context, a number of draft regulations covering a wide range of issues are in the course of preparation to coincide with its commencement.

With regard to the specific issue on tail docking of dogs' tails, the current legislation (the Protection of Animals Amendment Act (1965)), allows for tail docking of all dogs up to 1 month old by any person. My officials have met with a number of groups who made representations in relation to an appropriate approach to the docking of dog's tails. The Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 specifically prohibits the docking of a dogs tail for cosmetic purposes and under no circumstances will this be allowed. I am currently considering whether tail docking should be permitted in very limited circumstances in relation to working dogs, specifically terriers, spaniels and pointers. A fundamental element involved in drafting the regulations mentioned above will be to ensure the welfare of all animals, including dogs.

Commonage Framework Plans

564. Deputy Noel Coonan asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 184 of 7 November 2013, if he will identify each commonage that was subject to a ground inspection and the date of each inspection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48851/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The data sought is being compiled and will be forwarded directly to the Deputy immediately it becomes

available.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

565. Deputy Dara Calleary asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will have their area based payment processed; the reason for the delay in same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48853/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payment under the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme has not yet issued to the person named as their holding has not yet satisfied the Scheme minimum stocking density requirements. As soon as the holding is confirmed as having met these requirements, the case will be further processed with a view to payment issuing at the earliest possible date thereafter.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

566. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason payments have been held up in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48854/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): With processing of the application of the person named under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Area Scheme expected to be completed shortly, payments will then issue directly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

567. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason payments have been held up in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48855/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Following a review of the land submitted by the person named on his Single Payment Scheme application it was found that two of the parcels declared contained ineligible features. The person named has recently sought a review of the decision to exclude the ineligible features. This request will be examined in the near future and my Department will be in contact with the person named regarding the outcome in the coming weeks.

Agriculture Schemes Payments

568. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason payments have been held up in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48856/13]

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

Single Payment Scheme Payments

569. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) has not received farm payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48857/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Following a review of the land declared by the person named on his Single Payment Scheme and other area-bases schemes it was found that several of the land parcels declared contained ineligible features. The person named has sought a review of the decision and this review is currently being undertaken. My Department will be in direct contact with the person named regarding the outcome of this review shortly.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

570. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a disadvantaged area aid payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48904/13]

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

Single Payment Scheme Payments

571. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a penalty was applied under the disadvantaged area based scheme against a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the way this penalty was calculated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48932/13]

572. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a penalty was attached to the single farm payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway when the land was awarded aid for forestry and the person was entitled to payment on those hectares; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48933/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 571 and 572 together.

During initial processing of the 2013 Single Payment Scheme application of the person named, a number of errors relating to parcels claimed under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme and also claimed by the person named under the Forestry Scheme were identified. As subsequent validations have now confirmed this land as eligible under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme, the application of the person named will be further processed to ensure that this will be reflected in the balancing payment due to issue to farmers from 1 December 2013.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

573. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will advise how much longer it will take for maps to be digitised in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49001/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): As processing of the application of the person named under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was recently finalised, payments issued, directly to the nominated bank account of the person named, on 7 November and 15 November 2013 in respect of each Scheme, respectively.

Foreshore Licence Applications

574. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the foreshore application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; the reason for the delay in granting the application; the length of time it will take for this application to be finalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49016/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application for an Aquaculture Licence was received by the Department from the applicant referred to in respect of a site located in Inver/Donegal Bay in November 2011. The application is for cultivation of Pacific Oysters using bags and trestles.

The application area is located adjacent to Donegal Bay (Murvagh) Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and within the Donegal Bay Special Protection Area (SPA) (Natura 2000 sites). All applications in 'Natura' areas are required to be appropriately assessed for the purpose of environmental compliance with the EU Birds and Habitats Directives.

The assessment process of aquaculture applications is being dealt with on a bay-by-bay basis. This process includes the following:

- (a) a detailed data collection in 91 Bays/Estuaries
- (b) detailed analysis of raw data collected
- (c) setting of Conservation Objectives by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) in respect of each site
- (d) carrying out Appropriate assessments of each licence application/fishery plan against the detailed Conservation Objectives set, and
- (e) determination of Licences/Fisheries on the basis of the Appropriate Assessment and other relevant factors.

The appropriate assessments are being carried out by the Marine Institute on behalf of the Department and to date five bays have been assessed, including Inver/ Donegal Bay.

The Department is currently examining the outcome of the Appropriate Assessment with a view to formulating policy recommendations in respect of aquaculture activity in Inver/Donegal Bay. Such policy recommendations will take account of all national and EU legislative requirements and will reflect the full engineering, scientific, environmental, legal and public policy aspects of each licence application. This process, which is very detailed in nature, is ongoing.

Addressing the issue of aquaculture licensing in Natura 2000 areas is a key priority for my Department and the Deputy can be assured that every effort is being made to expedite the completion of the process in Inver/Donegal Bay having regard to all the complexities involved.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

575. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding payments in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49020/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Areas' Scheme application on 9 May 2013. EU Regulations governing the administration of the 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. This inspection has been completed and the results finalised.

Payments under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme and Disadvantaged Areas' Scheme issued directly to the nominated bank account of person named on 14 and 15 November 2013, respectively.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

576. Deputy Timmy Dooley asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive a disadvantaged areas payment for 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49022/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named is one of a number of applicants under the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, whose cases were impacted upon by the requirement to have achieved a minimum stocking density of 0.3 livestock units per forage hectare in 2011, and who applied for and were refused derogation in this regard. The person named subsequently appealed unsuccessfully to the independently chaired DAS Appeals Committee; the person named was informed accordingly and was advised of his right to pursue the matter with the Office of the Ombudsman.

Live Exports

577. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the fact that recently an export company got into trading difficulties which has resulted in many marts being exposed financially, as they are owed a lot of money; if he has any proposals to be of assistance to these marts and to provide emergency funding to help them through this difficult period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49026/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware that a company involved in the live export trade has been placed in receivership. However, I understand from various public statements that, while significant amounts may be owed to marts, the marts have signalled their commitment to continue to pay Irish livestock suppliers on a weekly basis. I should also point out that under agricultural state aid guidelines, Member States are precluded from assisting firms in difficulty.

The Deputy will be aware that my Department attaches considerable importance to the live export trade and, over the years, has done all in its power to facilitate this trade. The reality is

that the live export trade provides alternative market outlets for certain categories of livestock, particularly weanlings, thereby serving a market demand and providing increased competition in the market place for cattle. I am always keen that Irish meat and livestock producers can access as many global markets as possible and, to that end, my Department will continue to seek to ensure market access from Irish produce, including live exports.

Common Agricultural Policy Reform

578. Deputy Simon Harris asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the actions he will take in the context of the rural development plan to address the income concerns of many farmers who depend to a great extent on Pillar II payments, particularly in the vulnerable sectors and regions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49036/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The European Council agreement on the Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) provides a total of €2.19bn, or some €313m per year, for Ireland under Pillar 2 of the CAP for the period 2014 - 2020. The development of a new Rural Development Programme under Pillar 2 will be a key support in enhancing the competitiveness of the agri-food sector, achieving more sustainable management of natural resources and ensuring a more balanced development of rural areas.

Work is currently ongoing in my Department to design the new Rural Development Programme (RDP) for the period from 2014 – 2020. In designing the new RDP, my Department must take account of the range of requirements set out in the draft Rural Development Regulation and the need to support key policy aims for the agri-food sector in the light of the Food Harvest 2020 strategy. In undertaking this work, a number of ex-ante analyses are being undertaken and a public consultation process has also taken place.

While final decisions in relation to what measures are to be included in the new RDP have not yet been made, my Department is in ongoing contact with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the overall financing that will be required. I expect to make decisions in relation to the measures to be supported under the new RDP by the end of this year, and to submit a draft programme to the Commission in early 2014.

Food Harvest 2020 Strategy

579. Deputy Simon Harris asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if it is his intention that investment aid will be available across sectors to help farmers meet Food Harvest 2020 targets, fulfil higher environmental and welfare standards and improve on farm efficiency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49037/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The new EU policy framework for rural development for the 2014-2020 period is being finalised at present. In the determination of the farm sectors in which investment aid will be made available in the next rural development programme, I will be examining all options and consulting relevant stakeholders to ensure that the maximum benefit is derived from the financial resources which will be available.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

580. Deputy John McGuinness asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine

if disadvantaged area payment will issue as a matter of urgency in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [49059/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payment under the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme issued directly to the nominated bank account of the person named on 7 November 2013.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

581. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the delay in payment in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49067/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application from the person named under both the Single Payment Scheme and the Disadvantaged Area Scheme was received on 15 May 2013. In order to meet EU requirements, the application concerned was one of a number which was selected for a Satellite (remote sensing) inspection. After initial processing some over claims on parcels were detected which necessitated a further ground inspection.

The ground inspection has now been carried out and the results are being finalised with the intention of issuing any payment due as soon as possible. In the event that any queries arise officials in my Department will shortly be in contact with the person named.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

582. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding area aid and single farm payment in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49068/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme application on 30 April 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. This inspection has been completed and the results are now being finalised with the intention of issuing any payment due as soon as possible. In the event that any queries arise officials in my Department will shortly be in contact with the person named.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

583. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding payments in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49069/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme application on 13 May 2013. EU Regulations governing the administration of the schemes require that full and com-

prehensive 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. This inspection has been completed and the results finalised.

Processing of payment under the 2013 Single Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme has recently been finalised and will issue shortly to the nominated bank account of person named.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

584. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for cuts in payments in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49070/13]

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 the 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 identified discrepancies between the area declared and the area found, resulting in an over-declaration in area of between 3% and 20%. Based on the Terms and Conditions of the schemes, this results in the payment, under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme, being based on the found area having being reduced by double the difference between the area found and the area claimed. Payment on the above basis issued to the nominated bank account of the person named on 22 October 2013.

My Department has now reviewed this aspect of the case further and while an over-declaration in area of between 3% and 20% continues to apply, the level of area reduction has been reduced, resulting in a lower level of monetary reduction/penalty to be applied to the 2013 payment due under the Single Payment Scheme. Following this review, any monies owing will be processed and issued to the nominated bank account of person named as soon as possible. The person named will shortly be notified of the decision of the ground eligibility inspection and of their right to seek a review of this decision.

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 informed of this decision on the 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 any review, the decision can be appealed to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office, within 3 months.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

585. Deputy Seán Conlan asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) in County Monaghan has still not received area aid payments;

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49083/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payments under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme and 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme issued directly to the nominated bank account of the person named on 1 November and 24 September respectively.

Question No. 586 withdrawn.

Harbours and Piers Funding

587. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason an application by Mayo County Council for funding towards improvement works at Killala Harbour was refused; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49085/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Killala Harbour is owned by Mayo County Council and responsibility for its repair and maintenance rests with the Local Authority in the first instance. My Department, however, provides funding for the development and repair of Local Authority owned piers and slipways under the annual Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme subject to available Exchequer funding and overall national priorities.

I am pleased to inform the deputy that under the 2013 Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme a total of €202,500 has been approved for two separate project works at Killala Harbour and Killala Main Pier.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

588. **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. [49121/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payment under the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme has not yet issued to the person named as their holding has not yet satisfied the Scheme minimum stocking density requirements. As soon as their holding concerned is confirmed as having met these requirements, the case will be further processed with a view to payment issuing at the earliest possible date thereafter.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Appeals

589. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of appeals submitted to the disadvantaged areas scheme appeal committee by way of the minimum stock density derogation application for the years 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012; and of the appeals received the numbers successful. [49141/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I established the DAS Appeals Committee to deal with appeals from those farmers who were adversely affected by the changes to the Terms and Conditions governing the 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, specifically the requirement to have achieved a minimum stocking density on their holding of 0.3 livestock units per forage hectare and were dissatisfied with my Department's

adjudication on their appeals.

It will be recalled that, arising from the 2012 budgetary process, savings needed to be found in my Department's expenditure. Accordingly, it was necessary to adjust the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme. However, rather than simply apply an across the board cut to the rates payable or reduce the maximum payable area, I decided that real efforts should be made to focus the Scheme on those farmers who are most actively contributing to achieving the aims of the Scheme, namely:

- ensuring continued agricultural land use, thereby contributing to the maintenance of viable rural communities;
- maintaining the countryside; and
- maintaining and promoting sustainable farming systems, which take account of environmental protection measures.

Provision was made for an appeals process to take account of a variety of situations, specifically:

- Restriction on the stocking levels on the holding due to adherence to an agri-environments plan such as REPS, AEOS or National Parks and Wildlife Service plan.
- Farming marginal land where the level of stock that can be maintained is restricted.
- Illness or death in family.
- Outbreak of animal disease in the herd.
- New entrant to farming.

At the same time, I was also determined that those adversely affected by the 2012 changes should be afforded the opportunity to appeal, where they could show legitimate reasons for their inability to meet the new requirements. In total, my Department wrote to in excess of 10,000 beneficiaries under the 2011 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme whose holdings had not achieved the minimum stocking density of 0.3 livestock units per forage hectare as required under the Terms and Conditions of the 2012 Scheme.

In response, my Department received a total of 9,829 derogation applications of which 7,414 were successful. Those, whose applications were unsuccessful, were informed of their right of appeal to the independently chaired DAS Appeals Committee, on foot of which 1,574 appeals were received. On the basis of additional information which had not previously been submitted, my Department was in a position to overturn the original decision on 614 cases, without the need to refer the cases to the DAS Appeals Committee. Of the appeals submitted to the Committee, decisions have been taken in respect of 960 cases, of which 413 were allowed, 547 disallowed.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Eligibility

590. Deputy Patrick O'Donovan asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the stock density for farmers under the disadvantaged areas scheme for the years 2009,2010 and 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49151/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The position

regarding stocking density levels under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme in respect of the years in question are as outlined in the relevant Scheme Terms and Conditions, as follows:

2009 Scheme: Livestock Unit Values

The following livestock unit values are used for calculating compliance with the minimum stocking level of 0.15 livestock units per forage hectare for the entire area declared under the 2009 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme. You must possess, hold and maintain for at least three continuous months of the year the livestock required to maintain the minimum stocking level. The only exempted cases from compliance with the minimum stocking level of 0.15 livestock units per forage hectare are applicants where a REPS plan or a Commonage Framework plan or any other environmental scheme for your holding requires a lower stocking level. In such cases the requirement to maintain animals for at least three consecutive months of the year will apply to the number of animals per forage hectare which is the equivalent in livestock unit values to that lower stocking level.

2010 Scheme: Livestock Unit Values

The following livestock unit values are used for calculating compliance with the minimum stocking level of 0.15 livestock units per forage hectare for the entire area declared under the 2010 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme. You must possess, hold and maintain for at least three continuous months of the year the livestock required to maintain the minimum stocking level. The only exempted cases from compliance with the minimum stocking level of 0.15 livestock units per forage hectare are applicants where a REPS plan or a Commonage Framework plan or any other environmental scheme for the holding requires a lower stocking level. In such cases the requirement to maintain animals for at least three consecutive months of the year will apply to the number of animals per forage hectare which is the equivalent in livestock unit values to that lower stocking level.

2011 Scheme: Livestock Unit Values

The following livestock unit values are used for calculating compliance with the minimum stocking level of 0.15 livestock units per forage hectare for the entire area declared under the 2011 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme. You must possess, hold and maintain for at least three continuous months of the year the livestock required to maintain the minimum stocking level. The only exempted cases from compliance with the minimum stocking level of 0.15 livestock units per forage hectare are applicants where a REPS plan or a Commonage Framework plan or any other environmental scheme for the holding requires a lower stocking level. In such cases the requirement to maintain animals for at least three consecutive months of the year will apply to the number of animals per forage hectare which is the equivalent in livestock unit values to that lower stocking level.

Grassland Sheep Scheme Payments

591. Deputy Paul J. Connaughton asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) in County Galway has not received payments from the grassland sheep scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49166/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I can confirm that payments under the 2013 Grassland Sheep Scheme are scheduled to commence issuing, on target, as and from 9 December 2013.

Live Exports

592. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the communication he has had with companies (details supplied) in view of the significant moneys owed to both individual farmers and marts; if he will engage with the receiver to ensure that outstanding payments are secured to pay for livestock; and if he will clarify if it is possible to transfer the ownership of the stock under EU animal identification rules where payment has not been made in full. [49183/13]

593. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will reopen the lines of engagement with the pillar banks to ensure that a flexible approach is taken to farmers and marts who are owed significant moneys from live exporters and a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49184/13]

612. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the contact which he has had with his Italian counterparts regarding the retention of title for stock sold by Irish farmers and marts through TLT International; if a restriction can be placed on the slaughter of these animals pending the payment of outstanding moneys; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49570/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 592, 593 and 612 together.

As Minister of State Hayes stated to the House during the topical debate on this matter last week, it would be inappropriate for me or my Department to interfere in the operations of a receivership in the manner suggested by the Deputy. The role of a receiver appointed to companies in distress is set down in law.

I understand from various public statements that, while significant amounts may be owed to marts, the marts have signalled their commitment to continue to pay Irish livestock suppliers on a weekly basis. I am confident that the banks will deal sympathetically with individual farmers and marts who are owed money by the company concerned.

The Deputy will be aware that my Department attaches considerable importance to the live export trade and, over the years, has done all in its power to facilitate this trade. The reality is that the live export trade provides alternative market outlets for certain categories of livestock, particularly weanlings, thereby serving a market demand and providing increased competition in the market place for cattle. I am always keen that Irish meat and livestock producers can access as many global markets as possible and, to that end, my Department will continue to seek to ensure market access from Irish produce, including live exports.

Trade Missions Data

594. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide the total number of trade missions he or a Minister for State within his Department have been on since he became Minister; if he will provide the country for each of these missions; the names of each business which have operations here which accompanied him on each trade mission; the amount of additional business quantifiable in euro terms each business which accompanied him is doing with that country since the trade mission; if he will provide the total cost to his Department for each of these trade missions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49233/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I have led five trade and investment missions since I became Minister for Agriculture Food and the Marine, to China and the US in 2012, and Switzerland, the Gulf States and the US in 2013. Companies travelled with me on two of these missions - to China and the Gulf States. A list of those companies is set out below.

In the case of China, we have opened the market for specific products and for specific companies which have been approved to export. I would not have, nor would it be appropriate to provide, information that might be considered as business confidential in terms of specific companies and their sales/exports. I can, however, indicate that in the case of China:

- Exports of Irish agri-food and related exports have grown in value from €167m in 2010 to €323m in 2012, an increase of 93%;
- Exports of dairy products have increased from €103m in 2010 to €182m in 2012, an increase of 77%, with exports of infant formula amounting to €146m in 2012 an increase of almost 80% since 2011;
- Pigmeat exports have increased from €8m in 2010 to €44m in 2012, an increase of 450%;
- Exports of seafood have grown from €5.7m in 2010 to €10m in 2012, a 75% increase;
- Exports of Hides and skins are valued at €40m in 2012.

In the first eight months of 2013, when compared with the same period in 2012, there has again been a significant increase in exports to China, rising from €213m to €281m, an increase of 32%, with dairy exports showing a substantial increase from €120m to €176m, an increase of 47% in this period. There have also been a number of joint ventures announced between Irish and Chinese companies.

In the case of the Gulf States, Ireland currently exports almost €200m into the region and I would hope that we will be able to double the value of our agri food exports by 2020.

Among the publically announced developments during the trade mission, were the following:

- A €20m investment by the Irish Dairy Board in a 75 % stake in a dairy company in Saudi Arabia which will result in substantial volumes of milk powders being imported from Ireland for the production of up to 20,000 tons of cheese, using advanced technology developed by Teagasc which will allow the production of cheese from powders;
- The opening of the Kerry Development and Application Centre in Dubai, serving the Middle East, North Africa Regions and Turkey (MENAT);
- €5m contract for Irish Company Biotector for water analysis;
- Establishment by Bord Bia of an office in the Gulf Region to assist companies exporting or wishing to export to the region.

As to the US and Switzerland, exports of agri-food to the US have increased from €406m in 2010 to €518m in 2012 while exports to Switzerland have increased from €29m to €38m in this period.

The costs in relation to each of these trade missions are being collated at present and I will forward that information to the Deputy as soon as possible.

PARTICIPANTS IN TRADE MISSION TO MIDDLE EAST - OCTOBER 2013

Participating Company
Delegate
DAIRY SECTOR
Glanbia
Irish Dairy Board
Kilbeg Dairies
Dairygold Co-Op Society
Aurivo
Glenstall Foods
MEAT SECTOR
Ashbourne Meats
Dawn Meats
Donald Russell Intl. Ltd
Kepak
Dawn Farm Foods
ABP Ireland
Irish Country Meats
Liffey Meats
Kildare Chilling Co
Abbeyfield Fine Foods
FOOD & BEVERAGE SECTOR
Aran Candy
Murphy's Irish Seafood
Allinall Ingredients
Keogh's Crisps/Potatoes
Clonakilty Blackpudding Co.
Enterprise Ireland
BloTector Analytical Systems
Blackwater Engineering
Creme Group
Dairymaster
Farrelly & Mitchell
Kent Stainless
UCC
Malone O'Regan
EQUINE SECTOR
GOFFS
Green Acres Equestrian Centre,
Millstreet
Shane McGonagle
Noel Carroll Consultancy and Engineering

Company database for China visit

Beef	Consumer Foods and alcoholic beverages	Miscellaneous
ABP	Keelings	Bord Bia
Dawn Meats Group	Lily O'Briens	Irish Farmers' Association
Dunbia	Diageo	Meat Industry Ireland
Irish Casings Company	Pernot Ricard	Macra na Feirme
Kepak Group	Nature's Best	KPMG
Agra Trading	Agri-tech	Ulster Bank
Kildare Chilling	Liscarroll Engineering Ltd	Irish Dairy Industry Assoc.
Liffey Meats	FRS Training	Enterprise Ireland
Viastar	Cyber Colloids	Forfas
Mira	Connollys Red Mills	Pigmeat/poultry
Slaney Foods	University College Dublin	Carton Bros
Irish Country Meats	Richard Keenan & Co. Ltd	Silverhill Foods
Ashbourne Meats	E Pearson International Ltd	Rosderra
Seafood	Goffs Bloodstock Sales	QK Meats
Aquasea	University College Cork	Dairy
Atlantic Dawn	Bimeda Ireland	Dairygold
BIM	Distag Manufacturing Ltd	Glanbia
Carr Shellfish Ireland	Samco Agricultural Manufacturing	Kerry plc
Hannigans		Irish Dairy Board
Marine Harvest		Lakeland Dairies
McBride Fishing		
Murphys Seafoods		
Shellfish de la Mer		

Single Payment Scheme Payments

595. Deputy Dara Calleary asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will have an area based payment and a single farm payment processed; the reason for the delay in same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49248/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): With processing of the application of the person named under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Area Scheme due to be finalised shortly, payments will then issue to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

596. Deputy Patrick O'Donovan asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when single farm payment will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49268/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme was received from the named person on 1 of May

2013, processing of which has recently been finalised. Payment will issue to the nominated bank account of the person named in the coming days.

Scéim na Limistéar faoi Mhíbhuntáiste

597. D'fhiadfraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara cén uair a dhéanfar íocaíocht faoi Scéim na Limistéar faoi Mhíbhuntáiste agus faoin Scéim Íocaíochta Aonair do 2013 le feirmeoir i gContae na Gaillimhe (sonraí leis seo), cén fáth nach bhfuil an íocaíocht seo éisithe go fóill; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [49313/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Chuir an té a ainmnítear iarratas isteach faoin Scéim Íocaíochta Aonair/Scéim na Limistéar faoi Mhíbhuntáiste ar an 16 Aibreán 2013. Éilítéar faoi Rialachán de chuid an AE a dtagann an riarrachán i ndáil leis na scéimeanna faoina scáth go ndéantar seiceáil iomlán riarracháin den chuimsitheacht, lena mbaineann i roinnt cásanna, cuairt chigireachta ar an bhfeirm, sula n-eisítear íocaíocht de chineál ar bith.

Roghnaíodh iarratas an té a ainmnítear maidir le scrúdú i ndáil le hincháilíocht na talún agus croschomhlíontas.

Sonraíodh, ar incháilíocht na talún a scrúdú, míréir áirithe idir an réimse talún a dearbhaíodh agus an réimse talún a bhí ar fáil, rud a d'fhag gur ndearnadh ródhearbhú idir 3% agus 20% maidir le hachar na talún. Tagann dá thoradh sin, bunaithe ar Théarmaí agus ar Choinníollacha na Scéimeanna, go mbunaítear íocaíochtaí na bliana 2013 ar achar an réimse talún a bhí ar fáil arna laghdú de dhá oiread an difríocht idir an t-achar a bhí ar fáil agus an t-achar a ndearnadh éileamh ina leith. Cuirfear an té a ainmnítear ar an eolas faoin gcinneadh sin go gairid chomh maith lena chur in iúl dó go bhfuil de cheart aige athbhreithniú ar an gcinneadh a iarraidh.

Sonraíodh, ar chúrsaí croschomhlíontais a iniúchadh, sárú maidir le coinníollacha a bhaineann leis na Rialacháin Níotráiti agus le Caoi Mhaith Talmhaíochta agus Comhshaoil, agus bhí píonós 40% le gearradh dá bharr sin. Cuireadh an té a ainmnítear ar an eolas faoin gcinneadh sin ar an 20 Meán Fómhair 2013. Cuireadh in iúl don té a ainmnítear chomh maith go bhfuil de cheart aige athbhreithniú a iarraidh ar an gcinneadh seo.

Sa chás go mbíonn an té a ainmnítear míshásta leis an toradh ar athbhreithniú, is féidir achomharc a dhéanamh maidir leis an mbreith sin leis an Oifig Achomharc Talmhaíochta Neamhspleách, taobh istigh de thréimhse 3 mhí.

Rinneadh íocaíochtaí i leith na bliana 2013 a bhí dlite faoin Scéim Íocaíochta Aonair agus Scéim na Limistéar faoi Mhíbhuntáiste, faoi seach, arna mbunú ar a leagtar amach thusa, a eisiúint go díreach leis an gcuntas bainc a bhí sonraithe ag an té a ainmnítear ar an 14 agus an 15 Samhain 2013.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

598. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payments under the 2013 disadvantaged areas based scheme and the 2013 single farm payment scheme will be issued to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in issuing this payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49328/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): As processing of the application of the person named under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme/ Disadvan-

taged Areas Scheme has recently been finalised, payments under both Schemes are due to issue to the person named in the coming days, directly to the nominated bank account.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

599. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a 2013 single farm payment will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49358/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted an application under the 2013 Single Payment and Disadvantaged Area Schemes on 22nd April 2013. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases, land eligibility inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

In order to meet the EU requirements, the application concerned was one of a number which was selected for inspection. The land parcels declared on the application were examined via remote sensing (Satellite Inspection). The inspection and related processes have now been completed and any payments due will issue shortly.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

600. Deputy Mattie McGrath asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary will receive their single farm and disadvantaged area payments; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49379/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under 2013 Single Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 19 April 2013. Processing of the application has recently been finalised and payment under the Single Payment and Disadvantaged Areas Schemes issued, directly to the nominated bank account of the person named on 12 November 2013.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Payments

601. Deputy James Bannon asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Longford will receive their payment of REP scheme and disadvantaged area scheme which is due to them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49395/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the Agri-Environment Options Scheme from the person named was received in my Department on 29th November 2012. The process of ranking and selecting all AEOS applicants was clearly set out in the scheme documentation. Acceptance into the scheme was established using the pre-determined selection criteria as follows:

1. farmers in the Boora region of Co. Offaly who chose Wild Bird Cover Option B (Grey Partridge) as one of their selected options,
2. farmers with a minimum of 0.5 hectares of designated land,

3. farm partnerships,
4. farmers who previously participated in REPS commencing with smallest farms, and
5. others based on farm size (again favouring smaller holdings).

The person named was a previous participant in REPS. Based on the funding available farmers in category 4 with 22.06 hectares of utilisable agricultural area and below were successful. As the farm size of the person named is 144.17, the application was unsuccessful. On 27th May 2013, a letter issued to the person named informing him that he was not successful and setting out the reasons. The person was also informed of right of appeal to AEOS Section. To date, there is no record on an appeal having been received by my Department.

The person named also submitted a Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme application on 14 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. This inspection has been completed and the results are now being finalised with the intention of issuing any payment due as soon as possible. In the event that any queries arise officials in my Department will shortly be in contact with the person named.

Single Payment Scheme Administration

602. Deputy Frank Feighan asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 864 of 5 November 2013, when he will be in a position to provide the full information sought in relation to the withdrawal or reduction of single farm payments for commonages in respect of each county for 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013. [49397/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The material relating to the number of farmers in each county who have had their payments withdrawn or reduced following inspections of commonages by officials of my Department in 2011 and 2012 is being compiled by my Department in respect of the 2011 and 2012 scheme-years and it will be provided to the Deputy as soon as possible. As the 2013 inspections are ongoing or are not yet complete, it is not possible to provide the information requested.

Agriculture Schemes Payments

603. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a single farm payment will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49399/13]

604. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a disadvantaged area aid payment will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49400/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 603 and 604 together.

As processing of the application of the person named under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Area Scheme is due to be completed shortly, payments will then issue

directly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Payments

605. Deputy James Bannon asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Longford will receive their payment of REP scheme, disadvantaged area scheme and single farm payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49413/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in November 2009 and received payments for the first four years of their contract. REPS 4 is a measure under the Rural Development Programme 2007-13 and is subject to EU Regulations which require detailed administrative checks on all applications to be completed before payments can issue. Arrangements are well advanced to issue payments in respect of 2013 and I expect that these payments will commence in November.

The person named submitted a Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Areas' Scheme application on 8 May 2013. EU Regulations governing the administration of the 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 finalised.

The cross compliance inspection identified breaches in relation to cattle identification and registration requirements, resulting in a 1% penalty. The person named was informed of this decision on 26 August 2013. The person named was also informed of the right to seek a review of this decision. 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.

Processing of payments under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme and Disadvantaged Areas' Scheme have now been finalised and payments, based on the above, will issue shortly to the nominated bank account of person named.

Agriculture Schemes Payments

606. Deputy James Bannon asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Longford will receive their payment of REP scheme, disadvantaged area scheme and single farm payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49440/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): As processing of the application of the person named under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme has recently been finalised, payments in respect of both Schemes will issue shortly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Agriculture Schemes Payments

607. Deputy Michael Ring asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive payment of their single payment scheme

and disadvantaged area scheme in view of the fact that misleading information has been supplied by his Department in this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49450/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): With the necessary digitising relating to the application of the person named under 2013 Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme having been recently completed, processing was finalised, thereby allowing payments to issue, directly to the nominated bank account of the person named, on 14 November and 15 November in respect of the Single Payment Scheme and Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, respectively. The contradictory advice mentioned above was due to inadvertent clerical error, as the official concerned was responding to a number of different enquiries simultaneously.

Agriculture Schemes Payments

608. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49457/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payments under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme and 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Schemes issued directly to the nominated bank account of the person named on 16 November and 17 November, respectively.

Question No. 609 answered with Question No. 562.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

610. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a single farm payment penalty will be waived in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49560/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Following a review of the land submitted by the person named on his Single Payment Scheme application it was found that several parcels contained ineligible features. The person named has sought a review of the decision and this review is currently being undertaken. My Department will be in contact with the person named regarding the outcome of this review in the coming weeks.

Horticulture Sector

611. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his policies regarding the work of Teagasc and the role in which it is supposed to be engaged in terms of developing horticulture here, with particular reference to the fact that plant science in Ireland is rated below that of Romania, according to an EU funded survey conducted in NUIG, although we are uniquely positioned to develop a very labour intensive vibrant horticultural sector. [49569/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Teagasc has achieved a great deal on behalf of Irish Agriculture and food in improving farm incomes, educating and training students and adult farmers, conducting public good research and development and encouraging the adoption of new technology and practices on Irish farms. Their

services in research, education and advisory play a key role on the ongoing development and modernisation of Irish agriculture, helping to improve its competitiveness and to enable the sector take advantage of the many opportunities that exist in global markets. The industry continues to require a strong input from Teagasc in assisting the development of farm enterprises and providing direction to those involved in agriculture and food.

Teagasc receive an annual grant in aid allocation from my Department towards the costs of delivering various services to the agriculture sector. This year's allocation is almost €122m. Because Teagasc operates as a separate entity under the auspices of my Department, it is a matter for Teagasc and its Board to prioritise activities in the delivery of services and to allocate resources in accordance with these priorities.

Under Teagasc's Rationalisation Programme 2009-2013, it was decided to consolidate Teagasc research activities in the Dublin area at one location, Teagasc's Ashtown Food Centre. As part of this process, the horticulture research and knowledge transfer activities at Kinsealy are being located in new facilities in Ashtown.

In addition, to complement its horticultural research activities, Teagasc has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Horticulture Development Company, UK. This Memorandum of Understanding is operating to the benefit of both organisations since 2011. Teagasc currently has a number of post-graduate students involved in horticultural research projects that are jointly funded by Teagasc and the Horticulture Development Company.

Teagasc has a number of specific research programmes in the crops area particularly related to cereals and potatoes. These are carried out at its research Facilities in Oakpark County Carlow. In addition to this, significant research is also carried out on foliage plants, mushrooms and fruit at its facilities in Kinsealy and Ashtown and other locations.

My Department has been in contact with the Plant & Agri-biosciences Centre of the National University of Galway (NUIG) who have confirmed that there are unaware of any EU funded rating survey conducted in NUI Galway, as suggested in this question.

That said we should not necessarily be surprised if plant science in Romania should have more researchers and resources devoted to it than in Ireland. Romania, which is a country of over 20 million and a land area which is almost 3 times the size of Ireland. Due to its location and climatic conditions, it produces a wide range of horticultural crops and is in the top 10 wine producing countries in the world.

Question No. 612 answered with Question No. 592.

Milk Quota Cessation

613. Deputy Patrick O'Donovan asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine in view of the forthcoming abolition of quotas, if he will provide details of interactions between his Department, the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources and the relevant State agencies and semi-State companies with a view to encouraging the extension of the natural gas network to those towns in the country which currently do not have a gas connection but have a milk processing facility, and are likely to see increases in processing and as a result an increased energy requirement which could be further secured by connection to the national gas network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49596/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): As the Deputy is aware the Food Harvest 2020 strategy sets the ambitious target of increasing milk produc-

tion by 50% by the end of the decade. This will require significant processing capacity and I am aware that all of the major milk purchasers have drawn up significant investment plans with a view to enhancing their processing capacity for post 2015. I am sure that, in drawing up those plans, they would have examined the best and most cost effective energy supply options available. The plans will also have been discussed with relevant State Agencies such as Enterprise Ireland. My Department does not have any function in extension of the gas network and this is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources.

Question No. 614 answered with Question No. 562.

Child Care Services Inspections

615. Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position regarding the filling of the vacant preschool inspector's post in County Louth. [49109/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Under the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No. 2) Regulations 2006, the HSE has responsibility for pre-school inspections. There are areas throughout the country where gaps in the inspection services have been identified and the HSE is currently at an advanced stage of recruiting additional inspectors to address this deficit. These recruitments will strengthen the pre-school inspections system in a number of areas including county Louth, where I understand the recruitment process for the appointment of an inspector has been completed.

Foreign Adoptions

616. Deputy Tom Barry asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if any progress has been made in relation to the small number of families affected by a difficulty with Russian adoptions because of the expiration of their section 63 declarations of eligibility and suitability. [48909/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Adoption Act, 2010, provides for adoptions from countries that have ratified the Hague Convention on adoption and from countries where there is a bilateral agreement in place. During the drafting of the Act a considered and detailed transitional process to deal with the change from previous legislation to the new Act was put in place. The transitional measure contained in Section 63 of the Adoption Act, 2010, allows those who held a valid declaration of eligibility and suitability to adopt before the commencement of the Act to continue with an adoption, from a non-Hague, non-bilateral country for a maximum period of three years. Such applicants were thus afforded an additional three year period to complete these particular adoptions from non-Hague countries, and must have completed the process by 31st October 2013.

By their nature transitional provisions must be time limited, and it was considered by the Government at the time, and the Oireachtas, that three years was a reasonable period of time to finalise an adoption which was in process when the Adoption Act 2010 came into force. The Hague Convention sets out important safeguards to be implemented by member countries so as to ensure that the rights of children and families are protected and there is prevention of illegal, irregular, premature or ill prepared inter country adoptions. Ireland has ratified the Hague Convention and under the Adoption Act 2010 the Convention has force of law in Ireland. The provisions of the Adoption Act 2010 sought to balance the desire for a reasonable period of transition with the overall commitment to the mutual support amongst member countries for the operation of the standards and safeguards in inter country adoption outlined in the Convention.

One particular concern that has coincided with the expiry of the transitional provisions provided for in Section 63 of the Adoption Act 2010, is the position of a small number of applicants who were at a late stage in adopting from Russia when changes to Russian legislation were enacted which meant that they were unable to complete the adoption of identified children before 31 October, 2013. I am conscious of the strain that these prospective adoptive parents have experienced due to recent events which could not have been foreseen. Since this issue was brought to my attention, officials in my Department have been seeking a way to address the problems which resulted from the sudden change in Russian legislation. Considerable efforts have been made, including through diplomatic channels, to see if the problems which have arisen can be resolved.

It is my understanding that in order to adopt from Russia it is necessary to have a valid declaration of eligibility and suitability to adopt on the date of the court hearing to finalise the adoption, and for a specified period thereafter before the Court order takes effect. In order that these adoptions, which were stopped by this change in Russian law, could continue an amendment to the Adoption Act, 2010, would be necessary to extend the validity of the declarations of eligibility and suitability.

The advice of the Attorney General was sought and my Department is currently examining legislative options that might assist, possibly through the retrospective extension of the declarations of eligibility and suitability concerned. As the Adoption Act, 2010, is drafted on the basis of the incorporation of the Hague Convention, and the minimum set of standards outlined therein, the implications of amending the Act must be carefully examined before the Government is in a position to consider any proposed amendment of the legislation. My Department, in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General, is examining if it is possible to address this situation within the parameters of Irish law and our obligations under the Hague Convention. I have already met and spoken with some of those prospective adoptive parents affected by the changes in Russian legislation and have undertaken to keep them informed of any developments.

Work is also ongoing in relation to a possible bilateral agreement on inter country adoption with Russia. Following my invitation to the Russian Ministry of Education and Science in August, a delegation of Russian officials travelled to Ireland for discussions and the meeting of 22nd October 2013 was very positive with detailed discussions between the Russian officials and officials from my Department, the Adoption Authority of Ireland, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the HSE. At the meeting significant progress was made and my Department has committed to reverting to the Russian side in the coming weeks with further detailed proposals in an effort to address both Russian and Irish legal and administrative requirements to the greatest degree possible.

Youth Services Funding

617. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount of funding she is making available for youth funding this year; the amount being allocated to each body in comparison with the 2013 allocation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48945/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Youth Affairs Unit of my Department supports the delivery of a range of youth work programmes and services for all young people, including those from disadvantaged communities, by the voluntary youth sector. These schemes include the Youth Service Grant Scheme, the Special Projects for Youth Scheme, the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund Rounds 1 and 2, Local Drug

Task Force Projects and certain other provisions including the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme, Youth Information Centres, the European Youth in Action Programme (administered by Léargas – the Exchange Bureau) and Gaisce – the President’s Award.

In 2013, funding of some €53.498 million, including €1.75m in capital funding has been made available to support the provision of youth services and programmes to young people throughout the country. The funding supports the provision of services to some 400,000 young people involved in 477 projects and youth work initiatives with approximately 1,400 paid staff and 40,000 volunteers working in youth work services and communities throughout the country.

The Youth Affairs Unit of my Department is working on the funding allocations for youth services in 2014 and in line with Government policy must have regard to the savings requirements identified in the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure (CRE). An amount of €1m has been provided in Budget 2014 to offset the impact of the CRE savings requirements on the youth services next year. Every effort is being made by my Department to finalise the 2014 allocations so that youth projects and national youth organisations will be advised of the 2014 allocations as soon as possible.

Child Care Services Expenditure

618. Deputy Robert Troy asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason an IT system failure has resulted in child care education support scheme payment due to providers from 21 October to 1 December being delayed; when this problem will be rectified; and when service providers will receive payment. [49034/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am aware that a problem did arise with the IT system which supports the implementation by my Department of the Childcare Education and Training Support (CETS) programme. This resulted in a delay in the issuing of payments which were due to providers at the end of last month. The problems with the IT system, which is maintained by way of a shared service agreement with the Department of Health, are being examined with a view to resolution.

Pobal, who assist my Department with the administration of the CETS programme, are currently processing the outstanding payments. It is expected that providers will receive these payments over the course of this week. In order to offset the delay in payment, the current payment term has been extended by 4 weeks.

Children’s Rights Referendum

619. Deputy Michael P. Kitt asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs with reference to the referendum on children’s rights held some several months ago, if she will provide an update on implementation and if the relevant legislation is now in place; the sections that have been implemented to date; when the section allowing adoption of long time fostered children will be signed into force; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49098/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The judgment in the High Court challenge to the result of the Children’s Referendum was delivered on 18 October. The Petitioner was unsuccessful in her petition to the High Court challenging the Provisional Referendum Certificate issued on foot of the Children’s Referendum. The Court dismissed the petition.

With the consent of the parties and to allow time for giving notice of an appeal, the Judge decided to grant a short stay on his endorsement of the Provisional Referendum Certificate (as required under section 57(3) of the Referendum Act 1994).

On 24 October, the Petitioner's Counsel made an application to the Supreme Court for a priority appeal hearing date.

The Court granted the application for a priority hearing of the appeal and the extension of the stay on the endorsement of the Referendum Certificate. It is anticipated that the Supreme Court appeal will be heard early in 2014.

The Petitioner had also challenged, by way of plenary proceedings, the constitutionality of certain provisions of the Referendum Act 1994 and these proceedings remain before the High Court for determination.

The matter of referring the Thirty-First Amendment of the Constitution (Children) Bill 2012 to the President for signing into law, and to give effect to the Constitutional changes concerned, must await determination by the Courts of the legal challenge made.

The General Scheme and Heads of Bill of the proposed Adoption (Amendment) Bill was published in September 2012 in conjunction with the publication of the referendum proposal to inform the public of proposed changes to adoption law envisaged if the Constitutional amendment was approved.

The provisions of the proposed Adoption (Amendment) Bill 2013 will change the criteria, applicable under section 54 of the 2010 Act, under which the High Court may authorise the making of an adoption order without parental consent, in the case of a child who is in the care of prospective adopters and where that child's parents have failed in their parental duty to the child. The Bill will also provide for the voluntary placement for adoption of any child irrespective of the marital status of his or her parents.

It is my intention to bring the Adoption (Amendment) Bill 2013 before the Houses of the Oireachtas as soon as possible, following conclusion of all proceedings and processes relevant to the Children's Referendum.

UN Issues

620. Deputy Finian McGrath asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a national organising committee has been or will be put in place to organise events in 2014 for the 20th anniversary of the international year of the family; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49262/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Twentieth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family is a UN initiative. It is described as an 'opportunity to refocus on the role of families in development; take stock of recent trends in family policy development; share good practice in family policy making; review challenges faced by families worldwide and recommend solutions'. Obviously the scope of the initiative is very broad and has relevance to various Departments and agencies. The focus of the initiative has particular resonance in the context of children and family services in Ireland, given the decision taken by Government to establish a new Child and Family Agency from January next year.

The legislation to establish the new Agency, the Child and Family Agency Bill, is progressing through the Oireachtas at present, and it is my intention that the Agency will be established

from 1st January 2014. The policy intent in framing the functions of the Child and Family Agency has been to broaden the scope of the Agency beyond the traditional concept of child welfare and protection and to place emphasis on family support as an essential and discrete area of activity. In this regard specific attention has been paid to strengthening and consolidating the family support function within the Child and Family Agency Bill, which will encompass both the existing family support obligations imposed by the Child Care Act 1991 (and currently discharged by the HSE) along with the important work undertaken by the Family Support Agency (FSA). Family support is being viewed not only as a response to identified welfare and protection needs, but as a preventative strategy generally. This is in line with the general commitment to broaden the scope of the Agency and to underline the intended policy shift to an approach based more on prevention and early intervention strategies. There are a number of operational policy initiatives also underway within the HSE focused on consolidating and focusing their activities in respect of family support. Submissions to the Department in the context of consultation on the National Policy Framework have also identified the challenges for parents and families in modern society and good practice measures to support families.

All of these initiatives will be coming to fruition over the coming period into 2014 and have enormous resonance with the 20th Anniversary. I am currently considering the best approaches to mark this year.

Adoption Records Provision

621. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of Irish women who placed their child for adoption over the past five years; the amount of State money that goes into funding and promoting adoption services for such women; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49362/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Adoption Authority of Ireland Annual Reports contain details of the numbers of non-family domestic adoptions. The figures are as follows: in 2008 there were 49 non-family domestic adoptions, in 2009 there were 42, in 2010 there were 35, in 2011 there were 23 and in 2012 there were 16.

As the Health Service Executive is the body with responsibility for the delivery of domestic adoption services, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy in relation to funding and promoting these services.

Preschool Services

622. Deputy Jack Wall asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a child (details supplied) in County Kildare will qualify for a free preschool place this year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49443/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme is a universal programme implemented by my Department and provides a free pre-school year for children before they commence primary school. Children born between 2 February 2009 and 30 June 2010 qualify for the free pre-school provision in the current school year. Based on the date of birth provided by the Deputy the child in question will not qualify for the free pre-school provision this year but will be eligible in the school year commencing in September 2014.

Youth Services Funding

623. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the distribution of funding provided to the youth service grant scheme, the special projects for youth scheme, the young people's facilities and services fund rounds 1 and 2, the local drug task force projects, the youth information centres, and the local youth club grant scheme in 2013; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49461/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Youth Affairs Unit of my Department provides a range of funding schemes and supports to the youth sector. In 2013 funding of some €53.498 million including €1.75m capital funding has been made available for these schemes to support the provision of youth services and programmes to young people throughout the country.

Details of the funding allocated in 2013 to the Youth Service Grant Scheme, the Special Projects for Youth Scheme, the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund Rounds 1 and 2, the Local Drug Task Force Projects, Youth Information Centres and the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme are outlined hereunder.

Programme/Scheme	2013 Allocation €m
Special Projects for Youth Scheme	14.968
Youth Information Centres	1.282
Youth Service Grant Scheme	10.337
Young Peoples Facilities & Services Fund 1	5.905
Young Peoples Facilities & Services Fund 2	13.209
Local Youth Club Grant Scheme	1.035
Local Drugs Task Force Scheme	1.196

Water Fluoridation

624. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Health his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding fluoride in the water supply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48934/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Water fluoridation and the use of appropriate fluorides is a major plank of public health policy in Ireland in the prevention and management of tooth decay. In 2002 the Forum on Fluoridation, which was established to review this policy, concluded that the fluoridation of public piped water supplies should continue as a public health measure. The Irish Expert Body on Fluorides and Health, established in 2004, continuously monitors new and emerging issues on fluoride and its effects. It advises that the balance of scientific evidence worldwide confirms that water fluoridation, at the optimal level, does not cause any ill effects and protects the oral health of the population. The opinion of the Expert Body is supported by major international scientifically validated reviews. The effects of fluoridation on health and related matters are kept under constant review.

Health Services Staff Data

625. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Health if he will explain the relationship between the Right of Place survivor group and the Health Service Executive; if he will confirm that employees of Right of Place are direct employees of the HSE. [49267/13]

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

Medical Card Reviews

626. Deputy Tom Fleming asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a medical card review application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48795/13]

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 Waiting Lists

627. Deputy Colm Keaveney asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) may expect to receive an appointment for surgery in Cork University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48799/13]

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 Health Service Executive, 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 HSE to respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Medical Card Eligibility

628. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Health the data that was considered by his Department when reducing the income ceiling for the medical card for those aged 70 years and over (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48844/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Government recognises that the living costs of an individual living alone are more than half the living costs of a couple living together and that expenditure does not necessarily diminish relative to the number of people in the household. In that context, the over-70s income limit for a single person has been reduced proportionately less than the income limit for a couple. This differential concept is not new and is evident in other areas of public policy e.g.: the State pension is €230 per week for an individual and €436 per week for a couple; the provision of the Living Alone Increase - an extra payment for people on social welfare pensions who are living alone; differential income limits apply for medical cards for persons aged under 70 years between individuals and couples; and in the assessment for Supplementary Welfare Allowance, a differential applies whereby the rate for a dependent qualified adult is not half the personal rate of the applicant.

Alcohol Pricing

629. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Health his plans to ban the below cost selling of alcohol; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48845/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Government has approved an extensive package of measures to deal with alcohol misuse, on foot of the recommendations in the National Substance Misuse Strategy Steering Group Report. Legislation is being developed to provide for, inter alia, a minimum unit price for alcohol. This 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. As part of our work, a health impact assessment, in conjunction with Northern Ireland, has been 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.

Alcohol Advertising

630. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Health his plans to ban the advertising of cheap alcohol deals in newspapers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48847/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Government has approved an extensive package of measures to deal with alcohol misuse, on foot of the recommendations in the National Substance Misuse Strategy Steering Group Report. Legislation is being developed to provide for, inter alia, a regime of minimum unit pricing for alcohol. The policy of minimum unit pricing will be complemented by implementation of the recommendation in the National Substance Misuse Strategy Steering Group Report that an enforcement mechanism and regulations under Section 16 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act, 2008 be developed. Section 16 provides for the making of regulations which may prohibit or restrict the advertising, promoting, selling or supplying of alcohol at reduced prices or free of charge in order to reduce the risk of a threat to public order and health-risks arising from the excessive consumption of alcohol.

Alcohol Sales

631. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce a minimum VAT return for alcohol products (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48848/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Government has approved an extensive package of measures to deal with alcohol misuse, on foot of the recommendations in the National Substance Misuse Strategy Steering Group Report. Legislation is being developed to provide for, inter alia, a minimum unit price for alcohol. This 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. As part of our work, a health impact assessment, in conjunction

with Northern Ireland, has been 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.

Value-Added Tax is a harmonised tax within the framework of EU law. The operation of the tax in Ireland is governed by the Value-Added Tax Consolidation Act 2010, which is in accordance with EU Council Directive 2006/112/EU Council Directive 2006/112/EC. The Minister for Finance has responsibility for this legislation.

Value Added Tax (VAT) is a tax on the value added to a supply and the collection and recovery of VAT takes place at each stage of the chain of supply from manufacturing to retailer. Traders who are registered for VAT collect VAT on the goods and services that they sell. In turn such traders are entitled to recover the VAT that they incur on their business inputs used in the production of goods or delivery of services. Consequently, if there is a decrease in value at any stage in the process the trader is entitled to a refund of the excess of VAT incurred over that collected. In this regard, where a retailer is in a situation of net VAT gain as a result of below cost selling, this is not a loss to the Exchequer or an additional benefit to the retailer, it is merely how VAT is charged.

Water Fluoridation

632. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Health the amount of money that has been given to the two companies that have been paid for the supply and delivery of hydrofluosilicic acid for the purpose of water fluoridation in the past five years; the names of the two companies that have been paid for the supply delivery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48849/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Further to Parliamentary Question No. 1166 of 5th November 2013, I wish to confirm that one company has been paid for the supply and delivery of hydrofluosilicic acid and not two as previously advised. The hydrofluosilicic acid is sourced from Derivados del Fluor (DDF) in Spain and supplied and delivered by Chemifloc, a company based in Shannon, Co Clare. I apologise for the error which was brought to my attention after the previous reply had issued. The money spent over the last five years is as follows:

Year	Cost (including VAT)
2008	€1.5 million
2009	€1.6 million
2010	€1.6 million
2011	€1.7 million
2012	€1.6 million

Medicinal Products Availability

633. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Health his plans to lift the ban on the

sale of amino acid L-tryptophan here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48850/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I have been advised by both the Food Safety Authority of Ireland and the Irish Medicines Board (IMB) that there is no legal prohibition on the sale of L-Tryptophan in Ireland either as a food or as a medicine. L-tryptophan is an essential amino acid, which can be found naturally along with a variety of other amino acids in whey protein, hydrolysed whey protein and hydrolysed casein products, which are sold freely on the European market as foods including in Ireland.

I have been informed by the IMB that no product containing L-tryptophan is currently authorised as a medicine in Ireland and that the IMB is not in receipt of any application to license any such product. Products containing L-tryptophan have been made available in Ireland by way of the exempt medicinal product scheme which allows unauthorised medicines to be supplied on foot of a prescription to a named patient.

Orthodontic Service Provision

634. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Health if the Health Service Executive intends to engage an additional orthodontist in County Louth to address waiting lists for orthodontic treatment for under 18s; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48881/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The HSE has commissioned an independent review of orthodontic services. The outcome of this review, which is near completion, will give guidance as to what changes will be desirable to provide the best possible model of care delivery, given the current resources available and future demand for services. The HSE has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy regarding orthodontic waiting lists in County Louth.

Orthodontic Service Waiting Lists

635. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form, waiting time periods for orthodontic treatment for under 18s in County Louth for the years 2011 and 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48882/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The HSE provides orthodontic treatment to those who have been assessed and referred for treatment before their 16th birthday. Orthodontic referrals are generally received via the Public Dental Service school screening programme. I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy regarding waiting times for orthodontic treatment in Co. Louth.

Community Care Provision

636. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if community physiotherapy services in County Kildare have been reduced, or have been terminated; if community physiotherapy services in north Kildare have been reduced, or have been terminated; if funding for community physiotherapy services has been reduced in Kildare or in north Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48883/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): As the Deputy's question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health

Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Accident and Emergency Services Provision

637. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Health the protocol in relation to the calling of emergency services, with particular reference to an incident (details supplied); and the remedy open to the citizen in this case. [48884/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Investigations

638. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Health if all 11 recommendations following Health Service Executive investigations following the death of a person (details supplied) including No. 7, have been fully implemented in the Rotunda Hospital, Dublin. [48890/13]

639. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Health if the Rotunda Hospital, Dublin, has updated its guidelines on the management of intrauterine death to include lowering the dosage of Misoprostol to reflect recommended standards in RCOG. [48891/13]

640. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Health the reason the RCPI-IOG guidelines regarding the use and dosage of Misoprostol were not implemented, as per Health Service Executive recommendations. [48892/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 638 to 640, inclusive, together.

As I responded to the Deputy in my reply of 13th October last, I have been advised that the circumstances surrounding this patient's death were investigated by the HSE under the National Incident Protocol following which 11 actions were recommended. I have been informed by the HSE that the Rotunda Hospital has now implemented all 11 recommendations. In relation to the other issues raised by the Deputy, as these are service matters, I have referred them to the HSE for attention and direct reply.

Ambulance Service Response Times

641. Deputy Dara Calleary asked the Minister for Health the average response time for an ambulance call in 2011, 2012 and to end of September 2013 in counties Mayo, Galway, Roscommon, Sligo and Leitrim; the percentage of occasions in which calls were outside this average; the national average response time in 2011, 2012 and in 2013; the number of occasions in 2012 and to the end of September 2013 on which ambulances from outside County Mayo were deployed to answer calls in County Mayo; the response time on each occasion; the number of ambulances on call in County Mayo at any one time and where they are based within the county; his views regarding the organisation of the ambulance services in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48903/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

Ambulance Service Provision

642. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the number of shifts that have been dropped in the Health Service Executive ambulance base in St. James's Hospital, Dublin 8 since January 2013 until 11 November 2013. [48905/13]

643. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the number of shifts that have been dropped in the Health Service Executive ambulance base in Laois since January 2013 until 11 November 2013. [48906/13]

644. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the number of shifts that have been dropped by the national ambulance service since January 2013, identifying the bases in tabular form; the basis on which this decision was made; the criteria that applied; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48907/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 642 to 644, inclusive, together.

In relation to the detailed information requested by the Deputy, I have asked the Health Service Executive to reply directly to him.

Medical Card Eligibility

645. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Health if he will restore a discretionary medical card to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48935/13]

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.

Parliamentary Questions Numbers

646. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the number of parliamentary questions that have been referred by him to the Health Service Executive for direct reply that have yet to be answered; the number of these questions that have been referred for more than two weeks, more than four weeks and more than eight weeks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48943/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The HSE target to answer 75% of PQs within 15 working days has been exceeded. As of 23rd October some 2,942 PQs have been referred to the HSE since 1 January 2013. Of these, 2,359 (80%) were answered within the time frame. 2,886 PQs (98% of referred PQs) have been responded to and 56 cases remain open.

Of those 56 Cases, almost half, (21 cases) were referred between 15th October and 22nd October. Seventeen cases were referred between 1st October and 10th October. The balance, (18 cases) were referred during the second part of September.

It should be noted that the number of PQs referred to the HSE for direct response PQs has increased by 60% since 2011.

Departmental Expenditure

647. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Health in view of this year's early budget, the amount of funding he is making available to each drugs task force; the way this varies from their 2013 allocation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48946/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Decisions in relation to the allocations to Drugs Task Forces for 2014 will be made known shortly.

National Drugs Strategy Implementation

648. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the implementation of each action contained in the National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016 following the recent meeting of the oversight forum on drugs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48947/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Implementation of the National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016 which sets out Government policy in dealing with the drugs problem is being pursued across a range of Government Departments and Agencies. An annual progress report on the implementation of the actions of the Strategy is compiled. The 2012 progress report was considered in detail at the Oversight Forum on Drugs (OFD) meeting on 31st January 2013 and this report is available on the Department of Health website.

Solid progress has been made in 2013 across the 63 Actions of the Strategy which are based around the five pillars of supply reduction, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and research. At the last meeting of the OFD, on the 24th October, I informed the members that my Department would shortly be requesting an end of year progress report. The 2013 progress report should be available for consideration by the OFD at its meeting scheduled for 30th January 2014, following which it will then be made available through the Department's website.

Medical Card Applications

649. Deputy Patrick Nulty asked the Minister for Health if the renewal of a full medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15 will be expedited; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48948/13]

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.

HSE Governance

650. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Health the way that one director can cover three midlands regional hospitals located in different national groupings from his base at the Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore, County Offaly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48953/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I understand that Deputy James Bannon is referring to the role of hospital management within Hospital Groups. The introduction of Hospital Groups, which I announced last May, will provide for organisational change in the first instance, giving more autonomy and better enabling the reorganisation of services in a well-planned manner. Over time, this will help to improve services and deliver better outcomes for patients.

Chairs have now been appointed to all seven Hospital Groups. CEOs are in place for three of the Groups, and the process of recruiting CEOs for the remaining four Groups will shortly commence, in consultation with Chairpersons, through the Public Appointments Service. My Department will also enter into discussion with the Chairs with a view to appointing the remaining Board members as soon as possible.

A Strategic Advisory Group is now being established which will oversee the establishment of Hospital Groups and the subsequent reorganisation of acute hospital services. Each group of hospitals will work together as single cohesive entities managed as one, to provide acute care for patients in their area, integrating with community and primary care. This will maximise the amount of care delivered locally, whilst ensuring complex care is safely provided in larger hospitals. Hospital Groups will be required, within one year, to develop a strategic plan which will outline their plans for future services within the group area and the role of hospitals within each group will be considered in detail in the context of this strategic plan.

Transition to full implementation of Hospital Groups will take place over a period of time. Current management arrangements and care pathways will not be disrupted as an immediate consequence of establishing Hospital Groups pending their full implementation.

Medical Card Eligibility

651. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Health if he will issue a medical card to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48966/13]

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.

Child Safety

652. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that toothpaste containing fluoride has a child-proof cap and carries a poison warning. [48986/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): There is no re-

quirement under Irish or EU law for toothpastes to have a child-proof cap.

Toothpastes containing more than 0.15% fluoride, or which make a medicinal claim (irrespective of the fluoride level) are regulated as medicinal products; it is therefore mandatory under Directive 2001/83/EC for all such toothpastes to clearly state the content of fluoride on the labelling and to carry the warning text “keep out of the reach and sight of children”.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Eligibility

653. Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh asked the Minister for Health his plans to include the genetic disorder, long QT syndrome, on the list of qualifying ailments for qualification for a long-term illness medical card; and if not, the reason for same in view of the circumstances of the condition and the potential medical costs involved. [48988/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Long Term Illness Scheme.

Under the Drug Payment Scheme, no individual or family pays more than €144 per calendar month towards the cost of approved prescribed medicines. The scheme significantly reduces the cost burden for families and individuals incurring ongoing expenditure on medicines.

In addition, people who cannot, without undue hardship, arrange for the provision of medical services for themselves and their dependants may be entitled to a medical card. In the assessment process, the Health Service Executive can take into account medical costs incurred by an individual or a family. Those who are not eligible for a medical card may still be able to avail of a GP visit card, which covers the cost of GP consultations.

Water Fluoridation

654. Deputy Denis Naughten asked the Minister for Health the level of monitoring of fluoride levels in the population under the Health (Fluoridation of Water Supplies) Act 1960; if he intends to perform such a study; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48989/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The impact of water fluoridation on caries levels in Ireland has been regularly assessed in both national and local surveys since its introduction in the mid 1960s. Enamel fluorosis has been monitored in Ireland since 1984. This is regarded as an accurate method of monitoring total fluoride intake, using increasingly sophisticated new technologies. Surveys to measure the effectiveness of water fluoridation on children’s and adults’ oral health include national studies in 1984, 1990, 2001 and 2002, regional studies between 1990 and 1999 and a cross border study in 2006. All of these studies showed a substantial benefit of fluoridation in terms of a reduction in tooth decay.

At present the Department of Health is collaborating in a University College Cork-led research project, “Fluoride and Caring for Children’s Teeth” (FACCT) which will specifically examine the oral health status of children and inform national policy. The study will consider the impact of changes on the oral health of children, following policy decisions relating to toothpaste use by infants and young children made in 2002 and the reduction in the level of fluoridation in drinking water in 2007. It is focusing on 5-year old and 12-year old children. The HSE has released dental staff and is providing funding to support the study. Consideration is also being given by the Department of Health to a study on general and oral health findings in adults linked to the duration of exposure to fluoridated water as part of the Irish Longitudinal

Study on Aging (TILDA).

Orthodontic Service Provision

655. Deputy James Bannon asked the Minister for Health the reasons a person (details supplied) in County Longford who has been placed on the orthodontic treatment waiting list since October 2012 cannot be given an indication of a date for treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48991/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The HSE provides orthodontic treatment to patients based on their level of clinical need. An individual's access to orthodontic treatment is determined against a set of clinical guidelines and priority is given to patients with greatest needs. The HSE has been asked to examine the specific query raised by the Deputy and to reply to him as soon as possible.

Medical Card Delays

656. Deputy Peadar Tóibín asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in the processing of a medical card application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Meath. [48999/13]

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.

Treatment Abroad Scheme

657. Deputy Billy Kelleher asked the Minister for Health if the eligibility for the treatment abroad scheme has been changed by the Health Service Executive; if it is the case that only public patients are now eligible; that this means that even if a person is a GMS patient and has been receiving treatment abroad for many years, any renewal application must be certified by a consultant from a public clinic; if he accepts that the waiting list to attend such a clinic and receive certification is so long that it poses a severe risk to all patients who are acutely ill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49025/13]

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).*

As provided for in the various governing Irish legislation and EU regulations, the HSE TAS allows for the referral of public patients to access treatment in the public healthcare system of another EU/EEA member state through the issue of model form E112 (IE). Therefore, for the purposes of the TAS, an insured person in Ireland is a patient accessing services as a public patient. It is of course understood and accepted that any private patient can opt to avail of public patient status but only by following public referral pathways: private status cannot be used as a system of skipping waiting lists for the purposes of prioritised access. Therefore referral for patients to attend a hospital consultant in a private capacity are not now nor were they previously eligible for consideration under TAS.

Private patients applying to the TAS for funding are advised to seek such funding through their private health insurance provider in the first instance. In the instances where a patient's private health insurance provider will not cover either all of or any portion of the cost of the required treatment, the patient can revert to the TAS providing a copy of the written decision from his/her private health insurance provider. On receipt of this documentation, the TAS will consider each application on a case by case basis.

Each application to the HSE TAS is reviewed individually on its own merits and there are no restrictions on a person making an application to the HSE TAS for review and decision. Previous approvals or refusals are not used as an influencing factor on subsequent applications. Each application is for an individual episode of care unless otherwise specified by the consultant on the application form.

Health Services Provision

658. Deputy Regina Doherty asked the Minister for Health if he will review the situation whereby medical after care services in health centres will only facilitate medical card holders in order to enable all patients to benefit from after care services in health centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49035/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): At present, over 43% of the population is covered by the General Medical Services (GMS) Scheme. Any person who is experiencing undue hardship in paying for a medical service may apply to the HSE for a medical card or a GP visit card. The HSE, in assessing a person's means, takes into account expenditure by the applicant on medical services and medication. If persons are experiencing undue hardship in paying for particular services, it is open to them to submit an application to

the HSE for consideration on a discretionary basis.

The Government has embarked on a major reform programme for the health system. The aim is to deliver a single-tier health service, supported by universal health insurance, which will ensure equal access to care based on need, not income. A fundamental element in the reform process involves significant strengthening of primary care services to deliver universal primary care with the removal of cost as a barrier to access for patients. The phased implementation programme is being overseen by both Minister Reilly and me.

Medical Card Appeals

659. Deputy Tom Fleming asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a medical card appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49044/13]

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.

Home Help Service Provision

660. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Health the level of home help that will be given in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49045/13]

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.

Medical Card Eligibility

661. Deputy John McGuinness asked the Minister for Health if a medical card will be awarded without further delay to persons (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [49047/13]

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 Appointment Delays

662. Deputy John McGuinness asked the Minister for Health if an immediate appointment will be arranged in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [49049/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): For 2013, a maximum waiting time target of 12 months has been set for a first time consultant-led outpatient appointment and this is reflected in the HSE Service Plan. The SDU and the NTPF are working closely with hospitals towards achievement of the maximum waiting time.

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

Medical Card Appeals

663. Deputy Tom Fleming asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a medical card appeal in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49090/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

Medical Card Appeals

664. Deputy Tom Fleming asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a medical card appeal in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49107/13]

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.

Health Services Provision

665. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Health if and when an appointment for an occupational therapist will be organised in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49112/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the Health Service Executive. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medical Card Appeals

666. Deputy Tom Fleming asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a medical card appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49113/13]

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.

Water Fluoridation

667. Deputy Michael Lowry asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an assurance that tap water is safe for use in the making up of babies' bottles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49123/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Water fluoridation is the adjustment of the natural concentration of fluoride in drinking water to the optimal recommended level for the prevention of dental caries. The Irish Expert Body on Fluorides and Health, established in 2004, continuously monitors new and emerging issues on fluoride and its effects. The Expert Body and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland advise that there is no significant evidence of any adverse effects to the health of infants consuming infant formula made up with fluoridated tap water. I am unaware of any EU Ambassadors in this country advising their nationals not to use tap water in the making of infant formula. Fluoride concentrations in Irish tap water pose no known medical problems either for infants or for the population in general.

The Expert Body advises that the balance of scientific evidence worldwide confirms that water fluoridation, at the optimal level, does not cause any ill effects and protects the oral health of the population. The opinion of the Expert Body is supported by major international scientifically validated reviews. The effects of fluoride on health and related matters are kept under constant review.

Hospital Charges

668. Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) who should have a medical card will be exempted from hospital charges recently incurred by them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49138/13]

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.

HSE Properties

669. Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the building which has, since 1979, been home to the Kilmuckridge Family Resource Centre in County Wexford is currently for sale on the open market; if he will immediately intervene to reverse the decision by the Health Service Executive to sell the building; if he will provide assurances that the future of Kilmuckridge Family Resource Centre is secure; the steps he will take to ensure that this is the case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49182/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Management of the healthcare property portfolio is a service matter. Therefore your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Motorised Transport Grant Applications

670. Deputy Mary Lou McDonald asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) in Dublin 22 who applied for the motorised transport grant in 2012 has not yet received a decision on their application. [49186/13]

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.

Health Insurance Issues

671. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Health if there is ongoing contact with the European authorities concerning the future of the VHI; if he plans to provide an injection of funds for VHI; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49193/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Government agreed in December 2011 to address the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruling of September 2011 and to have my Department work with the VHI in its application process for authorisation by the Central Bank of Ireland (CBI). Officials from my Department, the VHI and the CBI continue to engage regularly to progress this application.

Department officials are also in regular contact with the DG Internal Market and Services in relation to addressing the ECJ judgment and with DG Competition regarding related State Aid issues and in addressing an alleged unlimited State guarantee.

The Government will make a decision on capitalisation of the VHI when the CBI has determined the amount of any capital requirements and the EU Commission has approved a capital injection under State aid rules.

Hospital Services

672. Deputy Dominic Hannigan asked the Minister for Health if he will confirm that there are no plans to alter services in Navan hospital in the next two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49212/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Report on the Establishment of Hospital Groups, which I launched on 14 May, is the most fundamental reform of the Irish acute hospital system in decades. The introduction of Hospital Groups will provide for organisational change in the first instance, giving more autonomy and better enabling the reorganisation of services in a well-planned manner. Over time, this will help to improve services and deliver better outcomes for patients. The Smaller Hospitals Framework, which will be implemented in the context of the Hospital Groups, defines the role of the smaller hospital and role of smaller hospitals within the Group and outlines in detail the wide range of services that can be provided within the smaller hospital and that can be transferred from the larger to smaller hospitals within the hospital group.

Our Lady's Hospital, Navan, is part of the Dublin East Hospital Group. The reforms outlined above can be expected to result in change at Our Lady's Hospital, Navan and, indeed, at most if not all hospitals across all Groups. However, Navan, as with all hospitals, will play a significant role in its Group in providing sustainable, safe and effective care at the appropriate level of complexity. The provision of services at Navan and all other hospitals will be examined in the context of Strategic Plans to be developed by each Hospital Group. The development of Strategic Plans will afford an opportunity for the challenges and opportunities of service reconfiguration to be fully considered. Strategic Plans will be prepared in the context of an overarching policy framework to be developed by my Department, and their preparation will afford an opportunity for all hospitals in a Group to work together to address the opportunities and challenges of service reorganisation.

Pension Provisions

673. Deputy John McGuinness asked the Minister for Health the reason the Health Service Executive continues to stop €71.45 from pension payments being made to a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [49217/13]

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

Medical Card Applications

674. Deputy John McGuinness asked the Minister for Health if a medical card will be approved in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [49221/13]

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 Appointment Status

675. Deputy Robert Troy asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a hospital appointment in respect of a person (details supplied). [49247/13]

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

Departmental Bodies

676. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 228 of 17 October if the drugs advisory group has met since his response or if a meeting has been scheduled. [49261/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): 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 to replace the Drugs Advisory Group. I met with representatives of the Local and Regional Drugs Task Forces on 15 November last to outline my plans for implementing the review, and in this regard I confirmed that the first meeting of the National Co-ordinating Committee will be held on 23 January 2014.

Commencement of Legislation

677. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1213 of 5 November 2013, if he will detail the complete list of operational issues that need to be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49269/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I wish to advise the Deputy that the operational issues due to be addressed are those required to give effect to Chapter 2 of the Act in relation to the formal clinical review process.

HSE Expenditure

678. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the reason health capital net voted expenditure was €99 million, 32.9% behind profile at the end of October 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49276/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to the HSE's voted expenditure the HSE stated that while capital expenditure was under profile, the Executive expected that this expenditure would increase by year end as was the case in previous years.

My Department's capital expenditure is traditionally drawn down in the last months of the year.

Ambulance Service Provision

679. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the Health Service Executive's plans for ambulance cover in County Louth; the number of ambulances available in County

Louth in 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that ambulance cover in County Louth has on days dropped by 50%; if a risk assessment has been carried out following the National Ambulance Service's decision to remove an ambulance service in the north east; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49277/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

Prescription Policy

680. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if the Health Service Executive has requested general practitioners to limit the prescribing of benzodiazepines to medical card patients in particular; the reason behind such a request; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49326/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Benzodiazepines, as a group of medicines, are commonly used to treat anxiety, sleep disturbance and insomnia. They are known to be associated with dependence and withdrawal symptoms and consequently are primarily recommended for short-term treatment only. There is evidence of their inappropriate use in Ireland. The HSE through the Primary Care Reimbursement Service captures information on the prescribing of benzodiazepines under the GMS and Community Drug Schemes.

The HSE has developed and made available an on-line report which enables General Practitioners (GPs) to access their personal prescribing of benzodiazepines on a monthly basis and also benchmark their own prescribing against their peers. This is standardized for gender and age of the GP's panel. All contracted GPs have access to the website and the majority are active users. To further assist GPs, snapshots of the level of prescribing of benzodiazepines and z-drugs were taken in November 2011, March 2012 and November 2012. Three pieces of information were subsequently provided to GPs: the prescribing frequency of benzodiazepines and z-drugs standardised for gender/panel profile, the number of patients presenting prescriptions for periods of more than 3, 6 and 12 months; and a pictorial representation of their individual prescribing against the national profile.

The HSE does not have a complete picture of benzodiazepine prescribing for GPs who do not hold GMS contracts nor for non GMS patients whose prescription costs do not reach the DPS copayment threshold. Thus, the data disseminated to GPs is in respect of Medical Card patients only.

Health Insurance Levy

681. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Health the specific factors that caused him to increase the risk equalisation levy on health insurance that he announced on 12 November; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49340/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Each year, at my request, the Health Insurance Authority (HIA) prepares the *Report of The Health Insurance Authority to the Minister for Health, in accordance with Section 7E (1)(b) of the Health Insurance Acts, 1994 – 2012*. The Authority submitted its most recent report to me in October 2013. These Reports set out the HIA's evaluation and analysis of information returns supplied by insurers, their analysis of market issues and, arising from their expert analysis, the Authority's recommendations for Risk

Equalisation Credits and associated Stamp Duty to apply for the following year.

In setting the rates for Risk Equalisation Credits, following consultation with the Minister for Finance, I must have regard to the Principal Objective of the Health Insurance Act (as amended), which is to ensure that access to private health insurance cover is available to everyone and they are charged the same premium for a particular health insurance plan, irrespective of age, gender and the current or likely future state of their health. I must also have regard to the aims of:

- avoiding overcompensation of registered undertakings or former undertakings,
- maintaining the sustainability of the private health insurance market,
- having fair and open competition in the market and
- avoiding the Risk Equalisation Fund having a surplus or deficit from year to year.

Having examined the HIA report and considered the views of my Department's Officials and its actuarial advisors, which includes other relevant market factors, I announced changes to the risk equalisation credits that will apply in the private health insurance market with effect from 1st March next. My Department, in consultation with the HIA, will publish a redacted version of the Report in due course.

Departmental Bodies Expenditure

682. Deputy Gerry Adams asked the Minister for Health the budget for SafeFood for the years 2010 to date in 2013; and any proposed budget reductions to these bodies currently being considered. [49350/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Details of the Food Safety Promotion Board's (FSPB/safefood) budget for the years in question are as follows:

2010 - €9.522m

2011 - €8.5m

2012 - €8.5m

2013 - €8.5m

Efficiency savings of 12%, to be achieved by the end of 2016, have been agreed by the Finance Departments North and South. These will result in a reduction of approximately 4% for each of the years 2014 to 2016.

Medical Card Applications

683. Deputy Finian McGrath asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 3. [49359/13]

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 es-

tablished 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 Investigations

684. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett asked the Minister for Health if he will arrange for an inquiry into the death of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin. [49360/13]

685. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett asked the Minister for Health if he will reply to the correspondence (details supplied) in County Dublin. [49361/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 684 and 685 together.

I would like in the first instance to offer my sympathies to the family involved in this tragic case, who met with officials of my Department in December 2011.

I am advised that the hospital is near completion of its investigation of the case and that an initial report will be provided before the end of this year. A definitive final report will be provided in early 2014. The investigation has been dealt with by the HSE using its Incident Investigation Process. There has been ongoing and significant contact with the family throughout the investigation.

In advance of the completion of the investigation, it would be inappropriate for me to comment further.

Medical Card Eligibility

686. Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin asked the Minister for Health if he will provide, in tabular form, the number of persons over 70 years who will lose their full medical cards as a result of the measures announced in budget 2014; the number that will have their medical card replaced with a GP only card; and a breakdown of same by county. [49365/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): It is estimated that, under the new medical card gross income limits for persons aged 70 or older announced under Budget 2014, in the region of 35,000 people will have their medical card replaced with a GP visit card. It is not possible to provide a breakdown of the numbers by county as the data is not collated in a manner to facilitate this.

Persons aged 70 or older who are assessed as ineligible under the gross income thresholds may also have their eligibility assessed under the means tested medical card scheme where they face particularly high expenses, e.g., nursing home or medication costs. This assessment is based on net income and assessable outgoing expenses. The qualifying income thresholds under this scheme are lower than over-70s gross income thresholds. Furthermore, persons aged over 70 years may still be eligible for a medical card on a discretionary basis where they face undue hardship in arranging medical services as a result of medical or social circumstances.

HSE Waiting Lists

687. Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form, waiting times for occupational therapy, speech and language therapy and psychology therapy services for children; and a breakdown of same by Health Service Executive area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49366/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): As the Deputy's question relates to services issues and as the information on waiting times for such therapy services is not routinely returned to my Department by the HSE, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy in these matters.

National Children's Hospital Status

688. Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in announcing the design team for the new national paediatric hospital. [49368/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Prior to the commencement of construction, key elements of the project include design development, decant works for the site and planning permission. The procurement process for the new design team was initiated in July. Following its appointment in August, the new National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB) reviewed that procurement process and has decided on a change of approach based on its collective expertise and experience and taking into account changing market conditions. While this change means that the design team will be selected in Spring 2014, rather than by the end of this year as originally planned, the new Board is confident that there will be no delay to the project overall, as time can now be recovered at contractor tender stage. The new Prior Information Notice was published on 7 November.

Work by the NPHDB on developing a detailed project timeline is continuing, which will reflect the urgency and priority of the project and also its scale and complexity. However, at this stage, the Board is confident that construction can begin in Spring 2015.

Primary Care Centre Provision

689. Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh asked the Minister for Health if consideration has been given to having the proposed primary care centre for Drimnagh located not at Curlew Road but at the newly purchased Davitt Road site. [49369/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Delivery of health-care infrastructure is a service matter. Therefore your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospitals Building Programme

690. Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh asked the Minister for Health in view of the fact that a decision has been taken to build a national paediatric hospital in St. James's Hospital, Dublin 8, if it is cost effective to continue to build new facilities in Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin, in view of the fact that the site is not owned by the State and that no future use has been decided for it post-construction of the new national paediatric hospital, and that the site and building could be sold with no financial benefit or recouping of cost arising to the State. [49370/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The requirement for capital investment in Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin to sustain and improve patient services in advance of the move to the new children's hospital will continue to be considered in the context of the priorities in the Capital Programme.

The HSE's National Capital & Property Steering Committee appraises all projects to be included in the Capital Plan. Project applications must be accompanied by detailed project briefs. The project brief includes a needs assessment, a detailed capital appraisal or a cost benefit analysis, life cycle costs, projected capital budget and revenue and staffing implications.

Hospital Waiting Lists

691. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a breakdown of the number of patients waiting for all types of surgery, including elective surgery, based on the following timeframes: one to three months; three to six months; greater than six months; greater than nine months; and more than one year in St. James's Hospital, Dublin 8. [49387/13]

693. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a breakdown of the number of patients waiting for all types of surgery, including elective surgery, based on the following timeframes: one to three months; three to six months; greater than six months; greater than nine months; and more than one year in Tallaght Hospital, Dublin 24. [49391/13]

694. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a breakdown of the number of patients waiting for all types of surgery, including elective surgery, based on the following timeframes: one to three months; three to six months; greater than six months; greater than nine months; and more than one year in the Mater Hospital, Dublin 7. [49392/13]

702. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a breakdown of the number of patients waiting for all types of surgery, including elective surgery, based on the following timeframes: one to three months; three to six months; greater than six months; greater than nine months; and more than one year in St. Vincent's Hospital, Dublin 4. [49442/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 691, 693, 694 and 702 together.

In relation to the detailed information requested by the Deputy, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to him in these matters.

Hospital Waiting Lists

692. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a breakdown of the number of patients waiting for all types of surgery, including elective surgery, based on the following timeframes: one to three months; three to six months; greater than six months; greater than nine months; and more than one year in Connolly hospital, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15. [49390/13]

701. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a breakdown of the number of patients waiting for all types of surgery, including elective surgery, based on the following timeframes: one to three months; three to six months; greater than six months; greater than nine months; and more than one year in Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9 [49441/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 692 and 701 together.

In relation to the detailed information requested by the Deputy, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to him directly, in these matters.

Questions Nos. 693 and 694 answered with Question No. 691.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

695. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Health in regard to the 477 multidisciplinary staff for community mental health services promised for 2013, the number that are currently in post; if all of the 477 staff for 2013 will be hired in 2013; if he will provide a breakdown, in tabular form, of the 477 staff for 2013 by discipline and by region; if he will provide a breakdown in tabular form of the 477 staff in terms of the allocation to adult mental health services, CAMHS, intellectual disability, old age and forensic services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49402/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): An additional €35m was allocated in Budget 2013 for the continued development of our 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 and mental health intellectual disability. 477 posts have been approved to implement these measures. As at 30th September 255 posts (54%) were in the final stages of recruitment, and a further 149 (31%) were at earlier stages indicating that 85% of the posts are in the recruitment process with the balance in the HR approvals process.

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. 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.

In relation to the specific breakdown by discipline and by region, since recruitment and allocation to posts and specific areas of service is currently underway this question would be more appropriately addressed by the HSE to whom it has been referred for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Consultants Recruitment

696. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if, in view of the importance of early diagnosis and timely medical intervention for sufferers of Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, he will provide resources to appoint specialists in this field in Dublin and Cork because there is currently no dedicated specialist in the field in the State. [49405/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to the specific query raised by the Deputy regarding the appointment of specialists in Dublin and Cork, as this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Treatment Abroad Scheme

697. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details of applications made to the treatment abroad scheme by sufferers of Ehlers-Danlos syndrome for each year from 2003 to date in 2013; the number of those applications approved and refused. [49406/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Health Service Executive has been asked to furnish the information requested. I will revert to the Deputy as soon as the information is obtained.

Rare Diseases Strategy Implementation

698. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if EU Council recommendation of 8 June 2009 on an action in the field of rare diseases (2009/C 151/02) is being implemented by his Department and the Health Service Executive in regard to Ehlers-Danlos syndrome. [49415/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): My Department is finalising a national plan on rare diseases which is set in the context of the council recommendation of 8th June 2009. While no specific rare disease is mentioned, the council decision declared that it is estimated that there are between 5,000 and 8,000 rare diseases; and hence it states that the specificities of rare diseases are:

- A limited number of patients and;
- A scarcity of relevant knowledge and expertise.

The councils decision recognised these specificities when it recommended that member states adopt a plan to guide actions in the general field of rare diseases. It is with this in mind that my Department is finalising a generic plan to apply to the 8,000 rare diseases - including Ehlers Danlos Syndrome - estimated to exist.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Eligibility

699. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if Ehlers-Danlos syndrome will be recognised, as a long-term illness, as required under a EU Council recommendation of 8 June 2009 on an action in the field of rare diseases 2009/C 151/02. [49416/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Ireland has been supportive of the EU proposals on rare disease which concluded with a Council Recommendation (2009/C 151/02) in June 2009. The end point is that countries are recommended to develop plans or strategies for rare diseases. Ireland is now well advanced in this work and it is expected that a rare disease plan will be finalised in the near future.

The Long Term Illness (LTI) Scheme is a non-means tested scheme introduced in 1971 under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). It provides free medicines and medical or surgical appliances to people with specified conditions. Regulations were made in 1971, 1973 and 1975 specifying the conditions covered by the Scheme. There are no plans to extend the LTI Scheme.

Under the Drug Payment Scheme, no individual or family pays more than €144 per calendar

month towards the cost of approved prescribed medicines. The scheme significantly reduces the cost burden for families and individuals incurring ongoing expenditure on medicines.

In addition, people who cannot, without undue hardship, arrange for the provision of medical services for themselves and their dependants may be entitled to a medical card. In the assessment process, the Health Service Executive can take into account medical costs incurred by an individual or a family. Those who are not eligible for a medical card may still be able to avail of a GP visit card, which covers the cost of GP consultations.

Hospital Services

700. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Health if there were dedicated resources and specialist staff treating patients with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome at Tallaght hospital, Dublin 24 in the past decade or so; and if it is the case that those resources were withdrawn as part of cuts to the health budget in recent years. [49417/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service issues they have been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Question No. 701 answered with Question No. 692.

Question No. 702 answered with Question No. 691.

HSE Agency Staff Data

703. Deputy Gerald Nash asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form the total number of agency staff engaged at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda for the years 2010, 2011 and 2012 in porter services, nursing grades, maintenance and cleaning; if he will provide in tabular format the total cost per annum under each of these headings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49445/13]

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

Hospitals Expenditure

704. Deputy Gerald Nash asked the Minister for Health the costs associated with transportation relating to the laundry service at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, within the hospital campus and from the hospital to facilities at Navan and Dundalk; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49446/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

HSE Properties

705. Deputy Billy Kelleher asked the Minister for Health the reason the Health Service Executive has decided to sell the health centre in Kilmuckridge, County Wexford; the guarantees he can give that existing community services in Kilmuckridge will be continued; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [49453/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Management of the healthcare property portfolio is a service matter. Therefore your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Local Drugs Task Forces

706. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funding provided for youth programmes and for local drugs task forces to date in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49462/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Local Drugs Task Forces operate a range of education and prevention programmes locally which aim to promote healthier lifestyle choices among young people and other vulnerable groups at risk of problem drug use. In the region of €19.2m was made available from the Drugs Initiative to the Local Drugs Task Forces this year, of which €7.2m was allocated to prevention and education related projects.

The provision of funding for youth programmes is a matter for the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Hospital Appointment Status

707. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Laois will be granted an appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49471/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): For 2013, a maximum waiting time target of 12 months has been set for a first time consultant-led outpatient appointment and this is reflected in the HSE Service Plan. The SDU and the NTPF are working closely with hospitals towards achievement of the maximum waiting time.

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

Proposed Legislation

708. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when he proposes to bring forward primary legislation to provide a restructuring of the way in which the designated professions as covered by the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 will be registered and regulated to provide a more cost-effective operating system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49477/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The drafting of legislation to amend the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 is at an early stage and ongoing consultation with Parliamentary Counsel is underway. The proposed amendments are to aid the implementation of the decision, made in accordance with the Government's programme of rationalisation

of State agencies, to merge the Opticians Board with the Health and Social Care Professionals Council, by regulating the professions of optometrist and dispensing optician under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. The two professions are currently regulated under the Opticians Act 1956.

In addition, amendments to the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 are proposed to enhance efficiency and cost effectiveness, while continuing to protect the public, and to update the Act in the interest of standardising the provisions of legislation governing health regulators. While these amendments include provision for the rationalisation of registration boards in certain circumstances, it is anticipated that comprehensive restructuring of the Council's regulatory framework will not be undertaken until such time as the registration boards have completed first phase establishment and registration.

It is hoped that the amending legislation will be published in 2014.

Hospital Appointment Status

709. Deputy Sean Fleming asked the Minister for Health when an appointment will be arranged in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49479/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): For 2013, a maximum waiting time target of 12 months has been set for a first time consultant-led outpatient appointment and this is reflected in the HSE Service Plan. The SDU and the NTPF are working closely with hospitals towards achievement of the maximum waiting time.

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

Hospital Equipment

710. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Health the reason the nuclear X-ray machine in Crumlin Hospital, Dublin, will not be able to deal with any patients or take X-rays in the month of January; the reason the machine is only used twice every month; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49491/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Prices

711. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the issue of the high cost of medication here compared to other countries; the progress that is being made and is expected to be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49496/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The prices of drugs vary between countries for a number of reasons, including different prices set by manufacturers, different wholesale and pharmacy mark-ups, different dispensing fees and different rates

of VAT.

The State has introduced a series of reforms in recent years to reduce pharmaceutical prices and expenditure. These have resulted in reductions in the price of thousands of medicines. Price reductions of the order of 30% per item reimbursed have been achieved between 2009 and 2013; the average cost per items reimbursed is now running at 2001/2002 levels.

A major new deal on the cost of drugs in the State was concluded with the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA) in October 2012. It will deliver a number of important benefits, including significant reductions for patients in the cost of drugs, a lowering of the drugs bill to the State, timely access for patients to new cutting-edge drugs for certain conditions, and reducing the cost base of the health system into the future.

The IPHA agreement provides that prices are referenced to the currency adjusted average price to wholesaler in the nine EU member states. The prices of a range of medicines were reduced on 1 January 2013 in accordance with the agreement. The gross savings arising from this deal will be in excess of €400 million over 3 years. €210 million from the gross savings will be available to fund new drugs.

A new agreement was also reached with the Association of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers in Ireland (APMI), which represents the generic drugs industry. Since 1 November 2012, the HSE only reimburses generic products which are priced at 50% or less of the initial price of an originator medicine. This represents a significant structural change in generic drug pricing and should lead to an increase in the generic prescribing rate. It is estimated that the combined gross savings from the IPHA and APMI deals will be in excess of €120 million in 2013 with an additional €28 million saved in 2014.

The Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, which came into operation on 24th of June, introduces a system of generic substitution and reference pricing. This legislation will promote price competition among suppliers and ensure that lower prices are paid for these medicines resulting in further savings for both taxpayers and patients. It is estimated that this system will yield €50 million in savings in 2014.

Under the Act, the Irish Medicines Board (IMB) is responsible for the assessment for interchangeability of medicines. Generic substitution will be introduced incrementally with the IMB prioritising those medicines which will achieve the greatest savings for patients and the State. The Board is in the process of reviewing an initial 20 active substances, which equates to approximately 1,500 individual medicines. They include statins, proton pump inhibitors, angiotensin-converting-enzyme (ACE) inhibitors and angiotensin II receptor blockers.

The first List of Interchangeable Medicines, containing groups of atorvastatin products, was published by the IMB on 7th August. The IMB is updating the List of Interchangeable Medicines on an ongoing basis and it expects to complete the assessment of the top 20 priority medicines by mid- 2014. The process will then continue until all relevant medicinal products on the reimbursable list have been assessed.

Once a List of Interchangeable Medicines is published by the IMB a two stage price reduction process gets underway. First, under the terms of the 2012 APMI Agreement, the price of all relevant products fall by 20%, e.g. atorvastatin prices were reduced from 1st September. Secondly, the legislation provides that the HSE may set a reference price for groups of interchangeable products published on the List of Interchangeable Products with a view to introducing further significant price cuts. Taking both price reductions into account, atorvastatin prices are down 70% since the introduction of generic substitution.

Reference pricing involves the setting of a common reimbursement price, or reference price, for a group of interchangeable medicines. It means that one reference price is set for each group or list of interchangeable medicines, and this is the price that the HSE will reimburse to pharmacies for all medicines in the group, regardless of the individual medicine's prices. The first reference price for atorvastatin products was implemented on 1 November 2013. Reference prices will ensure that generic prices in Ireland will fall towards European norms.

Question No. 712 withdrawn.

Infectious Disease Screening Service

713. Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl asked the Minister for Health if his Department has secured expert advice in relation to the development of an anti-malaria policy; the names and qualifications of those providing such advice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49510/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Malaria is a serious tropical disease caused by parasites that are spread by biting mosquitoes. There are four kinds of malaria that can infect humans: *Plasmodium falciparum*, *P. vivax*, *P. ovale*, and *P. malariae*. *P. falciparum* is the most severe form of malaria, and it and *P. vivax* are the most commonly encountered.

The mosquitoes that transmit malaria are not found in Ireland and all cases of malaria in Ireland are imported. The disease is contracted in countries where malaria is endemic or found naturally. African countries have the highest risk of malaria, especially Central and West Africa. But malaria can also be caught in Central and South America, in Asia and most of the Middle East.

Malaria was made a notifiable disease by the Infectious Diseases Regulations, 1948 (S.I. No. 99 of 1948). Provisional data published by the Health Protection and Surveillance Centre (HPSC) indicate that there were ten cases of malaria notified in the first quarter of 2013. Provisionally data also indicate that 65 cases of malaria notified to the HPSC in 2012.

Travellers to countries where malaria is endemic are advised to consult a GP or travel health clinic and take medical advice about malaria prophylaxis before travelling.

Medical Card Delays

714. Deputy Patrick Nulty asked the Minister for Health if a medical card application now under appeal will be expedited in respect of persons (details supplied) in Dublin 15; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49523/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

Medical Card Eligibility

715. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider increasing the eligibility levels for medical cards for single persons to two thirds of that of a couple in view of the hardship experienced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49551/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The income thresholds for a standard means tested medical card are determined by the HSE and the current weekly rates for a single person living alone and a married/cohabiting couple are detailed below.

The Deputy will note that the rate for a single person living alone is approximately $\frac{2}{3}$ of that of a couple for both age categories in the following table:

Category	Aged under 66	Aged 66–69
Single person living alone	€184	€201.50
Married or cohabiting couple (or lone parent with dependent children)	€266.50	€298

Freedom of Information Requests

716. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding a freedom of information request; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49552/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The request referred to was submitted to the Health Service Executive South. Under the Freedom of Information legislation the Health Service Executive is a completely separate body from the Department of Health. Statutory responsibility for compliance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Acts rests entirely with the Health Service Executive.

Provisions within the Freedom of Information legislation allow for an appeals process should any prescribed body fail to meet its requirements under the Acts.

Services for People with Disabilities

717. **Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin** asked the Minister for Health the cutbacks in State funding that have been made to an organisation (details supplied) in Dublin 7 over the past three budgets; and if the service is at risk of closure. [49566/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): This Government currently provides funding of over €1.5 billion to the Disability Services Programme through the HSE's National Service Plan for 2013, and is committed to protecting frontline services for people with disabilities to the greatest possible extent.

The Minister for Health is working to ensure that protection is afforded to the disability sector, and the Social Care area as a whole.

In 2013 the HSE is seeking to maximise the provision of services within available resources and is committed to maintaining a consistent level to that provided in 2012, by providing the following specialist disability services: residential services to over 9,000 people with a disability; day services to over 22,000 people with intellectual and physical disabilities; respite residential support for over 7,500 people with intellectual and physical disabilities; 1.68m hours of Personal Assistant/Home Support Hours.

Pending completion of the national estimates, budgetary and service planning process for 2014 it is not possible to predict the service levels to be provided next year.

In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service issues they have been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Medical Card Applications

718. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Health if and when a medical card may issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49572/13]

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.

Health Services Provision

719. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Health if and when occupational therapy will be offered in the case of the child of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare who has been waiting for three years and has been recognised as a priority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49584/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the Health Service Executive. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Charges

720. Deputy Martin Ferris asked the Minister for Health if it is normal practice for public hospitals to send accident and emergency bills to the next of kin of those who die as a result of road traffic accidents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49588/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I have asked the Health Service Executive for a report on the issue raised by the Deputy. I will revert to the Deputy on the matter as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointment Status

721. Deputy John O'Mahony asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive an eye appointment in UCHG; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49591/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): For 2013, a maximum waiting time target of 12 months has been set for a first time consultant-led outpatient appointment and this is

reflected in the HSE Service Plan. The SDU and the NTPF are working closely with hospitals towards achievement of the maximum waiting time.

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

Home Help Service Provision

722. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Health if any home help will be offered in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49612/13]

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.

Road Projects

723. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the discussions he has had in relation to the need to finalise the required funding to bring the Narrow Water Bridge project to construction stage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49246/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for each local authority. The Irish Government supported the original decision by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) to approve the allocation of EU funding to the Narrow Water bridge project and committed an upfront funding contribution of €3.9 million in January this year. The funding which was to be provided by my Department for the Narrow Water Bridge Project represented a significant commitment given the current financial circumstances. This funding contribution was due to be matched with a contribution from the Northern Ireland authorities in line with the agreed funding ratios for the Programme.

The Government was disappointed that the tender process resulted in a doubling of the initial costs budgeted for by the project partners for the construction of the bridge. The Government has indicated on many occasions that it would be willing to help to address the shortfall in funding for the Narrow Water Bridge, but this depends entirely on matching contributions from the other parties, including the Northern Ireland Executive. These commitments have not as yet been forthcoming.

As the Deputy will be aware, as part of the recovery programme that this Government has had to pursue to put the country back on its feet, unfortunately, there will be a further reduction in regional and local roads spending in 2014 of over €60 million. Ultimately it is from this budget that any additional funding from this State would have had to come and we would not have been in a position to provide a further €10 million towards this project as well as to underwrite any potential further overspend.

The progression and importance of this project has been discussed at the North South Ministerial Council on a number of occasions most recently on the 8th of November. In the Plenary Joint Communiqué issued subsequent to that meeting, it was stated that “Ministers remain supportive of the concept of the Narrow Water Bridge and have asked for an urgent analysis of the issues involved. They remain conscious that the priority is not to lose the EU funding involved.”

It is important to note that there are time constraints with regard to the SEUPB funding, which has to be spent by 2015. SEUPB has now decided to withdraw the letter of offer. The SEUPB is now exploring options for the reallocation of this funding to eligible projects capable of being delivered by December 2015. While this development is unfortunate, this is a project that the Government would like to see delivered in the future and remains committed to. However, we simply do not have the scale of resources required to advance it at this stage when the priority must be on road maintenance and restoration as against new projects.

Road Improvement Schemes

724. Deputy Willie Penrose asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the level of funding that will be made available in respect of local improvement schemes to the local authorities in counties Westmeath and Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49426/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Local Improvements Scheme provided funding for road and laneways that council's have not taken in charge. However, the maintenance and improvement of these roads is, in the first instance, a matter for the relevant landowner. As indicated to all local authorities in January 2013, the local improvement scheme was reinstated but with no separate allocation for this grant category. Under the new arrangements in 2013 local authorities may use up to 7% of their Discretionary Grant towards local improvement schemes should they wish to do so. The local contribution for these schemes has been increased to 20% of the total cost of the project. Apart from this amendment the same eligibility rules apply for these schemes. Furthermore, it is open to local authorities to supplement the 7% of their Discretionary Grant that they can use for the local improvement schemes with their own resources if they so wish.

Details of the 2014 regional and local roads grants will be communicated to local authorities early in the new year.

Bus Éireann Services

725. Deputy Dessie Ellis asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason for the removal of the service by Bus Éireann to the town of Clogheen, County Tipperary; if an impact assessment was carried out to gauge the effect of this on the local community particularly older residents; and if any future service for the area is planned. [48858/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The scheduling and timetabling of buses is an operational matter for Bus Éireann in conjunction with the National Transport Authority (NTA) and not one in which my Department has any role. I have forwarded your question to both the company and the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Road Safety

726. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the National Roads Authority changed the criteria with regard to the dimensions and height of cats' eyes which are installed on our national secondary and primary roads (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49009/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Safety

727. Deputy Tom Fleming asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request the National Roads Authority and Road Safety Authority to immediately investigate and improve the exit from Iveragh Park, Killorglin, County Kerry onto the Ring of Kerry road; if he will take into consideration the fact that there are a large number of residents living in this estate and that sight distance is severely restricted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49012/13]

728. Deputy Tom Fleming asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request the National Roads Authority and the Road Safety Authority to immediately investigate and improve the exit from Iveragh Park, Killorglin, County Kerry onto the Ring of Kerry road; if he will take into consideration the fact that there are a large number of residents living in this estate and the fact that sight distance is severely restricted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49046/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 727 and 728 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for the NRA in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

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

Rail Services

729. Deputy Seán Kenny asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if tickets can now be purchased on-line for all Irish Rail services; if the online option is not available on all services, when same will be available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49081/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The issue raised is

a matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Road Projects

730. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide details, in tabular form by local authority, of the number of road projects at the various stages of planning, including the preliminary stage of planning, the preferred route corridor stage, and the preferred route selection and approval stage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49115/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The planning, design and implementation of individual national roads are matters for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. As regards regional and local roads, the improvement and maintenance of those roads, in its area, is a statutory function of each road authority in accordance with the provisions of section 13 of the Roads Act, 1993. Works on such roads are a matter for the relevant local authority to be funded from its own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of projects to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

Details of the grant allocations for both national and regional & local road projects for 2013 are available in the Dáil Library. In relation to the national roads, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct response. If no response has been received within ten days, please contact my private office.

Road Safety

731. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider a scrappage scheme for trailers (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49135/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): A scrappage scheme along the lines of that suggested by the Deputy would be a matter for consideration by the Minister for Finance.

In the meantime, in the interest of road safety, it is important that trailers used on our roads comply with all relevant roadworthiness requirements.

Public Private Partnerships Cost

732. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will clarify the reason the Government will pay in the region of €10 million in subsidies over the next decade to a Spanish company (details supplied) and its operating concessionary partner for toll generated on the M3 motorway and also the Limerick motorway in view of the deplorable state of the roads here, particularly rural roads; the steps he intends to take to renegotiate the current contracts held with the companies concerned as the Portuguese Government has recently done; his views on whether the outlay could be easily redirected to address road surfacing issues throughout the country; if his Department is looking into the possibility of renegotiating these contracts; if so, the steps that have been taken to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49312/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The payment of the traffic guarantee payments are the result of legally binding contracts that the National Roads Authority (NRA) entered into with the relevant Public Private Partnership (PPP) consortia. The Deputy will be aware that as Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The implementation of individual national road schemes, including PPP projects, is a matter for the NRA under the Roads Acts 1993-2007.

In addition, the statutory power to levy tolls on national roads, to make toll bye-laws and to enter into toll agreements with private investors in respect of national roads is vested in the NRA under Part V of the Roads Act (as amended). The contracts for the privately-operated toll schemes including the two PPP contracts, the M3 Clonee-Kells PPP and the Limerick Tunnel PPP, where a traffic guarantee mechanism is in place are, therefore, commercial agreements between the NRA and the PPP concessionaires concerned. The Limerick Tunnel concession commenced from August 2006. The M3 Clonee to Kells concession commenced from April 2007.

These are legally binding contracts that cannot be unilaterally renegotiated by either party. While it would be obviously much more satisfactory to spend the money going on traffic guarantee payments on the maintenance and restoration of our roads, that is unfortunately not possible without changing the terms and conditions of the contract, and there has been no indication from either of the PPP consortia of a willingness to do so. My understanding is that the Portuguese government renegotiated their PPP contracts to extend payments over a longer period of time, so while payments are reduced in the short-term, the Portuguese government will pay more in the long-term. Given the responsibility of the NRA in this area, I have referred the Deputy's question to them for further reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Departmental Legal Costs

733. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 523 of 12 November 2013, if he will provide a breakdown of the total cumulative amount per year paid to senior counsel since 2004 as there is no data detailing the person who is senior counsel on his Department's website; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49316/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The information requested by the Deputy is contained in the table below:

Year	Amount
2006	€176,954
2007	€46,325
2008	-
2009	-
2010	€31,726
2011	€7,563
2012	-
2013 (to date)	-

Departmental Expenditure

734. Deputy Lucinda Creighton asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 521 and 522 of 12 of November 2013, the current Minister and Department responsible for providing the figures for tourism and sport prior to March 2011; the current Minister and Department responsible for providing figures relating to local roads prior to 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49317/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department has a policy of making the maximum possible financial information available on the www.dttas.ie and is committed to continuing to update and improve the reports which already have been made available. However, the details requested by the Deputy are not readily accessible by my Department.

In respect of payments relating to Tourism and Sport for the period prior to March 2011, the Tourism and Sport functions were part of the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, which was later re-named the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport. In the reconfiguration of Departments which took place at the formation of the current Government, the Tourism and Sport functions and associated financial information for that year were transferred to my Department. I understand that historical data relating to financial payments to third parties did not transfer across to my Department.

In respect of payments relating to regional and local roads for the period prior to 1 January 2008, the regional and local road functions were part of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Statutory Instrument No. 815/2007 – Roads and Road Vehicles (Transfer of Departmental Administration and Ministerial Functions) Order 2007, provided for the transfer of regional and local road functions to my Department. Historical data relating to financial payments to third parties for goods and services remained with the former Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, which is now the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government.

Data Protection

735. Deputy Michael McCarthy asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to a data breach regarding customer information at the National Driving Licence Service; the measures he is taking to preserve privacy online and protection of citizens' data in the wake of this significant breach of Internet privacy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49329/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The operation of the National Driver Licensing Service is a matter for the Road Safety Authority (RSA). The RSA informed me of the breach and assured me that no personal financial information was compromised. I understand that the RSA has notified the Data Commissioner of the incident. The RSA is also investigating the incident. As this is a matter for the RSA, I have forwarded the question to the Authority for direct reply, and I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received in the next ten days.

Departmental Bodies

736. Deputy Gerry Adams asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the budget for Tourism Ireland for the years 2010 to date in 2013; and any proposed budget reductions to these bodies being considered. [49351/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Tourism Ireland as a North South body receives funding from both the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in Northern Ireland and from my Department via Fáilte Ireland. The agency's annual Business Plan including its budget is approved by the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC). As the Deputy will be aware, his party colleagues in the Northern Ireland Executive are also members of the NSMC. The allocations provided by my Department to Tourism Ireland for administration and core overseas marketing activity for the period 2010 to 2013 are as follows:- 2010 ,€48.892 million; 2011, €47.248 million; 2012, €45.831 million; 2013, €44.294 million.

While the agency's 2014 Business Plan is yet to be approved, it is expected that its overall budget for next year will be reduced by 4% which is in line with efficiency-savings reductions agreed by the respective Finance Departments for all North/South bodies.

Road Projects Expenditure

737. Deputy Sandra McLellan asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the areas for which the National Roads Authority have provided funding in 2014 under the infrastructure and capital investment 2012-2016 programme; the amount allocated to each area; the reason Buttevant, County Cork, with one of the worst road surfaces in any town or village in the country has been omitted from funding allocation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49353/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter of the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993-2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. It is a matter for the NRA to prioritise allocations under the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Framework 2012-2016.

Noting this I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

State Bodies Expenditure

738. Deputy Patrick Nulty asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the annual budget for the National Transport Authority for each year 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49404/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The National Transport Authority (NTA) was established on 1 December 2009. In accordance with the Dublin Transport Authority (DTA) Act 2008, the functions of the NTA include securing the provision of public transport infrastructure projects in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). At national level, the NTA has responsibility for securing the provision of public passenger land transport services. This includes the provision of subvented bus and rail services by Bus Éireann, Dublin Bus and Irish Rail. The NTA has also administered the Regional Cities and Accessibility Grants Programmes on behalf of my Department since 2011. Given this, I have referred the question to the NTA for direct response to the Deputy. If a response is not received within ten working days, the Deputy should contact my private office.

Road Projects

739. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request the National Road Authority to provide funding as a matter of urgency to surface dress the Ring of Kerry road, N70, (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49420/13]

740. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request the National Road Authority to provide the necessary funding as a matter of urgency to surface dress the Ring of Kerry road, N70, from Caherciveen to Deelis Bridge as it is in an exceptionally poor condition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49421/13]

741. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request the National Road Authority to provide funding as a matter of urgency to surface dress the N70 Iveragh Road, Killorglin, County Kerry that is in an exceptionally poor condition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49422/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 739 to 741, inclusive, together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for the NRA in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

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

Driver Licence Applications

742. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he will take to remedy the situation which has arisen in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Longford and deal with the clear discrepancy that has arisen in respect of the specified category of vehicles to which they are entitled as a result of their application in May 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49424/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Driver licensing is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority, and I cannot comment on individual cases. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct response, and I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Road Projects

743. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when funding will be allocated to Longford County Council to enable the N55 Granard bypass to proceed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49432/13]

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

the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Sports Funding

744. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to any grant schemes at a European level for which sports clubs here may apply directly; if so, if he will provide the relevant information; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49451/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): Erasmus+ 2014-2020 is the new EU Programme for education, training, youth and sport and will for the first time include a specific sport chapter. The main focus of the sport chapter of the Erasmus+ Programme will be grassroots sports. The objectives of the sport chapter include promoting voluntary activities in sport, together with social inclusion, equal opportunities and awareness of the importance of health-enhancing physical activity through increased participation in, and equal access to sport for all.

Grassroots organisations will be invited to participate by creating partnerships with similar organisations from other EU Member States. Funding support will be available for transnational collaborative partnerships, not-for-profit European sport events, for initiatives strengthening the evidence base for policy making in sport and encouraging dialogue among European sport stakeholders. Given the focus on grassroots sports, there is an opportunity for Irish sporting organisations to benefit from the programme.

Driver Licence Renewals

745. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a category on the driving licence of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be reinstated as it was inadvertently removed after renewal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49493/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Driver licensing is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority, and I cannot comment on individual cases. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply, and I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Driver Licences

746. Deputy Noel Harrington asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will examine the situation regarding the removal of the category on driver licences for light trucks for those who held this category on previous licences; if the same criteria will be applied as those who had the trailer category on previous licences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49605/13]

747. Deputy Noel Harrington asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will examine the situation regarding the removal of the category on driver licences for motor

cycles for those who held this category on previous licences; if the same criteria will be applied as those who had the trailer category on previous licences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49613/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 746 and 747 together.

The situation whereby some people inadvertently lost their entitlement to tow trailers with their cars originated due to a change to driver licensing law in 1989. Before that date, there was one licence category for driving cars and cars with trailers. In many cases, this licence also permitted the driving of motorcycles and light trucks. The change in 1989 meant that in future there were separate categories, one for cars and others for cars with trailers, for motorcycles or for trucks. People requiring to tow trailers or to drive vehicles other than cars were, from then on, required to pass a test in that category. People who had a full licence before the change were allowed, when renewing their licences, to claim both of the new categories. To do so, they had to tick boxes for each category on their renewal forms.

It appears that a number of people renewed their licences for the car only category. Earlier this year, I received representations from farming organisations on behalf of people who had realised belatedly that they had lost the trailer entitlement which they had held prior to 1989. On consideration of the issue, I decided that people who could prove that they had held a full driving licence pre-1989 - that is, had originally held a full entitlement to draw a trailer - should be allowed to reclaim their trailer entitlement. I made it clear that this was a once-off arrangement and specific to the trailer entitlement. I have no plans to make arrangements of this kind in other cases.

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