

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 5, inclusive, answered orally.

Inter-Country Adoptions

6. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position regarding an adoption agreement between Ireland and Russia; the concerns the authorities in Russia have raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35732/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Efforts are ongoing in my Department in relation to a bilateral agreement on intercountry adoption between Ireland and the Russian Federation. Following a meeting with a delegation of Russian officials in October 2013 my Department prepared revised draft wording on a number of specific points. This was forwarded to the Russian Authorities in February 2014. In transmitting these revisions it was suggested that should these revisions be acceptable to the Russian Federation, it would be useful for both sides to meet again for further discussions.

In April the Ministry of Education and Science advised the Irish Embassy in Moscow that all proposed adoption agreements were on hold while the Russian Government considered proposals in relation to how they deal with adoption agreements in general.

The Embassy has recently advised that a reply from the Russian authorities to my Department's revised wording is expected shortly. Once received it will be reviewed so that next steps can be taken.

I have recently met with Maria Hunt of the Russian Irish Adoption Group to update them on the current situation with regard to discussions on a possible bilateral adoption agreement with Russia.

Child Care Services Data

7. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide the number of voluntary and private residential child care centres in Dublin North-East; the number of young persons in each of these centres; and the budget allocation for each centre. [35436/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Child and Family Agency has a statutory duty under the Child Care Act 1991 and the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013, to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care and protec-

tion. Depending on the nature of the individual circumstances, a child may be received into the care of the State. At the end of July 2014, there were 6,466 children in care.

The majority - 93% - of children in care are placed in foster care with a family. Where a foster care placement is unsuitable, children may be placed in a children's residential centre. There were 339 children placed in children's residential centres at the end of July 2014. Children's residential centres can be operated directly by the Agency or by a private or voluntary provider on behalf of the Agency. A child is placed in a private residential centre when no suitable Child and Family Agency placement is available and the placement has been assessed as meeting the needs of the child. Children with more complex and challenging needs are generally placed in private residential centres.

Nationally, at the end of July 2014, 163 children in residential care were placed in private residential centres, 38 of whom were in private residential centres in Dublin North East. I am advised by the Agency that in February 2014, there were 63 Private Residential Child Care Centres in operation throughout the country. 21 of these were based in the Dublin North East Region. I have asked the Agency for up to date information in relation to this Region and I will arrange for this to be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

The Agency undertook a tendering process in 2013 for the provision of private residential placements. All Private Children's Residential Providers are now subject to contract. The Agency advised that approximately 91 places in 23 centres operated by 9 providers will be subject to a block-book contract at € 4,500 per week per place. This is a reduction from the previous average cost of €5,000 per week prior to tendering process. The value of the tender is €23.6 million.

The Agency advised that the number of placements procured is less than what is used from the private sector at any one time so the Agency does not pay for beds that are not used. This means the Agency "spot purchase" a number of beds over and above what is procured on a block basis.

All private children's residential centres who were not awarded or did not enter the block-book element of the tender will also be considered as approved providers for "spot purchased" placements. These "spot purchased" placements are now governed for the first time ever by an approved provider system. 136 places are available in 40 centres operated by 17 approved providers who were not part of the above tender process, should these placements be required by the Agency. These providers are contracted to provide placements in this manner and costs only arise when a child is placed in one of these placements. The cost of each child's placement will vary according to the identified needs of the individual child and cannot be qualified, though the base cost is generally €5,000 per week.

Question No. 8 answered orally.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

9. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will ensure that the terms of reference of the mother and baby home inquiry operate similar to the institutional abuse inquiry in Northern Ireland where a survivor from any institution may contact the inquiry and be heard. [35432/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Government has undertaken to establish a Commission of Investigation into the concerns that have arisen in relation to Mother and Baby Homes. The decision to establish a Commission of Investigation into

these matters received the unanimous endorsement of this House on the 11th June. Since this date, considerable progress has been achieved in advancing the necessary legislative and operational arrangements required to establish a statutory investigation. It is my intention to come back to both Houses during this Dáil term with a draft resolution to establish the Commission.

The specific matters to be investigated and the appropriate range of methodologies to be utilised are being considered as part of Government's deliberations on the Commission. The broad range of issues and concerns raised with my Department with regard to the proposed Commission's terms of reference are being given consideration in arriving at an overall scope for the Commission which is workable and effective.

One of the key conclusions of the Inter-Departmental report published on the 16th July was that an opportunity for those who were mothers or children in Mother and Baby Homes to input their experiences should be developed. This is recognised as requiring considerable and careful planning taking account of previous learning from similar processes in earlier investigations. It is important that any such process should be as sensitive and non-adversarial as possible, consistent with the requirements of natural justice and the provisions of the Commission of Investigation Act 2004. As the Commission will be addressing matters which touch on areas of great personal sensitivity it will be necessary that appropriate protocols be adopted which protect the confidentiality of sensitive personal information.

More generally, our approach should have regard to the facts established through recent inquiries into related institutions, and the general experience gained in conducting similar investigations into matters of public importance. Establishing an investigation which is capable of delivering on public expectations and effectively addressing these important matters in a sensitive and timely manner must be our primary concern.

Education Policy

10. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the input he has into children's education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35733/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): As the Deputy is aware, my Department recently launched *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, the first overarching national policy framework which comprehends the age ranges of children and young people 0 – 24 years. *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* is a cross-government strategy aimed at ensuring that all children and young people get the best possible foundation in learning and development, are engaged in education, and are supported to achieve their full potential in all areas of learning and development.

The Minister for Education and Skills has overall responsibility for policy, funding and direction, with regard to the education of children.

My Department supports the Department of Education and Skills in implementing its responsibility in a number of ways.

As regards the pre-school period, my Department funds the Early Childhood Care and Education programme at an annual cost of some €175 million enabling almost 70,000 children to avail of a free pre-school year, which benefits children's educational and developmental outcomes. Funding is provided by my Department to support a number of key childcare programmes which support the provision of early childhood care and education for more than 100,000 children each year and to assist their parents to avail of job opportunities.

Improving quality is critical to improving of educational outcomes for children. The two Departments continue to collaborate on the quality agenda for Early Years Services. Indeed the fact that the Early Years Education Policy Unit of the Department of Education and Skills is co-located with my Department in Mespil Road is testament to the close working relationship.

My Department supports quality in pre-school education in a number of ways. These include funding voluntary organisations to carry out the field testing of the Síolta Quality Assurance Programme and the roll out of the Aistear in Action projects, incentivising higher qualifications through the criteria for funding attaching to the free pre-school year, and, most recently, the introduction of new qualification requirements for staff in child care settings and financial support for staff to achieve those qualifications.

In respect of primary and secondary level pupils, the Child and Family Agency assists the Department of Education and Skills in a number of ways.

The functions and operational responsibilities of the former National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) are now part of the new Child and Family Agency. Since 1st January 2014 the staff of the former NEWB, including its Education Welfare Officers, have transferred to the new Agency.

The three service strands formerly under the remit of NEWB collectively form the Educational Welfare Services of the new Agency. These are:

- The Education Welfare Service, which has specific responsibility for the Agency's general function to ensure that each child attends a recognised school or otherwise receives a certain minimum education,

- The Home School Community Liaison Programme, which has 402 school-based co-ordinators; and

- The School Completion Programme which has a €24 m budget and provides support to 124 locally managed projects and related initiatives operating across 470 primary and 224 post-primary schools and providing targeted supports to approximately 36,000 children and young people.

I am confident that this Government's decision to amalgamate the educational welfare functions formerly assigned to the National Educational Welfare Board, into the Child and Family Agency will provide opportunities for more effective working amongst the range of professionals involved in directly supporting children and their families.

The Children Detention Schools in Oberstown, provide education facilities to children detained there by the courts. Educational Services are delivered to the children by the Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board based on an education strategy agreed with the Irish Youth justice Service operating in my Department. The Inspectorate within the Department of Education and Skills carries out inspections of these services.

Questions Nos. 11 and 12 answered orally.

Young People's Facilities and Services Fund

13. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his views on the operation of the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund; his further views on the need for continuous monitoring of the fund to ensure it reaches its target groups. [35435/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. In 2014, funding of €49.78m has been provided to my Department for these schemes.

From within this budget, my Department provides funding to projects under the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund. Some 230 projects are supported under the Fund. They are located in disadvantaged areas where a significant drug problem exists or has the potential to develop. The objective is to attract "at risk" young people into facilities and activities and divert them away from the dangers of substance abuse. In 2014, the allocation for the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund is €18.4m.

The projects funded report on an on-going basis to my Department and they are linked with the Education and Training Boards in their respective areas in the context of overall youth funding at local level. The projects provide annual progress reports on their activities and audited accounts to my Department. The youth projects and services also provide a progress report on their engagement with the National Quality Standards Framework for youth work on an annual basis to my Department.

The Young People's Facilities and Services Fund is one of three schemes administered by my Department that target young people who are "at risk" because they live in disadvantaged communities and they are vulnerable to drugs, alcohol misuse, or they are out of school, or at risk of homelessness. Together the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund, the Special Projects for Youth and Local Drug Task Force schemes account for 70% of the funding available to my Department for the provision of youth services. In 2014, almost €34 m was allocated to the schemes.

My Department has recently completed a Value for Money and Policy Review of the schemes. The review makes recommendations for the future operation of the schemes that will shape their development in the years ahead to ensure quality effective, value for money services that are evidence based and designed to secure the best outcomes for young people. The review includes recommendations about governance processes that will improve oversight of how well the schemes are meeting their objectives for vulnerable young people.

I am currently considering the review's findings and recommendations and my Department is making arrangements for its publication at an early date. I intend that the recommendations of the review will be progressed in the context of the new National Youth Strategy that is being developed by my Department. The National Youth Strategy will be a strategy for all young people aged 10-24 years and it will have particular regard to young people experiencing or at risk of experiencing the poorest outcomes and in most need of support. The strategy will be informed by the recommendations of the Value for Money and Policy Review as to how best the youth services may be developed for the future to meet the needs of this cohort of young people and improve the prospects of securing improved developmental outcomes for them. It is anticipated that the new National Youth Strategy will be completed by the end of this year.

Question No. 14 answered orally.

Departmental Funding

15. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide the services carried out on behalf of his Department by Pobal; the financial amount paid by his Department for the administration of such services; if there are measures in place to review the

programmes and schemes operated so that duplication is avoided and public money is spent as effectively as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35738/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Pobal provides a significant level of service to my Department and it would be impossible to deliver the various Departmental programmes without Pobal's support. The majority of these services relate to Early Years programmes and services, some of which are:

- Conducting contractual compliance visits to participating childcare services under the large-scale Early Years funding programmes: Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Childcare Education and Training Support (CETS) and CCS and payment administration, accounting and reporting for CCS and CETS;

- Managing a range of capital funding programmes and commitments (including the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme; the National Childcare Investment Programme; and early years capital schemes in 2012, 2013 and 2014). The role includes application, appraisal and contract management as well as verification of the capital expenditure which involves on-site visits to a sample of projects;

- The management of the Early Years Practitioners Learner Fund 2014-2015 including the procurement of training providers and the administration, accounting and reporting of the funding.

- The development, delivery and management of business processes, systems and infrastructure to improve the supports provided to beneficiaries and the management of the state's investment in the early years sector, including on-line funding application and appraisal processes for capital and for the Learner Fund; Pobal maps, hosting of Tusla inspection report

Pobal also provides a number of other services to other aspects of the Departments' remit, including for example grant management and support in relation the Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme, and support for the National Early Years Access Initiative, the youth capital, youth services and youth cafe programmes, the School Completion Programme and the Family Contact Centre Pilot Initiative as well as for Comhairle na nÓg.

In 2013 my Department paid a total of €5.7 million to Pobal for these services. The figure for 2014 is likely be similar; some services have been added in, e.g. the Learner Fund for the Early Years sector and some have been reduced or were more resource intensive in 2013, e.g. publication of inspection reports. The total budget for the services that Pobal deals with is of the order of €300 million annually so the cost of the work Pobal does on the Department's behalf is approximately 2% of the total cost of the programmes.

There is ongoing review of programmes to ensure effectiveness and that there is no duplication. The very strong data management role that Pobal plays is a key factor in the Departments ability to review and assess programmes effectiveness, efficiency and value for money.

Youth Unemployment Measures

16. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will co-ordinate a programme of action between the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Education and Skills to address the escalating youth unemployment issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35761/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): My Department works

closely with the Departments of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Education and Skills, Social Protection and others as part of a cross departmental effort to tackle youth unemployment.

My Department administers a range of funding schemes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country by the voluntary youth sector. In 2014 €49.78m has been allocated to my Department for these schemes. The funding schemes support national and local youth work provision to some 380,000 young people, and involve approximately 1,400 youth work staff in 470 projects and 40,000 volunteers in local communities around the country. As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, my aim is to highlight the potential youth work can play, as part of the response to the youth employment challenge, through collaboration with other interests. Youth work and non-formal learning, in its many programmes and activities, offers young people opportunities to acquire new competences and skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, motivation, creativity and leadership. These are core and transferable life skills - the 21st century skills - that are so important to training and career readiness.

The work of the voluntary youth work sector, in the provision of youth services, has a significant contribution to make to the Government's jobs agenda for young people including the Action Plan for Jobs, led by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Pathways to Work and the implementation of the Youth Guarantee for unemployed young people, which is led by the Department of Social Protection. Many youth organisations are working closely with the relevant Government departments and delivering youth employment and youth employability measures to address the challenges of youth unemployment.

The youth work sector has a significant contribution to make to a number of actions for progression by my Department in the Action Plan for Jobs 2014. These include promoting youth entrepreneurship activity at local level, increasing participation in volunteering opportunities in youth services and promoting mobility and learning opportunities for young people under the European Commission's Erasmus+ programme. In this context my Department, in consultation with the youth sector, has developed a 'Youth Employability Initiative' which builds on existing youth work initiatives that increase the employability of marginalised young people in the 15 to 24 age group. The initiatives will target the hardest to reach young people who are at risk of becoming NEET (i.e. not in employment, education or training) for intensive support to prevent unemployment. My Department is liaising with the relevant Government departments in the development of the initiative for 2015.

The National Youth Strategy 2014-2020 which is being developed by my Department in collaboration with other Government departments and youth interests will have a particular focus on ensuring greater coordination in policy and provision across government for young people aged 10-24 years. The strategy will aim to be responsive to current and emerging issues which impact on young people's lives, such as the unemployment challenge at this time.

It is anticipated that the new National Youth Strategy will be completed by the end of 2014.

Iniúchtaí ar Sheirbhísí Chúram Leanaí

17. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Seán Kyne** den Aire Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige cén obair atá déanta ar an bpróiseas chun áiseanna cúraim leanaí ar fud na tíre a iniúchadh agus cén obair atá déanta chun na tuarascálacha cigireachta go léir a chur ar fáil ar an idirlíon; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [35739/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Tá freagracht ag Tusla,

an Ghníomhaireacht um Leanaí agus an Teaghlach, as iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar áiseanna réamhscoile faoin Acht um Chúram Leanaí 1991. Tá mórchlár athchóirithe ar siúl laistigh den Ghníomhaireacht le cur chuige soiléir náisiúnta a fhorbairt i dtaca le hiniúchtaí. Tugadh buanósanna imeachta oibríochta isteach le haghaidh a thabhairt ar cheisteanna neamh-chomhsheasmhachta agus le tuilleadh soiléireachta a sholáthar do sheirbhísí réamhscoile, tá tuairiscí iniúchta ar fáil ar líne agus ceapadh cigirí nua le folúntais a líonadh arbh ann dóibh. De bhun an bhuiséid 2014, tá luach €4.5m de mhaoiniú Stáitchiste á chur ar fáil le tacú le cur i bhfeidhm Chlár Oibre Cáilíochta na Réamhscoileanna, agus táthar ag leithdháileadh €0.5m den mhaoiniú seo i dtreo an chostais a bhaineann le leibhéil fhoirnithe a mhéadú leis an gcóras iniúchta réamhscoile a threisiú. Rinneadh roinnt leasuithe don Acht um Chúram Leanaí 1991 san Acht um an Ghníomhaireacht um Leanaí agus an Teaghlach 2013. Táthar ag súil gan mhoill le foilsiú rialachán a thugann éifeacht do na hathruithe reachtaíochta. Tabharfaidh an reachtaíocht nua isteach raon de chumhachtaí nua forfheidhmithe do Chigirí ag leibhéal an réamhionchúisimh. Tabharfar de chumhacht do na Cigirí coinníollacha feabhsaithe a shonrú nach mór do sheirbhís cloí leo agus beifear in ann bagairt go mbainfí a clárú de sheirbhís. Déanfaidh an córas seo soláthar do rialú agus d'fhorfheidhmiú tráthúla agus éifeachtacha na gcaighdeán sna seirbhísí réamhscoile, agus iad cúltacaithe ag reachtaíocht reachtúil. I Mí Iúil 2013, chuir an FSS tús le foilsiú tuairiscí iniúchta cúlghabhálacha réamhscoile ar líne, agus táthar ag leanúint ar aghaidh leis an bpróiseas seo. Táthar ag foilsiú gach tuairisc nua iniúchta a cuireadh i gcrích ó 1 Iúil 2013 ar aghaidh ar líne freisin. Tá Pobal ag óstáil fhoilsiú na dtuairiscí iniúchta réamhscoile, agus tá siad ar fáil ar shuíomh gréasáin Pobal. Tá muintín agam go ndéanfaidh na hathchóirithe cuimsitheacha atáthar ag tabhairt isteach soláthar d'fheidhmiú na Gníomhaireachta um Leanaí agus an Teaghlach de réimeas iniúchta réamhscoile atá comhsheasmhach agus láidir. Ba mhaith liom a rá freisin nach bhfuil san iniúchadh ach cuid amháin den chur chuige i leith cáilíochta agus go mbeidh mo Roinnse ag díriú ar fhorbairt chóras le feabhas a chur ar sheirbhísí cáilíochta agus tacaíochta le hardchaighdeán a chomhlíonadh.

Youth Cafés Expenditure

18. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when funding will be provided to the Attic Youth Café in County Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35729/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): In 2013, €1.5m in capital funding was made available to my Department for a Youth Café scheme. Pobal assisted my Department to administer this scheme. In all 95 applications with proposals were received and some 30 proposals for new youth cafés facilities around the country were approved for funding. These projects are now working with Pobal to develop their projects to the next stage of development. An application for funding was received in respect of the Attic Youth Café, however, the application was deemed ineligible for the scheme.

Representations on behalf of the project have been received in my Department. There have been meetings with the then Ministers for Children and Youth Affairs and officials in January and in May this year. Officials of my Department and Pobal met with the project representatives on 11th September, 2014. Officials are now undertaking a full examination of all aspects of this case, including information and documentation provided at the meeting. The outcome of this examination will be communicated to the project in the coming weeks. Pending the outcome of this examination my Department is not in a position to determine what steps, if any, may be available to the proposers to advance the project.

My Department does not have available to it, a new capital fund for the development of

youth cafés in 2014. However, it is acknowledged that youth cafés offer young people a safe, alcohol and drug free space, for recreation, non formal learning and youth activities. The Department has supported the development of some 100 youth cafés over the period 2011 to 2013. The development of youth café facilities will continue to be advanced should further capital funding become available in future years.

Longford Youth Service receives funding on an annual basis from my Department under the Special Projects for Youth Scheme. In 2014, funding of €74,651 has been allocated to Longford Youth Services to support the provision of services to young people in the locality.

Youth Services

19. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which he and his Department remain in contact with those providing supportive youth services throughout the country with particular reference to the need to identify ongoing needs and requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35586/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. In 2014, funding of €49.78m has been provided to my Department for these schemes. The funding schemes support national and local youth work provision to some 380,000 young people and involve, approximately 1,400 youth work staff in 477 projects and 40,000 volunteers working in youth work services and communities throughout the country.

Ongoing engagement and dialogue with the youth sector organisations and with young people themselves are priorities in the formulation of policies and provision of services to support young people's development and learning. My Department works closely with the youth sector interests in various fora in developing key initiatives. The National Youth Work Advisory Committee, whose members include representatives of the national youth organisations, Government departments and the Education and Training Boards, that support youth services at local level, has an important advisory role to me in matters to do with provision for young people. My Department has worked with the youth sector on the development of youth work responses to the challenges of youth unemployment, including the contribution that the youth services can make to the Government's employment agenda and the Action Plan For Jobs, 2014.

The youth sector is engaged in the development, by my Department, of the new National Youth Strategy 2014-2020. The strategy will be a universal strategy for all young people, aged 10 to 24 years, while having particular regard to those young people who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing the poorest outcomes and, therefore, in most need of support. In consultation with the National Youth Work Advisory Committee, my Department has set up a National Youth Strategy Task Group to oversee the development of the new strategy. The Task Group, which meets regularly, is chaired by the Director of the National Youth Council of Ireland and comprises representatives from the youth sector, Government departments, Education and Training Boards, the Centre for Effective Services and the business community. It is anticipated that the new National Youth Strategy will be completed by my Department for the end of 2014.

I, and officials of my Department have met, and continue to meet regularly, with youth organisations and groups. Earlier this month, over 2 days, I met with the representatives of some 30 national and major regional youth organisations. My aim is to see how we can work together to bring about the best possible outcomes for young people, having regard to resources available to us and to ensure that the programmes and services being provided are relevant and

responsive to young people's needs.

Juvenile Offenders

20. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which adequate and appropriate accommodation is available to facilitate the needs and requirements of juvenile offenders, with particular reference to adequate segregation to ensure that the maximum opportunities for rehabilitation and-or education are available to such offenders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35585/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The 3 children detention schools, all located at Oberstown, Lusk, Co. Dublin, currently provide a total of 46 detention places for young people ordered to be remanded or committed by the courts. These comprise 6 places for girls up to the age of 18 on admission and 40 places for boys up to the age of 17 on admission. Boys aged 17 on being ordered to be detained are currently accommodated by the Irish Prison Service. This practice will cease, meeting the commitment in the Programme for Government to end the practice of detaining children in adult prison facilities, when new children detention facilities currently being constructed on the Oberstown campus become available before the end of this year. Construction commenced on site on the Oberstown campus in September 2013 and the new facilities will increase the capacity on the campus to provide sufficient accommodation for all children under 18 years of age ordered to be detained by the courts. In the interim, pending introduction of the expanded facilities, the existing facilities at Oberstown are being used to meet demand from the Courts. There is ongoing contact with the Courts, Probation and An Garda Síochána regarding the availability of places in the children detention schools.

The services currently being delivered in the children detention schools and the enhanced services which will be supported by the new facilities being developed (including new education and recreation facilities as well as dedicated visiting and medical facilities) focus on education and rehabilitation of the young people detained in order to minimise re-offending and to support their early re-integration into the community. Each young person is assessed on admission to determine his/her need for specialist therapeutic interventions and to develop an individualised management plan which might include addressing offending behaviour, family therapy and other relevant programmes. The Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board provide delivery of age and ability appropriate education services to the young people in detention including up to State examination level.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

21. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will initiate a comprehensive examination of the State's treatment of women and their children born outside marriage, rather than a narrow inquiry into certain mother and baby homes in the interests of full justice and accountability for these citizens who were gravely wronged. [35433/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): This Government is committed to establishing a comprehensive and effective Commission of Investigation into matters relating to Mother and Baby Homes in accordance with the Motion passed in this House on the 11th June last.

This Motion focused on a number of specific concerns, including that Dáil Éireann "*acknowledges the need to establish the facts regarding the deaths of almost 800 children at the*

Bon Secours Sisters institution in Tuam, County Galway between 1925 and 1961, including arrangements for the burial of these children; acknowledges that there is also a need to examine other “mother and baby homes” operational in the State in that era and recognises the plight of the mothers and children who were in these homes as a consequence of the failure of religious institutions, the State, communities and families to cherish the children of the nation in the way they should have been cherished and cared for”.

Considerable progress has been achieved since this Motion was passed to advance the necessary legislative and operational arrangements to establish a statutory investigation. The specific matters to be investigated are being considered as part of Government’s deliberations in order to finalise an overall scope for the Commission’s investigation which is workable and effective.

The Inter-Departmental Group’s Report on Mother and Baby Homes, which I published on the 16th July, has served to stimulate and further inform public debate on these important matters. Given the breadth and scale of the issues identified in the Report, and our experience of previous statutory inquiries, the importance of providing the Commission with precise terms of reference should not be underestimated. Discussions in this regard are on-going with my Government colleagues and the Attorney General with a view to finalising our deliberations in early course.

As part of the process it is my intention to arrange further opportunities for engagement with key stakeholders in order to update them on the emerging issues and seek their further views.

Detention Centres Provision

22. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide a progress report on the developments at Oberstown; the current status of the construction works; the anticipated completion date of same; when the new facilities will be commissioned and the current usage of St. Patrick’s; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35742/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): There is a commitment in the Programme for Government to end the practice of detaining children in adult prison facilities, which under the Children Act 2001 means all young people up to the age of 18 years. This will be met in full later this year when the extension of the Oberstown campus results in the transfer of responsibility for 17 year old boys from the adult prison system to the children detention schools.

Following the appointment of a main contractor and a number of sub-contractors, construction on the Oberstown development project started on site on 23 September 2013. The project will provide sufficient new detention places to enable the extension of the child care model of detention to all under 18 year olds ordered to be remanded or committed by the courts on criminal justice charges. I am advised that the first 3 units of residential accommodation are scheduled to be delivered by the end of this year, in order to facilitate the transfer of responsibility for 17 year old boys from the adult prison system. A further 3 residential units, to be delivered in 2015, will replace existing detention buildings used by Oberstown Boys School and Oberstown Girls School which have reached the end of their useful life. The Office of Public Works (OPW) is overseeing the delivery of the project on behalf of my Department with the main contractor involved, BAM Building Ltd.

In addition to the capital project, there is an ongoing programme of reforms aimed at enhancing the effective management and capacity of services on the Oberstown campus.

The transfer of responsibility for 16 year old boys campus was implemented in 2012 and the logistical and legal aspects of accommodating 17 year old boys in custody on remand in Oberstown at the earliest possible date are currently being examined.

A recruitment process carried out in late 2013 has resulted in the appointment of a Campus Manager for the Oberstown campus. The Campus Manager reports to the Board of Management and is responsible for driving the reforms that are currently taking place in Oberstown, in particular the integration of the 3 children detention schools into a single entity.

A care staff recruitment programme, to meet the needs of the increased capacity in children detention places on the Oberstown campus, is well advanced. This is the first additional recruitment of staff to the campus in many years. I am advised that employment contracts are currently being issued to qualified candidates and that the first group of new staff is due to commence employment in Oberstown for orientation and training next month.

Heads of a Bill for amendments to the Children Act 2001 were recently approved by Cabinet and drafting work is now underway with a view to its enactment before the end of 2014. The Bill will, in particular, provide for the legal amalgamation of the 3 existing children detention schools and the repeal of all current legal provisions which permit the detention of children in the adult prison system.

Child Care Qualifications

23. Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his plans to require all child care workers to be qualified to at least FETAC level 5 by September 2015; if allowance will be made for those employed in child care and enrolled in FETAC courses that will not be completed by September 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35724/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): A number of amendments were made to the Child Care Act 1991 in the Child and Family Agency Act 2013. Regulations giving effect to the legislative changes are expected to be published shortly. The new Regulations will impose qualification requirements of a minimum Level 5 award in early childhood care and education for all staff working in early years services (no requirement currently exists). This requirement applies from September 2014 in the case of new services, and from September 2015 in the case of existing services. In addition, the minimum qualification requirement for pre-school leaders delivering the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme will be increased from a Level 5 award to a Level 6, from the same dates.

In light of the proposed timeframes for the introduction of new qualification requirements, the Department has sought to work with the childcare sector to accelerate the process for training and up-skilling staff and improving the quality of care delivered to children. €0.9 million was provided to support a training programme in 2013 to provide support to staff who are seeking to meet the qualification requirements.

In March of this year, the Learner Fund was launched. This Fund, which has an allocation of €3m over the two years 2014 and 2015 and is sufficient to support all eligible applicants, is designed to support existing childcare staff to up-skill to meet new qualification requirements. The Learner Fund is being administered by Pobal, with the assistance of local City and County Childcare Committees. There will be a maximum cost per module of €200 for classroom-based courses, of which €150 will be the maximum Learner Fund subvention and €50 the maximum contribution by the learner. The maximum cost per complete classroom-based course will be

€1,600. For blended/online courses, the maximum cost per module will be €150, of which the maximum Learner Fund subvention will be €120 and the maximum contribution by the learner will be €30.

While the deadline is September, it is recognised that some courses may not have been fully completed by that date, and individuals who are working in the sector will not be penalised in such circumstances. The aim of is to raise qualification levels, not to push experienced and committed workers out of the sector.

A limited “grandfathering” arrangement is being introduced to allow staff who have worked in the sector for many years and are nearing retirement to be exempted from the Level 5 requirement.

Early Child Care Education

24. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if his Department will ensure equal access for children with disabilities to the first year of pre-primary care in the absence of adequate supports. [35737/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): My Department implements the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme which provides a free pre-school year to all eligible children before they commence primary school. The programme is a free and universal provision to which all children have access.

To ensure that the ECCE programme is more accessible to children with special needs a number of additional provisions have been added. These include an exemption from the upper age limit for qualification under the programme where a child would benefit from starting primary school at a later age. In addition, children with special needs can apply to have the pre-school year split over two years on a pro-rata basis, for example availing of the programme for 2 days a week in the first year and for 3 days a week in the second year.

I am aware that the Health Service Executive does, where possible, provide additional supports to children with special needs to enable them to avail of pre-school services in mainstream pre-school settings. My Department has been working with the Department of Health in the context of building better supports to facilitate children with special needs. The aim is to develop an agreed framework for the provision of resources to support special needs children in mainstream childcare settings. However the issue of supports for children with special needs availing of services in mainstream childcare settings remains a matter for the Department of Health and the HSE.

Early Child Care Education Standards

25. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs on the recently announced review of early childhood education programmes and the announcement of ten new early years inspectors to the Department of Education and Skills, if this signifies a departmental shift in terms of responsibility for early childhood education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35731/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): At Government level responsibility for the early years sector is split between the Minister for Education and Skills and myself, and our two departments collaborate on developments, particularly in terms of

building quality. There has been no change in these responsibilities, nor is any change planned. Recent announcements by Minister O'Sullivan have related to her areas of responsibility and are very welcome as they will support the Early Years Quality Agenda which is the focus of the work of the Departments. The first major review of education and training programmes that lead to qualifications in the early years care and education sector is a very timely development and will support the ongoing work to improve quality in early years through increasing the qualifications of staff. Courses in this area have developed in an ad hoc way as the sector has grown and are delivered in a range of institutions, and there is a need to review the programme quality, the curriculum content and issues such as practice requirements. It is important to ensure that we can be sure that individuals who take on a qualification are getting the most appropriate training in their own interests and in the interests of the children they will work with.

Reference has also been made to proposals to carry out education focussed inspections. The background to this is that during 2012 and 2013 inspectors from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, and inspectors from the Department of Education and Skills carried out a pilot joint inspection. This was a very useful exercise. An issue identified was that there were weaknesses in relation to education and learning in a number of services that both Departments felt needed to be followed up. For that reason, the Department of Education and Skills has been looking at how best they might carry out such education-focused inspections in a way that would complement to the work of the Early Years Inspectorate of Tusla. There is as I understand it still some work to be done, but progress is being made, in consultation with my Department.

The two Departments will continue to work closely together to press forward with the Quality Agenda and improve services for the benefit of children.

Adoption Legislation

26. Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide an update on the adoption (information and tracing) Bill; the date on which it will be published; the extent of the engagement that he and his predecessors have had with representatives of those most directly affected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35744/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): My legislative priority in the area of adoption is the preparation of information and tracing legislation. In addition, my Department is also working closely with the Department of Justice and Equality on the Children and Family Relationships Bill, which it is proposed will contain measures in relation to guardianship and adoption by civil partners.

It is intended to proceed to finalise legislative proposals so that I may bring a general scheme and Heads of Bill on adoption information and tracing to the Government as soon as possible with a view to early publication. Subsequent consideration by the Oireachtas Health and Children Committee will allow the issues to be carefully teased out and the views of different interested parties on these important and sensitive matters to be fully considered. I look forward to advancing these important matters in association with the Oireachtas Health and Children Committee as soon as possible.

Children in Care

27. Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will advise the facts on social worker provision for children in foster care and children in other care settings across the regions; the steps he is taking to ensure that all children in care have a

designated social worker; when he expects the position to be resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35743/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Child and Family Agency compiles monthly performance reports which include statistics in relation to children in care. These reports are published on the Agency's website. The report for July 2014 shows that 6,062 of the 6,466 children in care had an allocated social worker and 5,854 had an up to date written care plan. 6,000 children were in foster care, 5,609 of whom had an allocated social worker and 5,434 had a written care plan.

The Agency has stated that it is their policy to ensure that all children in care have a Care Plan and that the Care Plan is reviewed as required by the Child Care Regulations. The Agency has advised me that day to day exigencies of service provision, such as staff absence due to annual, maternity and sick leave, can impact on services. The Agency further advised that there may be circumstances in which local decisions are made in regard to work planning within the context of service priorities, such as child protection workloads within an area or staff availability. In these circumstances, it may be determined that a 'child in care review' can be deferred for a short period. Such a decision will be made on the basis of risk assessment and would apply to particularly stable care placements. Special Care, High Support, Residential care and short term foster care are all prioritised for an allocated social worker. Ongoing provision of social work to children and foster families is ensured in these circumstances.

The Agency is in receipt of funding of €6.7m this year to alleviate identified service pressures and to support the continuing implementation of the reform programme across children and family services.

This funding is being targeted at a number of areas, including the replacement of staff on maternity leave by way of a 12 month temporary contract. Latest figures indicate that at the end of August, 164 staff were on maternity leave, 82 of whom were social workers. The Agency is also finalising proposals for the introduction of a guaranteed and protected one year induction programme for newly qualified social workers.

The Agency recruited 106 social workers up to the end of August this year and a further 148 posts are at various stages of recruitment.

The initiatives described above are designed to assist the Agency in responding to identified service pressures and to provide for a targeted response to such pressures, taking account of identified need and available resources.

Inter-Country Adoptions

28. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide an update on engagements his Department has had with his counterpart in Belarus with a view to concluding an agreement on inter-country adoptions between Ireland and Belarus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35434/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): It is a matter for the Adoption Authority of Ireland to identify suitable Hague Convention countries and to engage with those Central Authorities to pursue administrative agreements to facilitate Hague compliant intercountry adoptions. The Adoption Authority of Ireland advises that while Belarus ratified the Hague Convention in July 2003, the Belarusian authorities suspended intercountry adoptions to all countries in 2004 to facilitate a review of Belarusian adoption laws, procedures and practices. The Authority advises that this suspension continues.

Complex constitutional and legal issues arise with regard to a number of criteria proposed by the Republic of Belarus in relation to intercountry adoption arrangements. These include the production of post-adoption reports, registration of the adopted child at the Belarusian embassy in London and consular visits to the homes of adoptive parents.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Appeals

29. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an application for supplementary welfare allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [36169/14]

Tánaiste and 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 29 August 2014, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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

Disability Allowance Appeals

30. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a decision on his or her disability allowance; the reason for the delay in same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36181/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that the disability allowance appeal of the person concerned was received in that office on 15 April 2014. In accordance with legislative requirements the appeal contentions were forwarded to the Department with a request that the appeal file and submission by the Deciding Officer be provided. These were received in the appeals office on 30 July 2014 and the appeal was forwarded to an Appeals Officer for consideration on 6 August 2014. I am advised that the Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, decided on 17 September 2014 to allow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

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

Carer's Allowance Payments

31. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will consider extending the grace period during which carer's allowance is paid to a carer following the death of the caree; if she will consider introducing an additional grace period during which carer's allowance will continue to be paid to a carer upon the cared-for person entering long-term residential care. [36223/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The current position

whereby Carers Allowance is retained for 6 weeks following the death of the care recipient is consistent with the approach taken by the Department in relation to payment after death across other schemes, such as the State Pension.

The period gives a reasonable time for the carer to apply to the Department for other benefits to which they might be entitled or, where a person returns to employment, to rearrange their financial affairs.

There are no plans to increase the grace period at this time or extend it to other circumstances.

Household Benefits Scheme

32. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to set out the cost in 2015 of the planned €100 payment to persons in receipt of the household benefits package to alleviate the impact of water charges; the additional cost of extending the payment to recipients of the fuel allowance who do not receive the household benefits package; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36238/14]

33. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to set out the cost, in 2015, of increasing the €100 payment to €150 for persons in receipt of the household benefits package to alleviate the impact of water charges; the additional cost of extending the payment at the same rate to recipients of the fuel allowance who do not receive the household benefits package; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36239/14]

51. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to set out the cost of extending the household benefits package to recipients of carer's benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36386/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 32, 33 and 51 together.

The household benefits package comprises the electricity/gas allowance (€35 per month) and the free television licence scheme (€160 per annum). At present, it is paid to some 411,000 customers, with expenditure estimated at €230 million for 2014.

From 2015 the household benefits package will also include a quarterly water support payment of €25. The estimated cost of this new water support payment of €100 per annum will be in the region of €42 million in 2015.

There are approximately 226,000 people in receipt of fuel allowance who do not receive the household benefits package. Extending the water support payment to these people would cost in the region of €22.6 million.

If the water support was increased to €150 annually, the estimated cost in 2015 would be €63 million, based on the existing cohort of household benefits customers. Extending a water support payment of €150 to people in receipt of the fuel allowance would cost in the region of an additional €33.9 million.

There are currently approximately 1,750 people in receipt of care's benefit. Extending household benefits, including water support, to all of these people would cost €1.2 million per annum. The cost would be less if household benefits were paid only where the carer is living with the person being cared for as is the practice with carer's allowance.

The household benefits package was envisaged as a way of providing some additional support for those who are elderly or on long-term welfare payments. Issues in relation to all social welfare supports in 2015 are a matter for Government in the context of the forthcoming Budget.

Labour Activation Measures

34. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 171 of 18 September 2014, when it is expected the process of procurement of third party providers of employment services for the JobPath programme will be completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36254/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): JobPath is the Government's new labour market activation service aimed specifically at the long-term unemployed and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed. JobPath will be delivered by third party providers of employment services under contract to the Department. JobPath will augment and complement the Department's existing employment service capacity as well as that of the Local Employment Service (LES) and Job Clubs, which already operate under contract to the Department, thereby increasing capacity to provide supports to assist jobseekers in obtaining employment.

The Department expects to be in a position to notify tenderers of the outcome of the evaluation process shortly.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

35. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to set out the position regarding an application made for a domiciliary care allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36256/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received from the person concerned on the 20th February 2014. This application was referred to one of the Department's Medical Assessors who did not consider that the child met the medical criteria for the allowance. A letter issued on the 10th April 2014 outlining the decision of the deciding officer to refuse the allowance.

A review of this decision was requested on 20th August 2014 and additional information on this child's condition/care needs has been supplied. The application together with the new information supplied will now be examined by another medical assessor. Once their opinion is received the application will be re-examined by a deciding officer and a revised decision will be made, if warranted. The person concerned will be notified of the outcome of this review as soon as it is completed.

Questions Nos. 36 and 37 withdrawn.

Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Scheme Payments

38. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to detail the cost of restoring by 50% the funds cut to the back to school clothing and footwear allowance introduced since the Government came into office; the cost of fully restoring the cuts outline;

and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36269/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The back to school clothing and footwear allowance scheme provides a one-off payment to eligible families to assist with the extra costs when children start school each autumn. The Government has provided €46.3 million for the scheme in 2014 and provided assistance to over 160,000 families this year.

It is estimated that the cost to restore the 2011 rates for the back to school allowance by 50% based on current eligibility criteria would be approximately €16.5 million and the cost to restore in full the 2011 rates would be approximately €33 million.

Household Benefits Scheme

39. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to set out the cost of restoring, by 50%, the cut in funding in the electricity and gas element of the household benefits package that has been introduced since the Government came to office; the cost of fully restoring the funding cuts outlined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36270/14]

40. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to set out the cost of restoring, by 50%, the cut in funding in the telephone allowance element of the household benefits package that have been introduced since the Government came to office; the cost of fully restoring the funding cuts outlined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36271/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 39 and 40 together.

The overall concern of Government in Budget 2014 and previous Budgets has been to protect the primary social welfare rates. Expenditure on pensions at approx. €6.5 billion is the largest block of expenditure in the Department in the Estimate for 2014, representing approx. 33% of overall expenditure. Because of demographic changes the Department's spending on older people is increasing year on year. In 2013, the Department had to make provision for an additional €190 million for the increasing number of pensioners. Maintaining the rate of the State pension and other core payments is critical in protecting people from poverty.

The adjustments made to the household benefits package in recent years have made it much easier for customers to switch to cheaper energy suppliers, without the loss of any credits they may have built up. The decision to discontinue the telephone allowance provided annual savings of €48 million and meant that the Department was able to retain the other elements of the household benefits package such as the electricity and gas allowance and the television licence. These are valuable supports for recipients. The Department will spend €230 million this year on these elements of the household benefits package for over 411,000 customers.

The fuel allowance scheme and the free travel pass were also protected for older people and people with disabilities. The living alone allowance was maintained at €7.70 per week.

In 2010 the monthly value of the free electricity allowance was €40.70. It is currently €35.00. Restoring the allowance to 2010 levels would cost an additional €28 million for 411,000 customers. Restoring the allowance by 50% would cost an additional €14 million.

In 2010 the monthly value of the telephone allowance was €26. The telephone allowance was discontinued in 2014. Restoring the telephone allowance to 2010 levels would cost an ad-

ditional €128 million. Restoring the allowance by 50% would cost an additional €64 million.

Community Employment Schemes Funding

41. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to detail the cost of restoring by 50% the cut in funding that has resulted in a reduction in training and materials grants for community employment scheme, back to education and jobs initiative schemes introduced since the Government came to office; the cost of fully restoring the funding cuts outlined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36272/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Community Employment (CE) schemes have achieved significant efficiencies over the past 2 years in their administration (circa €11m per annum). Where there have been individual cases that warranted further attention, these were reviewed at a local level and adjustments made where the circumstances permitted. The Department continues to monitor expenditure in line with the programme's operational guidelines. As the Deputy may be aware, an additional €1.3m was allocated to the CE training budget in 2013 in order to support the provision of training to participants. The CE Financial Review of Schemes in 2012 highlighted that schemes could still operate efficiently and effectively with better targeting of funding and improvements in the administration of the schemes required by the Department.

Under the revised funding arrangements agreed with sponsors, schemes were given individual allocations of financial support aimed at meeting the particular costs necessarily incurred by them, having regard to economies made by the scheme and to the overall level of funding available for community employment nationally.

Please note that there are 2,000 more places on CE now than in 2012 with an increase in the CE annual budget increased from €352m in 2013 to €357m in 2014.

Job Initiative is closed to new entrants since November 2004 and the programme budget is reducing in line with the decreasing participant numbers via exits and retirements. There are currently 1,051 participants and Team Leaders on the JI programme. Over the past 2 years the JI programme has achieved efficiencies in the administration of the order of €2m per annum.

The cost of education allowance that formed part of Back to Education Allowance was reduced from €500 to €300 in 2012 and abolished the following year from January 2013. This amounted to a reduction in expenditure of circa €7.8m.

Child Benefit Payments

42. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to set out the cost of restoring, by 50%, the cut in funding provided for child benefit introduced since the Government came to office; the cost of fully restoring the funding cuts outlined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36273/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Since 2011, the monthly rates of child benefit have been standardised at €130 per month. The cost of increasing the rate of child benefit to the rates that applied in 2011 (including the re-introduction of certain grants payable in respect of multiple births) is estimated at €215 million in a full year. The cost of restoring the rate of child benefit to 50% of the 2011 rates is estimated at €108 million in a full year.

Issues in relation to the rate of social welfare supports in 2015 are a matter for Government in the context of the forthcoming Budget.

Questions Nos. 43 to 46, inclusive, withdrawn.

Water Charges Administration

47. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on the request by Irish Water for the use of individual PPS numbers; the reason this is required by Irish Water; the provisions her Department will make to ensure that such information once provided to Irish Water is secure and used correctly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36377/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Personal Public Service (PPS) number is a unique identifier for use in any transaction a person may have with specified public bodies or persons authorised by those bodies to act on their behalf. The legal basis of the PPS number is set out in the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (as amended) and this legislation sets out the circumstances in which the PPS number can be used. It also specifically covers the fact that the PPS number can only be used by certain specified bodies and only for the purposes of public service transactions.

Irish Water, a registered subsidiary company of Bord Gáis Éireann, was incorporated in July 2013, as a semi-state company under the Water Services Act 2013 to bring the water and wastewater services of the 34 Local Authorities together under one national service provider. The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2014 included an amendment to include Irish Water as a specified body in Schedule 5 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act, 2005 (as amended). This Legislation was enacted on the 17th of July 2014 and it allows Irish Water to request and use the PPS numbers from customers.

As part of its functions, Irish Water will be transacting with members of the public and will need to share or confirm data and information in certain cases. The PPS number is being collected by Irish Water for the purpose of validating the identity of customers in order to ensure the proper application of both household and children's water services allowances for which customers may be eligible.

The actual arrangements for any required data exchange and validation with the Department are under consideration. Any such arrangements will be subject to compliance with all relevant legislation, including the provisions of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (as amended) and the Data Protection Acts. For its part, Irish Water is subject to the onus on public bodies to comply with relevant legislation in terms of the collection, storage and use of all sensitive data including the PPS number.

Irish Water has confirmed to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government that the data protection notice it has in place is fully compliant with Data Protection requirements and that it is in regular contact with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner to ensure this is the case.

Rent Supplement Scheme Expenditure

48. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the approximate cost of increasing the maximum rent limits, within the rent supplement scheme,

by 5% in the four Dublin local authority areas as well as Cork city and Galway city; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36379/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The purpose of the rent supplement scheme is to provide short-term income support to assist with reasonable accommodation costs of eligible people living in private rented accommodation who are unable to provide for their accommodation costs from their own resources. 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 73,800 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €344 million for 2014.

The cost of increasing payments under the rent supplement scheme by 5% for recipients in the three counties of Dublin, Cork and Galway would be in the region of €11.5 million. A breakdown of these costs in respect of the Dublin local authorities, Galway city and Cork city is not available.

A review of the maximum rent limits is underway within the Department and will be considered as part of the forthcoming budgetary process.

Respite Care Grant Expenditure

49. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the cost of restoring 50% of the 2013 cut to the respite care grant; the cost of reversing the cut in full; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36383/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): It is estimated, based on the anticipated number of grants in 2015, that the cost of increasing the Respite Care Grant by €325, to €1,700 (the rate that existed prior to Budget 2013), would be approximately €29.6 million in a full year. The cost of restoring 50% of this would be approximately €14.8 million in a full year.

Issues in relation to the rate of social welfare payments are a matter for Government in the context of the upcoming Budget.

One-Parent Family Payment Expenditure

50. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the cost in 2015 of not proceeding with the reduction in income disregard for the one-parent family payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36385/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The one-parent family payment (OFP) scheme supports 71,886 recipients at an estimated cost of €863 million in 2014.

The Social Welfare and Pensions Act, 2012, provided for the reduction, on a phased basis, of the OFP scheme income disregard for new and existing recipients of the payment. In line with the legislation, the income disregard was reduced from €110 per week to €90 per week in January, 2014, and will be further reduced from €90 per week to €75 per week in January, 2015, and from €75 per week to €60 per week in January, 2016.

The estimated cost, in 2015, of maintaining the OFP scheme income disregard at its current level of €90 per week would be in the order of €8.3 million. There would also be additional

costs in maintaining the income disregard at €90 per week in 2016 and in subsequent years.

Any changes to the OFP scheme income disregard, other than those that are already provided for in legislation, would be a matter for the Government to consider in a budgetary context.

Question No. 51 answered with Question No. 32.

One-Parent Family Payment Applications

52. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the extent to which the one-parent family allowance or an alternative is payable in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36403/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned applied for a basic social welfare allowance payment on 10 July 2014, which was disallowed as she did not satisfy the habitual residence condition. To date no application for a one-parent family payment, to which the habitual residency condition also applies, has been received by the Department.

Question No. 53 withdrawn.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

54. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the correct level of payment of jobseeker's allowance in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36418/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned is not in receipt of a social welfare payment in their own right, however, another person is being paid a qualified adult increase of €124.80 (maximum increase for qualified adult) in respect of the person concerned.

The person concerned has agreed to refund €10.00 per week by standing order in respect of an overpayment.

Rent Supplement Scheme Payments

55. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the maximum rent support available in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36420/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The maximum rent limit at which Rent Supplement is assessable to a client of this family composition residing in Celbridge, is €500 per calendar month.

Back to Education Allowance Applications

56. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if

and when a back to education allowance will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36425/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned was refused a back to education allowance as he failed to satisfy the requisite number of paid days on his jobseeker's allowance claim. A review of this decision was requested on the 19/09/14. The review was undertaken and the original decision was upheld. The outcome of the review was issued to the person concerned on 23/09/2014.

Questions Nos. 57 and 58 withdrawn.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

59. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on whether in certain circumstances where an applicant is marginally in excess of the income guidelines it may be unfair for the means assessed against them to be applied across the board to each application in isolation resulting in the applicant not being entitled to any of the payments whereas a person marginally below the income guidelines where the same criteria are applied would be entitled to all forms of assistance; her views on whether it is time to review the means assessment guidelines with a view to assessing an applicant's overall social welfare requirements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36433/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department operates a range of means tested schemes where, in order to qualify for the social assistance payment, the claimant must satisfy a means test.

With social assistance payments, the maximum rate of entitlement is payable where a claimant's means are nil. Where a claimant has means, the maximum rate of entitlement is reduced by reference to the means in any given case and scheme. It is in the nature of means tested schemes that where means exceed a certain amount, no entitlement exists. It should be noted that the means tests for social assistance schemes operated by the Department are not always identical (for example, the means test for Carer's Allowance is more generous than that for other schemes) and that, therefore, the income/asset thresholds at which entitlement ceases can vary across schemes. In addition, certain other organisations operate income/means tested schemes and services and eligibility is a matter for the relevant organisations.

Any changes to means assessment would have to be considered in a Budgetary context.

Insurance Industry

60. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the implications for consumers and the Exchequer of the decision by the Motor Insurance Bureau of Ireland not to meet the claims of third party claimants at Setanta Insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36166/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): MIBI obtained a legal opinion and, having considered it, advised the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport in late July that the 2009 agreement with him does not require the MIBI to satisfy awards against drivers covered by a policy of insurance where the insurer is unable to pay all or part of an award because of insolvency.

Jointly with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have obtained legal advice on

this matter from the Attorney General. Having considered the Attorney General's advice, I intend to proceed on the basis that MIBI will not be playing a role in compensating claimants due awards under Setanta policies.

With regard to the general position with the Setanta liquidation, you will appreciate that a liquidation of an insurance company is a legally complex and time consuming process. In general terms, under the Statute of Limitations, claimants are given two years following an accident to make an initial claim. However, it could take several years for a particular case to be settled. These are factors that the Setanta Liquidator is currently examining in order to estimate the cost of claims, and the extent to which claims can be met in the Setanta liquidation.

The Insurance Compensation Fund (ICF) provides for payments to meet the liabilities of insolvent insurers in cases where it is unlikely that claims can be met otherwise than from the ICF. Under the Insurance Act 1964 claims by bodies corporate or unincorporated bodies are not covered by the ICF, except where there is a liability to or by an individual. In addition, all ICF payments are subject to a limit of 65% of the amount due or €825,000, whichever is the lesser. Management and administration of the ICF is under the control of the President of the High Court acting through the Office of the Accountant of the Courts of Justice. In view of the clarifications in relation to the MIBI position, it is a matter for the Office of the Accountant of the Courts of Justice to finalise arrangements for processing ICF claims.

My officials continue in discussions with the High Court and with the Setanta Liquidator with a view to achieving more certainty in relation to the standing of claimants as soon as possible.

As the ICF is not pre-funded, the Insurance Act 1964 provides that the Minister for Finance may, on the recommendation of the Central Bank of Ireland, advance from time to time to the ICF such sum as he thinks proper to enable payments out of the ICF. Any such advances are to be refunded to the Exchequer by the ICF in due course. The Central Bank has not made any such recommendation arising from the Setanta liquidation and accordingly no funds have been advanced to the ICF for that purpose.

VAT Rate Application

61. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to abolish VAT on standing charges for utility services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36206/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Section 37(1) of the Value-Added Tax Consolidation Act 2010 provides that the amount on which VAT is chargeable is the total consideration which the person supplying the goods or services becomes entitled to receive in respect of that supply, "including all taxes, commissions, costs and charges whatsoever", but not including the VAT itself. This reflects EU VAT law, with which Irish tax law must comply. In this regard, Article 78 of the EU VAT Directive provides that the taxable amount shall include "taxes, duties, levies and charges, excluding the VAT itself". In this regard, standing charges for utility services are legally liable to VAT. The carbon tax element of a gas bill or the public service obligation levy element of an electricity bill is also subject to VAT.

I would point out, however, in Ireland the supply of electricity and gas is subject to the 13.5% reduced VAT rate, where most other EU Member States apply a much higher standard VAT rate to these supplies.

Tax Reliefs Cost

62. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of increasing the threshold for capital acquisitions tax category A from €225,000 to €250,000 and €275,000 respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36230/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the estimated full year cost to the Exchequer from increasing the threshold for Capital Acquisitions Tax Category A from the current €225,000 to €250,000 is €12 million and from €225,000 to €275,000 is €24 million.

Tax Yield

63. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the approximate additional tax revenue the State earns from each 1% rise in nominal GDP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36231/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): There is no simple answer with regard to the impact of different growth rates on tax revenue as the exact impact would depend on the composition of growth. For example, growth driven by exports does not have as significant an impact on the public finances as domestically driven growth. A general rule of thumb, assuming no change in tax policy, every increase of 1 percentage point of nominal GDP will result in about a 1 percentage point increase in tax revenue.

As the Deputy, will be aware, the next formal forecast will be the White Paper on Receipts and Expenditure which will be published in advance of the Budget and will set out the no-policy change position for 2015.

Excise Duties Yield

64. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide in tabular form the total excise duty collected from beer, wine and spirits in each year since 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36232/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The table below indicates the total excise duty collected from all alcohol product categories since 2008.

Year	Beer	Cider	Spirits	Wine	Total
	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
2008	427.1	60.5	350.9	231.3	1069.8
2009	404.2	57.1	264	242.5	967.8
2010	320.1	44	243.4	218.8	826.3
2011	307.3	43.9	247.3	230.9	829.4
2012	308	42.8	263.9	231.4	846.1
2013	358	51.6	290.3	302.1	1002
2014*	270.8	38.1	165.9	214.7	689.5

*2014 figures are to end August 2014.

Tax Reliefs Cost

65. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of increasing the rate of tax relief at source that will apply in 2015 to 40% and 50%, respectively, from 30% for those who took out a qualifying loan between 2004 and 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36233/14]

66. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of increasing in 2015 the ceiling of €3,000 interest for tax relief at source for those who took out a qualifying loan between 2004 and 2008 to €4,000 and €5,000, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36234/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 65 and 66 together.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that in the time available, having regard to the volume of questions received this week, Revenue are not in a position to provide the information sought. However, I will arrange for the information to be supplied directly to the Deputy.

National Pensions Reserve Fund Portfolio

67. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the current cash balance on the discretionary portfolio in the National Pensions Reserve Fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36235/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The most recently reported balance for cash and cash equivalents in the NPRF Discretionary Portfolio was €2,433 million as at 30 June 2014.

Tax Yield

68. **Deputy Peadar Kirby** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide in tabular form the Government's total tax measures revenue between 2008 and to date in 2014. [36313/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The table below sets out the total yield expected from tax measures introduced in the Budget for the years 2008 to 2014 inclusive.

Year	Cost - €bn/Yield +€bn
Budget 2008	-€0.7bn
Budget 2009	+€2.0bn
Supplementary Budget 2009	+ €3.5bn
Budget 2010	+€0.1bn
Budget 2011	+€1.4bn
Budget 2012	+€1.6bn
Budget 2013	+€1.4bn
Budget 2014	+€0.9bn
Total	+€10.2bn

A full breakdown of the figures above can be obtained by accessing the following links:

<http://www.budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2008/2008.aspx>

<http://www.budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2009/2009.aspx>

<http://budget.gov.ie/budgets/2010/2010.aspx>

<http://www.budget.gov.ie/budgets/2011/2011.aspx>

<http://budget.gov.ie/budgets/2012/2012.aspx>

<http://budget.gov.ie/budgets/2013/2013.aspx>

<http://budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2014/2014.aspx>.

Tax Code

69. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance the costings that have been provided for the elimination of the windfall tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36327/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that on the basis of Income Tax returns and Corporation Tax returns for 2010-2012 (the latter being the latest tax year for which the necessary information is available), there is no record of any such profits or gains having been returned. There is therefore no reliable basis for estimating the impact of its elimination.

The windfall gains provisions were introduced primarily to discourage overheating of the property market by way of speculative transactions involving rezoned land rather than as a revenue raising measure.

Financial Services Regulation

70. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to introduce regulations to prevent vulture fund activity here; if he will be seeking capital gains tax or any other revenue from these unregulated operators; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36338/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I understand the Deputy's question concerns non-traditional mortgage providers which are unregulated and which have acquired Irish mortgages. I, as Minister for Finance, am committed to bringing forward legislation that protects consumers whose mortgages are sold to unregulated entities. The Government has reiterated this commitment on several occasions. In July and August of this year, my Department ran a public consultation seeking views on its proposed legislation to protect consumers whose loans are sold to unregulated entities.

The Department of Finance received 18 submissions from a range of respondents from the financial services industry, consumer groups, public representatives and individuals and other stakeholders. Officials in my Department are carefully considering the submissions and it is anticipated that legislation will be published by the end of this year.

As regards the taxation of the operators referred to in the question it is not possible to reply comprehensively to this on the basis of the information provided. However, I do note that a business of the provision of mortgages, which can include the acquisition of existing mortgages from other mortgage providers, is a trade for tax purposes, the profits or gains from which are chargeable to tax.

An interest in assets such as mortgages may also be acquired by investors through the pro-

cess of securitization of such assets. Specific provision is made in the tax code for the taxation of companies engaged in the securitization of assets.

Tax Reliefs Cost

71. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Finance if any tax relief measures have been costed or considered by his Department to help alleviate the price premium imposed on standard variable rate mortgage holders on principal primary residences purchased between 2003 and 2008; his views that standard variable rate mortgage holders have incurred disproportionate interest hikes on their mortgages in the past six years relative to inflation; if he has considered any measures to help reduce the burden on standard variable rate mortgage holders for principal primary residences purchased between 2003 and 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36374/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Firstly, I must confirm to the Deputy that neither the Central Bank nor I have any responsibility for any variation in the variable mortgage interest rate charged by regulated financial institutions. The lending institutions in Ireland - including those in which the State has a significant shareholding - are independent commercial entities. I have no statutory role in relation to regulated financial institutions passing on the European Central Bank interest rate change or to the mortgage interest rates charged. It is a commercial matter for each institution concerned. It is not appropriate for me, as Minister for Finance, to comment on or become involved in the detailed mortgage position of mortgage holders.

The Central Bank has responsibility for the regulation and supervision of financial institutions in terms of consumer protection and prudential requirements and for ensuring ongoing compliance with applicable statutory obligations. The Central Bank has no statutory role in the setting of interest rates by financial institutions, apart from the interest rate cap imposed on the credit union sector in accordance with the provisions of the Credit Union Act, 1997.

The mortgage interest rates that financial institutions operating in Ireland charge to customers are determined as a result of a commercial decision by the institutions concerned. This interest rate is determined taking into account a broad range of factors, including European Central Bank base rates, deposit rates, market funding costs, the competitive environment and an institution's overall funding.

This Government is committed to helping address the particular problems faced by those that bought homes at the height of the property boom between 2004 and 2008. In this regard, in Budget 2012, I fulfilled the commitment in the Programme for Government to increase the rate of mortgage interest relief to 30% for first time buyers who took out their first mortgage in that period. This was the period during which house prices peaked. The 30% rate of relief is available regardless of mortgage type and is proportionate to the amount of mortgage interest paid, up to certain ceilings.

A mortgage holder qualifies for the increased rate if they made their first mortgage interest payment in the period 2004 to 2008 or if they drew down their mortgage in that period. In addition, the increased rate of tax relief for first time buyers who took out their first mortgage in that period will continue up to and including the 2017 tax year.

Universal Social Charge Exemptions

72. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of raising the threshold for the universal social charge to €12,500, €15,000 and €16,500 respectively; the number of persons who would be taken out of the USC net and average saving in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36380/14]

85. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of income earners exempt from the universal social charge; the number who pay a maximum rate of 4%; the number who pay the 7% rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36400/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 72 and 85 together.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the cost of raising the Universal Social Charge (USC) threshold to €12,500, €15,000 and €16,500 respectively is set out in the following table.

Proposed threshold	Cost €m	Numbers Benefitting	Maximum Annual Saving to Taxpayer €
€12,500	34	99,300	299
€15,000	77	192,300	399
€16,500	110	249,400	473

It should be noted that the cost for each threshold was produced by the Revenue Commissioners Tax Modeller, which does not estimate the numbers affected by changes to USC. The estimate for the numbers affected is obtained from an analysis of the income ranges of the same base which the proposals were executed against (to identify how many additional cases would be exempt at each threshold level). However, it is not possible to accurately infer an “average” saving from the findings of these two different processes. Instead the actual maximum annual saving to a taxpayer earning up to new proposed thresholds has been included in the table for illustrative purposes. All these figures are estimated on the basis of no change to the rest of the structure of the USC.

In relation to Question 36400/14 the following table provides a breakdown by rate of the number of individuals who paid USC in 2012 (the most recent tax year for which complete data are available).

USC Rate	Numbers
Exempt	523,000
4%	267,000
7%	1,444,000

These figures are rounded to the nearest 1,000. There is a 2% USC rate, applicable to the first €10,036. However, where an individual’s total income for a year does not exceed €10,036, they are exempt from USC, thus there are effectively no cases on the 2% rate.

Tax Code

73. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of making the 100% young trained farmers’ stock relief available to all farmers, for four years up to 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36388/14]

74. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of allowing capital allowances of up to 50% over the first two years, for the development of the agriculture industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36389/14]

75. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of extending the land leasing tax exemption scheme to include a company that is operating for the purpose of farming as a qualifying lessee; the cost of removing the 40 year age limit for qualifying lessors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36390/14]

77. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of extending the capital gains tax relief for farm restructuring to include as qualifying transactions; farmland that is sold under CPO and subsequently replaced; the sale of an existing farm and replacement with a more viable consolidated holding; the sale of a land parcel and reinvestment of the sale proceeds into farm capital infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36392/14]

78. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of treating compulsory purchase of co-operative shares or other forms of compulsory financial contribution fulfilling the same role as a qualifying capital expenditure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36393/14]

79. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of allowing forestry income to be declared over a number of taxable years, similar to the averaging of sugar beet restructuring payments over a six-year period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36394/14]

84. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of allowing farmers the choice to write-off capital expenditure on plant and machinery and farm buildings over a period of three to eight years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36399/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 73 to 75, inclusive, 77 to 79, inclusive, and 84 together.

In October 2013, I announced the setting up of a review of the various agritaxation measures. A public consultation process was undertaken and a number of stakeholder meetings were held. The review is on-going and it is hoped that a report will be made available in mid October.

In relation to question number 36388/14, based on data from tax returns for tax year 2012 it is tentatively estimated that the cost of the proposal could be in the region of €15 million for each year of the accelerated relief.

Regarding Questions 36389/14 and 36399/14, the cash flow loss associated with the proposals will depend on the amount of expenditure over the years in question and the extent to which the claimants are able to use the additional relief in each year. However, on the basis of certain assumptions regarding potential expenditure, the notional cash flow loss associated with a two year capital allowance regime for claims for plant and machinery and buildings by farmers could be up to €60 million for the first year of claim, rising to €120 million in the second year, before the cost starts reducing.

On the same basis the loss associated with a three year write off period could be €30 million in the first year of claim, rising to €60 million in the second year and then €90 million in the third year, before the cost starts to reduce.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that sufficient data are not readily available on which to base a reliable estimate of the cost to the Exchequer from the proposals outlined

in Questions 36390/14, 36392/14, 36393/14 and 36394/14. Accordingly, it is not possible to provide the specific information requested by the Deputy at this time.

There are a number of reliefs where detailed information is not required to be returned to Revenue and therefore no costing is readily available without a detailed review of case records by the Commissioners. I am informed that the agritaxation review referred to above uses information from a variety of sources to estimate costs for a wider selection of farmer tax reliefs.

Tax Reliefs Application

76. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of extending the stamp duty consanguinity relief for non-residential property after 31 December 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36391/14]

82. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of extending the 1% stamp duty rate for transfers to close relatives post 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36397/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 76 and 82 together.

It is assumed the Deputy is referring in both questions to the stamp duty consanguinity relief for non-residential property. I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the estimated cost to the Exchequer from extending the relief after 31 December 2014 would be in the region of €5 million.

Questions Nos. 77 to 79, inclusive, answered with Question No. 73.

Motor Tax Collection

80. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of changing the system of taxation of farm quad bikes to a system similar to that which exists in the United Kingdom whereby quads are registered as a light agricultural vehicle, with a nil value tax disc, whereby the quad can be used on the road, if the distance travelled between sites is less than 1.5 km; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36395/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that many quad bikes are not manufactured for use on the roads and accordingly are not registered in the State. New quad bikes manufactured for use on the public roads are required to be registered and the application for registration must be accompanied by an appropriate Certificate of Conformity issued by the manufacturer under EU Directive 2002/24/EC (as amended) relating to the type-approval of two or three-wheel motor vehicles and quadricycles.

In the case of quad bikes previously registered in another Member State, the application for registration must be accompanied by the relevant vehicle registration document of that State.

The question as it regards motor tax is a matter for the Minister of Environment, Community and Local Government.

Tax Code

81. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of introducing an earned income credit as recommended by the Commission on Taxation for the self-employed and be equal to the PAYE allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36396/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the cost to the Exchequer of extending the PAYE credit to the self employed and proprietary directors is estimated at €470 million in a full year.

These figures are estimates for 2015 from the Revenue tax forecasting model using the latest actual data for the year 2012, adjusted as necessary for income, self-employment and employment trends in the interim. They are, therefore, provisional and may be revised. A married couple or civil partners who have elected or have been deemed to have elected for joint assessment is counted as one tax unit.

Question No. 82 answered with Question No. 76.

Tax Code

83. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will amend capital gains tax restructuring relief to provide for the relief from capital gains tax whereby a person sells two separate holdings to consolidate into one holding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36398/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): A relief was introduced in Finance Act 2013 on disposals of farm land for farm restructuring, subject to a Commencement Order, which I made on 6 June 2013. The terms of the relief are set out in Section 604B, Taxes Consolidation Act 1997.

The relief applies to a sale, purchase or exchange of agricultural land in the period from 1 January 2013 to 31 December 2015 where Teagasc has certified that the sale and purchase or an exchange of agricultural land was made for farm restructuring purposes. The initial sale or purchase, or the exchange, must occur in the relevant period and the subsequent sale or purchase must occur within 24 months of that sale or purchase.

Full relief from capital gains tax will be given where the consideration for the purchase or the exchange is equal to or exceeds the consideration for the sale or the other land that is exchanged. Where the consideration for the purchase or the exchange is less than the consideration for the land that is sold or the other land that is exchanged, relief will be given in the same proportion that the consideration for the land that is purchased or exchanged bears to the consideration for the land that is sold or the other land that is exchanged.

Provision is made for the clawback of the relief where qualifying land in respect of which relief has been given is disposed of within 5 years of the date of the purchase or exchange of that land. A clawback does not apply where the disposal arises under a compulsory purchase order.

A prerequisite to any disposal and acquisition of farm land qualifying for this relief is that an application for a farm restructuring certificate is made to Teagasc and that Teagasc grants such a certificate (that has not been withdrawn). Guidelines relating to the application for, and the issue of, a Farm Restructuring Certificate are available on the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's website.

The purpose of the relief is to ensure that the sale and purchase of farm land together lead to a reduction in the distance between parcels of land comprised in a farm, thereby leading to an

improvement in the viability of the consolidated farm. Depending on the circumstances in any particular case, it may be that the disposal of two separate holdings of land and their replacement with a single holding of equal value may qualify as farm restructuring for the purposes of this relief. This would be a matter for Teagasc to consider in the first instance by reference to the full facts being known.

The farm restructuring relief is one of the measures under consideration in the context of the AgriTaxation Review which I announced in my Budget 2014 speech. The review is being completed shortly and its report is expected to be published around Budget Day. It would not be appropriate for me to comment further in advance of the completion of the review.

Question No. 84 answered with Question No. 73.

Question No. 85 answered with Question No. 72.

Tax Code

86. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of increasing the standard rate band from the current €32,800 by €500, €1,000, €1,500 and €2,000 respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36401/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I assume that the Deputy refers to an extension of the standard rate income tax band, which would apply similarly to single and widowed persons, as well as to single person child carers. The proposed extension to the standard rate band is assumed to also apply to married couples and civil partnerships. On this basis, I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the full year cost to the Exchequer, estimated by reference to 2015 incomes, of increasing the standard rate tax band by €500, €1,000, €1,500 and €2,000 while also maintaining the current monetary differences between the single persons standard rate band and the various other classes of tax bands, is as follows:

Proposed Increase	Estimated Cost €m
€500	90
€1,000	178
€1,500	262
€2,000	350

All figures above are estimates for 2015, using the latest actual data for the year 2012 adjusted as necessary for income and employment trends in the interim. They are provisional and may be revised. A married couple or civil partners who have elected or have been deemed to have elected for joint assessment are counted as one tax unit.

Tax Yield

87. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide the yield that would be raised by increasing the price of cigarettes by 25 cent and 50 cent, respectively, as well as proportionately across other tobaccos products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36402/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that it is assumed the Deputy is referring to an increase in excise and VAT. The

estimated yield that could be raised in a full year from the proposed increases is as set out in the table below.

Increase (VAT inclusive)	Yield
25 cent	€31.7m
50 cent	€62.9m

I am advised by the Commissioners that these estimates are based on the assumption of no exceptional change in behaviour by consumers following the increase in prices. This assumption may not hold where consumers substitute non-Irish duty paid consumption for duty paid consumption, or reduce their smoking levels.

VAT Rate Reductions

88. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the increasing popularity of both social and popular media and that the print media sector in general have been coming under more and more pressure of late as the availability of free news items has adversely affected their trade (details supplied); his further views that this sector has benefited greatly from the reduced VAT rate of 9% and that it is essential for its survival, particularly the survival of the smaller family run print businesses that this reduced rate remain in place for the foreseeable future; if he will not increase the VAT rate in the upcoming budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36431/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In July 2011, as part of the Government Jobs Initiative, the 9% reduced VAT rate was introduced and applied to tourism related services, including newspapers. In applying the 9% rate to newspapers, the measure was designed to create additional jobs in the print sector.

It is not the practice to comment on what measures may or may not be introduced in advance of the Budget.

Public Sector Staff Data

89. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide in tabular form the annual reduction of workers employed in the public sector between 2008 and to date in 2014. [36307/14]

90. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide in tabular form the total number of workers employed in the public sector between 2008 and to date in 2014. [36308/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 89 and 90 together.

Information on the number of public servants is collected and collated on a quarterly basis. The total number employed in the Public Service from end 2008 to date, expressed in terms of whole-time equivalents (WTEs) is set out below. This information and further data is freely available on my Department's Databank website (<http://databank.per.gov.ie/>).

-	2008	2009	2010	2011	2013	2012	2014
-	Q4	Q4	Q4	Q4	Q4	Q4	Q2
Numbers Employed	320,387	310,747	305,967	297,327	290,862	288,217	288,472

Government Expenditure

91. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide, in tabular form, the Government's total annual current expenditure budget between 2008 and to date in 2014. [36309/14]

92. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide, in tabular form, the Government's total annual current capital budget between 2008 and to date in 2014. [36310/14]

93. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide, in tabular form, the annual reduction to the capital expenditure budget between 2008 and to date in 2014. [36311/14]

94. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide, in tabular form, the annual reduction to the current expenditure budget between 2008 and to date in 2014. [36312/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 91 to 94, inclusive, together.

The voted current and capital expenditure outturn figures for the period 2008 to 2013, and estimated expenditure figures for 2014 as published in the Revised Estimates Volume 2014, along with the year-on-year variances are set out in the table below. Also included in respect of 2014 is the year to date expenditure to the end of August 2014, as reported with the end August Exchequer returns. The Deputy may be interested to know that my Department publishes a comprehensive set of data on voted expenditure which is available at <http://databank.per.gov.ie>.

-	2008 €m	2009 €m	2010 €m	2011 €m	2012 €m	2013 €m	2014 €m	Expen- diture to Date in 2014 €m
Gross Current Expenditure	53,384	55,719	54,179	52,847	52,149	51,078	49,648	33,099
Year-on-year variation	-	2,335	-1,540	-1,332	-698	-1,071	-1,430	N/A
Gross Capital Expenditure	9,011	7,333	6,385	4,515	3,809	3,287	3,339	1,533
Year-on-year variation	-	-1,678	-948	-1,870	-706	-522	52	N/A

IDA Portfolio

95. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the criteria chosen for the selection of Athlone, Letterkenny and Waterford by the Industrial Development Agency Ireland to develop new property solutions in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36367/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): As part of the Action Plan for Jobs 2014, we are bringing a particular focus to regional job creation and are

delivering a range of measures to support this goal.

One such measure is that IDA Ireland has agreed contracts for delivery of two new building developments in Athlone and Waterford with construction completion dates of November 2014. Both buildings are expected to be completed by November 2014. The two new building developments will be suitable for future IDA Ireland client investments from a number of potential sectors. Additionally, IDA Ireland has supported the development of office space in Letterkenny in order to support potential investment wins and associated job creation opportunities. Private developers are currently on site and the building is under construction.

In the current economic climate coupled with the limited availability of funding for all capital projects, investment must be targeted to potential investment wins and associated job creation opportunities. IDA Ireland has assured me that it will continue to assess the requirements in other regional locations on an ongoing basis.

IDA Portfolio

96. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the total moneys spent to date by the Industrial Development Agency Ireland on a property (details supplied) in County Mayo; the reason there has been no development on the site; if the site was considered as part of the IDA capital plan for 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36368/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am informed by IDA Ireland that since 2008, the Agency owns c.11 hectares (c.28 acres) of industrial zoned land on the Sligo Road, Ballina, Co. Mayo.

IDA Ireland carried out limited site treatment works on the site in 2010. These works involved some limited boundary fencing, cultivation, planting and general low level landscaping focusing on the site boundaries. The total expenditure on these works, which also included the demolition and environmental disposal of materials relating to a former derelict house, was in the region of €60,000 excluding VAT.

The IDA Ireland lands are concept master planned and planning permission has been obtained.

IDA Ireland provides property solutions to potential client of both IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland client companies, but while IDA Ireland seeks to influence the selection of location, the final decision on where a company visits and invests in is made by the company in a location that best meets its requirements.

In relation to property construction, IDA Ireland policy is to pursue public/private partnerships, where possible. In 2014, as in the past number of years, the private sector, in many locations, has been unable to deliver appropriate property solutions to meet the needs of foreign direct investment (both existing and new), IDA Ireland has intervened and is currently constructing a 2,674m² manufacturing building in Waterford and in Athlone. A private developer is constructing a 2,000m² office building on IDA Ireland's Park in Letterkenny.

In the current economic climate coupled with the limited availability of funding for all capital projects, investment must be targeted to potential investment wins and associated job creation opportunities. IDA Ireland has assured me that it will continue to assess the requirements in other regional locations on an ongoing basis.

I should like to remind the Deputy that 2014 was a good year for Ballina with Hollister announcing in June last a major expansion project with an investment of €65m and the creation of an additional 250 new jobs at their premises in Ballina.

Work Permit Applications

97. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if a work permit will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36410/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): There is no record in my Department of a work permit application in respect of the person named by the Deputy. There is no record of a work permit having previously been held by this person.

Work Permit Criteria

98. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the position regarding a work permit in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36428/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The decision to revoke the permit of the person named by the Deputy was based on evidence supplied to my Department that the employee had not been getting the remuneration stated on his employment permit and which was the basis for granting of the permit. My Department is currently seeking to establish whether the employer proposes to pay the correct remuneration. The review is pending the outcome of these discussions. It is expected that the review will be completed shortly.

Rural Development Programme Funding

99. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide annual costings on 50/50 co-financing for the Rural Development Programme 2015-2020. [36326/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Rural Development Programme (RDP), 2014-2020 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. Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council on support for Rural Development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) sets out the breakdown of EU support for rural development for each EU Member State for the years 2014-2020. Ireland's total EAFRD allocation for rural development is some €2.19 billion (or some €313 million per annum), as agreed at the Multi-annual Financial Framework negotiations in 2013. EU funding amounts are combined with national co-funding to provide for each Member State's RDP. In Ireland's case, National Exchequer funding brings the total to be spent on RDP schemes in the 2014-2020 period to over €4 billion. Annual costings for the RDP will be agreed in line with the roll out of schemes and the annual budgetary process.

Beef Data Programme

100. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide costings on a €200 beef genomic scheme in 2015. [36332/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Beef Data and Genomics Programme has been developed as part of the draft Rural Development Plan submitted to the European Commission in July of 2014. It is currently the subject of discussion with the European Commission whose agreement is required before the scheme and the RDP can come into force. The proposed Beef Data and Genomics Programme is intended to deliver an accelerated improvement in the quality and environmental sustainability of the beef herd through the application of genomics technology. This will help farmers to maximise productivity in a sustainable way, while supporting improved quality and traceability in the national suckler herd, as set out under the Food Harvest 2020 strategy.

The programme will provide support to farmers to take samples for genotyping from selected animals in their herds and to provide vital breeding data to support the development of a national cattle breeding databank. This data will then be returned to farmers in respect of their own animals and will provide them with the tools to select higher quality and more efficient breeding replacements based on criteria such as ease of calving, high weight gain thereafter, and animals that can be finished earlier. The scheme will have a substantial environmental dividend while improving productivity, reducing input costs and improving margins for farmers.

Payments will, subject to the approval of the programme by the EU Commission, be paid to farmers for work carried out, including the development of a herd breeding plan, training and transaction costs. Among the activities being considered for the programme are the:

- recording of animal events,
- recording of a range of performance criteria,
- taking and sending for laboratory testing tissue (DNA) samples from selected animals, and
- selection of high quality replacement bulls and heifers over the period of their BDGP contract.
- Completion of an on-farm Carbon Navigator.

A budget of €295 million has been allocated in the draft proposal sent to the Commission. This €80 is calculated, in accordance with EU requirements, on the basis of the cost incurred and the income foregone by the farmer in completing the actions required under the scheme. Officials in my Department are currently in discussions with the EU Commission on the final details of the programme.

Fisheries Protection

101. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties currently being experienced by fishermen in Killybegs, County Donegal and other places caused by the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority's new guidelines on the weighing of fish at piers and the draining of water from fish; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36202/14]

102. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will review the current Sea Fisheries Protection Authority's proposals on the regulation of the pelagic fishing and processing industry here with a view to addressing the concerns of the Irish Fish Processors and Exporters Association and the Federation of Irish Fishermen as communicated to him on the 16 September 2014. [36203/14]

103. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the scope allowed to him under Article 61(1) of Council Regulation 1224/2009 for the weighing of fish at factory premises; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36204/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 101 to 103, inclusive, together.

Firstly, may I say that all matters relating to the operational enforcement of sea fisheries law are, by Statute, matters appropriate to the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA). The SFPA is the independent law enforcement agency of the State for sea fisheries law.

As Minister, I do not have responsibility in relation to the issues raised by the Deputy. Responsibility in these matters rests with the SFPA. The SFPA have a challenging job to do. Its statutory responsibility is to enforce EU and national law under the Common Fisheries Policy. It also has responsibility to provide a level playing field for everybody in this industry. If one boat or two or six boats are overfishing deliberately, it is not a victimless crime. It has an impact on others who are law abiding and who are catching in accordance with the quotas allocated to them. The market situation for pelagic fish is currently challenging, as Russia has banned the importation of pelagic fish and Russia has been an important market for mackerel, in particular. If illegally caught fish are being placed on the market, it displaces and reduces prices for those operators, the majority of our industry, who are abiding by the rules set down. In my view, it is in the interest of the industry as a whole to have strong and fair arrangements in place that give confidence that the rules apply across the board and that all operators are abiding by the quota allocations made available to them.

In order to inform the Deputy, the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority has sent me a report on the issues that have given rise to the current situation, the actions taken and the current state of consultation between the SFPA and the industry.

Arrangements for the monitoring and control of fisheries is set down in the EU Control Regulation 1224/09. Article 60(2) of the Council Regulation requires that weighing of fisheries products shall be carried out on landing prior to the fisheries products being held in storage, transported or sold. The SFPA has allowed a derogation from the EU regulations and permitted the weighing of pelagic fish post-transport in every plant since 2012, based on assurances that proper systems and procedures that accurately recorded catches were in place in these plants.

However, there have been substantial indications that fish have been landed in weights that exceed those recorded by the weighing systems in factories. These indications have arisen through the routine course of the SFPA's work and as a result of joint inspections with other organisations, including the National Standards Authority of Ireland. The SFPA has set out some of the issues that gave rise to concerns. These include a high level of divergence between spot checks by the SFPA and the official factory weight, even taking account of some divergence relating to water content. A trend of individual trucks recording substantially more fish when subject to an SFPA official control compared to instances when not subject to such controls. One instance involved a simple on-off switch on the belt weigher in a factory which had the effect of allowing the belt to transit fish without being recorded on the meter. If used in this way, fish would not be weighed or recorded.

The permits which allow in-factory weighing have lapsed due to the SFPA's overall lack of confidence in the operation of the weighing systems. The SFPA has entered into discussions with both catchers and processors to implement systems and procedures that will restore confidence in the weighing systems in factories. The SFPA have set out to the factories certain requirements necessary before permits can be granted, allowing the renewal of in-factory weighing. These requirements include provisions to give assurances that weigh belts in the factories when moving are recording. They include confirmation of product flows into and out of the plant and checks involving weighing of a sample of landings on the pier side as a means of validating factory weighing.

Several pelagic fish factories have over recent days applied for permits under the new requirements, albeit generally qualified by statements around non-acceptance of some of the requirements described by SFPA. These applications are currently being considered by the SFPA. The representative bodies for the Irish pelagic industry have acknowledged the need for change. However, they are not to date willing to support the SFPA requirement for a continuous remote monitoring facility to increase assurances of accurate recording. Furthermore, they are not to date willing to provide stock movement records at the level of detail of the SFPA request. Irish catchers have said they are not willing to move to recognise the validity of weighing at landing, even as a component cross checking arrangement of an overall system of supporting factory permits.

I understand and appreciate that the new arrangements sought by the SFPA for the effective control of pelagic fisheries involve some changes in practices. However, in the long run, I believe that it will be in the interests of the industry as a whole to commit to strengthened controls that give all catchers and processors assurances that there is a level playing field across the industry. I would encourage the industry to continue its dialogue with the SFPA. The SFPA is currently considering existing applications for in factory weighing permits and is awaiting further applications from the remainder of the factories. If there are additional technical issues to be sorted out, the SFPA have assured me that it remains available for further discussion with industry representatives.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

104. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding an agri-environment option scheme payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36207/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was approved for participation in the Agri-Environment Options Scheme (AEOS 3) with effect from the 1st May 2013. Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, have to be completed before any payment can issue. During these checks a query arose in respect of land parcels declared which required digitisation. This is being dealt with by my Department at present and once the digitisation process is completed, the application will be processed with a view to making payment in respect of 2013 at the earliest opportunity.

Departmental Staff Data

105. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Ma-

rine the number of Department staff in County Galway that have transferred to Government Departments in counties Mayo or Sligo to date in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36209/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): No staff from my Department in County Galway transferred to Government Departments in County Mayo or County Sligo to date this year. In 2013, however, 4 clerical staff from my Department's offices in Galway transferred on a temporary basis to Claremorris, County Mayo.

Single Payment Scheme Administration

106. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way his Department deals with the area aid and single farm payments to farmers who transfer land from their holding to local authorities for the common good relating to road works, flood alleviation and so on as the transfer pertains to regional and local roads; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36258/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In order to receive full payment under the Single Payment Scheme an eligible hectare must be declared for each entitlement held by the farmer as set out in Council Regulation (EC) No. 73/2009. Consolidation of Entitlements under the Single Payment Scheme was also introduced in 2005 under this regulation. Consolidation (stacking) of entitlements means that in certain circumstances a farmer may give up to the National Reserve his/her own existing entitlements. The farmer is then re-allocated a lower number of entitlements with a higher net unit value.

Farmers who satisfy certain conditions are eligible to apply to have their entitlements consolidated. The reduction in the number of hectares must have arisen due to certain circumstances, including the acquisition of land by a public authority under a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) for non-agriculture purposes.

Application for consolidation of entitlements as a result of hectares lost as outlined above could only be considered if these hectares were used to establish entitlements during the reference period 2000 to 2002. Consolidation of entitlements has been available each year since 2005.

National Milk Agency

107. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will be nominating a person representing the large multiple supermarkets to the board of the National Milk Agency, at the inception of the new term for members of this board, which is due for renewal in December 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36287/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Milk (Regulation of Supply) Act, 1994, allows for the appointment by the Minister of ordinary members of the board of the National Milk Agency nominated by processor, distributor, retail and consumer interests. There is currently one retail sector representative on the board and this has been the practice since the establishment of the Agency. The National Milk Agency (Members) Regulation, S.I. No. 234 of 1995, sets down the prescribed number of ordinary members from each sector as follows: - consumers - one; retailers - one; distributors - one; processors - four; producers - five. The Milk (Regulation of Supply) Amendment Act, 1996, increased the number of members to be nominated by consumer interests to at least two.

Appointments are ordinarily for a term of three years and the next renewal is due in December 2015. It is open to the retail interests mentioned by you to seek to nominate a representative for consideration for appointment at that time. Any request from retail or other interest groups wishing to nominate an additional representative to the Board should be forwarded to my Department for consideration.

Departmental Correspondence

108. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a decision on their mapping appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36362/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Due to inadvertent oversight the appeal of the person named to which the Deputy refers was not replied to, an official of my Department contacted the person named directly, this morning, to explain the position and apologise for the oversight. A letter, formally replying to the enquiry, will issue to the person named without further delay. The issue under appeal relates to the removal of ineligible areas from the claim of the person named - gardens of a dwelling house from one land parcel and sheds from another. While these reductions, in themselves, did not give rise to penalties, as the eligible area of the claim of the person named was reduced, the payment made was marginally below the maximum. In order to receive full payment, applicants under the Single Payment Scheme are required to declare one eligible hectare for each payment entitlement held.

Army Barracks Closures

109. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Defence if he has received proposals regarding the future use of Columb Barracks, Mullingar, County Westmeath; the Government's plans for the future use of this facility. [36179/14]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The former Columb Barracks in Mullingar is currently used by Westmeath GAA Board under a short term licence and it is hoped to put a long term arrangement in place with the Board for the use of the barracks over the coming weeks. The former barracks is also currently used by An Garda Síochána and the Customs Service for training purposes and it is intended that these arrangements will remain in place. A number of other organisations and individuals have also made enquiries/suggestions as to the possible use of the barracks and these are being looked at in the context of an overall plan for the barracks under a long term lease with Westmeath GAA Board.

Defence Forces Recruitment

110. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Defence his plans to engage in further recruitment to the cadets corps of the Permanent Defence Force in addition to the 20 who have already been recruited; if some of those who have been selected as being suitable and are on a waiting list will be facilitated in the near future; the likely timescale for further recruitment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36246/14]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The 2014 Cadetship Competition for the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service has been conducted and 39 Cadetships are being awarded, comprising of 20 Army to include 2 Equitation School, 9 Air Corps and 10 Naval Service Ca-

detships. The intake of Cadets into the Permanent Defence Force is normally carried out on an annual basis taking into consideration the operational requirements of the Defence Forces and the resource envelope allocated to Defence. The selection of Cadets following the 2014 competition has been finalised and offers of Cadetships have recently issued. As there is only one intake of Cadets each year candidates are not placed on a waiting list, but should they continue to fulfil all the eligibility criteria they may re-apply for the Cadetship Competition in subsequent years. It is too early at this stage to say if there will be such a requirement for a further intake of Cadets in 2015.

Garda Strength

111. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide details of the total population of the southern region of An Garda Síochána; the population and the number of square kilometres of each Garda division in that region; the population and the number of square kilometres in each Garda district in those divisions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36167/14]

112. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí by rank available for policing duties and those assigned to managerial-administrative duties in each Garda district in the southern region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36171/14]

113. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide details by Garda district in the southern region; the number of vehicles registered in each of the following years which are in use for policing duties, 2007 to 2013, and to date in 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36175/14]

114. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide details by rank, the number of gardaí available for policing duties and those assigned to managerial-administrative duties in each district in the southern region during the years 2011 to 2013, and to date in 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36176/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 111 to 114, inclusive, together.

The information the Deputy is seeking is currently being collated by my Department. I will contact him when it is to hand.

Prison Accommodation Provision

115. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the annual costs of running the prison service for each year since 2005; and the average cost per person imprisoned in each of those years. [36177/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The annual costs of running the prison service for each year since 2005 and the average cost per person imprisoned in each of those years is captured in the following table. The figures presented for 2013 are subject to audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General and may be subject to change.

YEAR	Cost of Running Prison Service - (€000)	Cost of Keeping an Offender - (€)
2005	334,931	90,900

YEAR	Cost of Running Prison Service - (€000)	Cost of Keeping an Offender - (€)
2006	387,240	91,700
2007	373,055	97,700

YEAR	Cost of Running Prison Service - (€000)	Cost per Available, Staffed Prison Space - (€)*
2008	402,318	92,717
2009	357,827	77,222
2010	317,109	70,513
2011	330,149	65,359
2012	316,805	65,404
2013	304,967	65,542

***Cost per Available, Staffed Prison Space.**

It should be noted that the methodology for measuring costs across the prison estate was reviewed in 2008. The previous approach (Cost of Keeping an Offender) did not give consideration to the various factors that drive costs.

The revised methodology is of greater benefit in the financial management of the Service than the one previously used as it facilitates the strategic measuring and comparing of costs across the prison estate. It also excludes costs which are not under the direct control of the Irish Prison Service, for example, teachers salaries.

Garda Station Refurbishment

116. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide details on a matter (details supplied) regarding Garda accommodation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36180/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel, including assigning members to Drugs Units, among the Garda Regions, Divisions, and Districts. 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 personnel strength of Newcastle West Garda Station on 31 July, 2014, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 38. The personnel strength of Newcastle West Garda Station on 31 December, 2010 was 28. Information in relation to support staff is as outlined as follows:

Civilian Staff as at 31/08/10

District Finance Officer/Staff Officer	1
Clerical Officer	3.4

Civilian Staff as at 31/08/14

District Finance Officer/Staff Officer	1
Clerical Officer	3.4

Following the amalgamation of Newcastle West and Askeaton Districts on the 22nd April, 2013 there was a requirement for additional IT infrastructure. In this regard sanction was given to carry out the necessary works.

The programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda stations is based on accommodation priorities which are established by An Garda Síochána. The programme is advanced in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. I am informed that the Garda authorities are currently examining the refurbishment of the station in question in conjunction with the OPW.

Garda Station Expenditure

117. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality in view of recent proposals to reform the Garda Síochána, her views that the mechanism for determining how capital investment in Garda stations is made needs to be reformed; her plans to reform the method for prioritising investment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36185/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The programme of replacement of Garda stations is based on accommodation priorities which are established by An Garda Síochána. The programme is advanced in close co-operation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation.

The Office of Public Works, on foot of an analysis of the accommodation priorities determined by An Garda Síochána, provides options on identifying appropriate, cost effective solutions to the requirements of An Garda Síochána. Garda accommodation projects are progressed having regard to the level of capital funding that is available in the OPW Vote for Garda projects.

Garda Station Expenditure

118. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide details of the number of Garda stations who in 2013 and to date in 2014 have reported instances of vermin infestation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36186/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Garda authorities that expenditure was authorised to deal with reported instances of vermin infestation in 15 (fifteen) Garda Stations for the year 2013. The comparable figure for the year 2014 to date is 11 (eleven).

Court Poor Box

119. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason for the operation of poor boxes in court and if there are any guidelines about the use of such a system. [36249/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The court poor box is a non-statutory system used mostly by the District Courts to impose a financial charge on a defendant to be used for a charitable purpose, usually instead of imposing a criminal conviction. Payments made to the court poor box are accounted for by the court office concerned and the

accounting procedures are subject to audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General. Generally, charities are the recipients of poor box contributions but the decision is solely at the discretion of the Judge who is independent in the matter of sentencing, as in other matters concerning the exercise of judicial functions, subject only to the Constitution and the law.

The Deputy will be aware that the Government have approved the drafting of the Criminal Justice (Community Sanctions) Bill and the publication of the General Scheme of the Bill. The proposed legislation will abolish the Court Poor Box and replace it with a statutory Reparation Fund to provide for a fair, equitable and transparent system of reparation that will apply only to minor offences dealt with by the District Court.

The new Reparation Fund will be used to provide additional funding for services for victims of crime and compensation payments payable by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal. The legislation will clearly provide that the Reparation Fund may not be used for any purpose other than the provision of compensation, reparation and assistance for victims of crime.

Garda Policing Plans

120. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there has been any consideration toward aligning Garda districts within county council boundaries with a view toward streamlining Garda community work. [36250/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Garda Síochána Policing Plans for 2008 and 2009 outlined a programme to realign Regional, Divisional, District and Sub-District boundaries to make them co-terminous with local authority boundaries. This was carried out to facilitate the working of Joint Policing Committees in accordance with the provisions of the Garda Síochána Act 2005.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel, including community Gardaí, among the Garda Regions, Divisions, and Districts. 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.

Courts Service

121. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps she has taken to ensure that the courthouses in Swords and Balbriggan, County Dublin continue to operate, as closure would undermine legal practices in the area and considerably disrupt matters for citizens and staff having to journey to the city centre for matters which could more conveniently be dealt with locally; the contact she has had with the Court Service on the matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36263/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy is aware, the Courts Service Act 1998 provides that management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions, which include the provision of accommodation for court sittings.

However, in order to be of assistance, I have had enquiries made and have been informed that the Courts Service undertook a review of the administration and delivery of court services in the Dublin Region. The purpose of the review was to identify, in consultation with all stakeholders, a range of options which could be considered to enable the Courts Service to maintain

frontline courts services and support court sittings in the context of reduced budgetary and staffing availability. Arising from the review, proposals were formulated including proposals to close the court office in Swords and the court venues at Swords and Balbriggan. A comprehensive public consultation process was undertaken by the Courts Service and submissions were received from a range of stakeholders including the judiciary, other agencies across the justice sector, the legal profession, local authorities and public representatives, staff associations and members of the public generally.

The Courts Service has advised that the proposals, including all submissions received during the consultation phase, were considered by the Courts Service Building Committee, a sub-committee of the Courts Service Board, at its meeting on 22 September 2014. These included views of the Working Group on Efficiencies in the Criminal Justice System which is chaired by my Department and comprises representatives of the main justice sector agencies including An Garda Síochána, the Irish Prison Service, the judiciary and the Courts Service among others, which, at my request, considered the proposals on court closures from a Justice system perspective.

The Building Committee, in considering the submissions received, noted the views expressed regarding possible inconvenience that could entail for court users, the potential impact on local policing and also the projected increased costs across the justice sector. Following the extensive consultation process, the Courts Service has recently announced that the proposals will not proceed at this time.

Liquor Licensing Laws

122. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedures under licensing laws that public house owners must adhere to when applying for late night extensions for the selling of alcohol and late night music; the powers of the Garda Síochána under the licensing laws in this regard; the provision being made in the legislation for the submissions of observations and comments by the public. [36266/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Section 5 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 1927 (as amended), provides that the licensee of a public house may apply to the District Court for a special exemption order which permits extended opening hours for a special occasion. An applicant for such an order must, not less than forty eight hours before making the application, serve on the officer in charge of the Garda Síochána for the licensing area concerned a notice of intention to apply for the order which contains details of the premises, the special occasion and the hours in relation to which the order is being sought.

In such cases the District Court may grant the special exemption order if it thinks fit to do so having heard the officer in charge of the Garda Síochána for the licensing area concerned. However, the Court shall not grant such an order in respect of any premises unless it is satisfied that the special occasion concerned will be conducted in a manner which will not cause undue inconvenience or nuisance to people residing in the locality or create an undue threat to public order or public safety in the locality. Members of the public may therefore convey any concerns they may have in relation to special exemption orders granted in respect of specified premises to the officer in charge of the Garda Síochána for the licensing area concerned.

Garda Recruitment

123. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide

in tabular form the costs of recruiting, training and employing 100, 200, 300, 400 and 500 extra gardaí per annum to An Garda Síochána; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36274/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the initial annual cost of recruiting, training and employing 100, 200, 300, 400 and 500 extra Gardaí per annum is as set out in the following table:

Expenditure Category	100 Members	200 Members	300 Members	400 Members	500 Members
Salary and Allowances	€1.89m	€3.77m	€5.66m	€7.54m	€9.43m

The costs presented do not include pension costs which are not known until they are drawn down. They do include employers' PRSI where relevant but exclude any allowances for which members may qualify following attestation.

Registration of Title

124. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding land registration in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36304/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): 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 T.D.s 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.

Student Visas Eligibility

125. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if level 6 courses offered by institutes of technology qualify as eligible courses for participation in the student bond system for the purposes of obtaining a visa to study here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36322/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): All non-EEA students seeking to pursue a full time course of studies in Ireland are required to demonstrate access to certain minimum levels of finance. For visa required nationals this generally requires the provision of bank statements and comprehensive information is available to students on the INIS website regarding what proof of finance is required when applying for a visa. A pilot programme is currently in operation which allows visa required nationals seeking to undertake certain degree programmes in Ireland to provide an alternative to bank statements as a method

of proof of finances. The alternative method is an “education bond” with a minimum value of €7,000. The bond must be lodged to an approved student fees payment service and must be held continuously from the initial visa application through to the time the student registers in Ireland with the immigration authorities. Currently the courses allowable under this alternative arrangement are limited to Degree Programme courses delivered by certain types of institution which I understand can include the Institutes of Technology. Full details regarding eligible courses and awarding body are available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie.

Officials from my Department are available to discuss the operation of the bond system with the Institutes of Technology.

Proposed Legislation

126. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the forthcoming Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill will make provision for the Joint Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality recommendations on prostitution; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36353/14]

127. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding laws targeting sex buyers to end exploitation, abuse and trafficking (details supplied); when this Bill will be taken as it is now over a year since the Justice Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality issued its report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36364/14]

128. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if legislation in the area of sex trafficking and-or prostitution is planned to be brought forward with a view to better protecting women; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36376/14]

146. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when she plans to introduce laws targeting sex buyers to end exploitation, abuse and trafficking in view of a report issued from the Joint Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality, which recommended such laws after studying numerous submissions and months of hearings. [36430/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 126 to 128, inclusive, and 146 together.

I am examining the recommendations made by the Joint Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality, the advices of the Attorney General and the views of the Minister for Health regarding a new approach to prostitution legislation.

As Deputies will be aware, prostitution raises a wide spectrum of issues. When I have had the opportunity to complete consideration of the issues, proposals will be brought to Government in the usual manner.

I would draw attention to the existing legislative provision addressing the trafficking of persons for the purposes of exploitation (including sexual exploitation) which can attract significant penalties. The Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) Act 2008 prohibits trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Any person found guilty of such an offence shall be liable to imprisonment for life or a lesser term, and at the discretion of the court, to a fine.

There is also provisions in our criminal law directed at the public nuisances and exploitation associated with prostitution. Solicitation, by both the client and the prostitute, living on the earnings of prostitution, organising prostitution and running a brothel are all offences under the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 1993.

Direct Provision System

129. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the approximate cost of ending the current system of direct provision and replacing it with accommodation in the community; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36381/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of my Department is responsible for the accommodation of protection applicants in accordance with the Government policy of direct provision and dispersal. Direct provision provides for full board accommodation supports while a final decision is awaited by a person on their protection or any related leave to remain application. Currently, 4,330 persons are residing in 34 asylum accommodation centres under contract to RIA. Direct Provision owes its origin as the public policy response to a major accommodation crisis that existed in the late 1990s/early 2000s. At its high point in 2005 the number of persons residing in Direct Provision was 8080.

A key finding in the 2010 Value for Money Report on the Direct Provision system was that if we were operating a system which provided for asylum seekers to live independent lives in individual housing with associated social welfare payments, aside from the asylum ‘pull factor’ towards the State it would clearly create, the cost to the exchequer could be possibly double what is currently paid under the direct provision system. The report is available in full on the agency’s website on www.ria.gov.ie.

In terms of the cost of replacing the Direct Provision system with private rented accommodation, it is difficult to calculate what that cost would be. The number of persons seeking asylum this year is currently running at 40% higher than last. This, invariably, creates additional pressures and challenges for the State. Asylum seekers are not obliged to avail of direct provision supports and a significant number choose to make their own arrangements in the absence of an alternative. Should a system be introduced whereby such persons could effectively avail of mainstream social welfare supports, including rent supplement in line with those available to Irish citizens, it would be logical to expect that the numbers seeking such State supports could increase significantly with costs rising accordingly. It would also be logical to expect an increase in the number of economic migrants seeking to enter the State via the asylum system. Therefore, any change to the current Direct Provision system must be given careful consideration.

The Government is committed to making real improvements to the protection process, including direct provision. We have made a number of commitments to this end in the Statement of Government Priorities 2014-2016. This includes a commitment to establish an independent Working Group to report to Government on improvements to the protection process, including Direct Provision and supports for asylum seekers.

My intention is to proceed with the establishment of that Working Group in the near future. Together with Minister of State O’Riordáin, I hosted a Round Table on 18 September to provide non-governmental organisations active in the field of asylum the opportunity to outline the key issues for them in relation to the State’s current arrangements for asylum seekers. That initiative was widely welcomed by the NGOs involved and proved very useful for the purpose of identifying the issues which will need to be addressed. I will be using the outcome of that meeting to inform the terms of reference of the Working Group which I expect to establish shortly.

Garda Recruitment

130. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the expected number of new Garda recruits to commence training in 2015; the additional cost in 2015 of increasing this number by 100 and 200 respectively; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36382/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will be aware that the first intake since 2009 of 100 new recruits entered training at the Garda College in Templemore on Monday 15th September 2014. This marked a positive step forward for policing in Ireland. It is my intention that there will be ongoing recruitment and I am discussing the details of this with my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

The Garda Trainees will receive an allowance of €184 per week for the 32 weeks leading to attestation. A weekly living allowance of €77.92 will also be provided for this period. After 32 weeks of training, Garda recruits are attested and move on to the first point of the Garda pay scale of €23,171 rising to a maximum of €45,793 per annum after 19 years. They may also qualify for other allowances depending on their assignments.

The table below discloses the initial annual cost for recruiting 100 and 200 extra Gardaí per annum. The costs presented include employers' PRSI where relevant but exclude any allowances for which members may qualify following attestation.

Expenditure Category	100 Members	200 Members
*Salary and Allowances	€1.89m	€3.77m

*costs for calendar year from start date of Garda Trainees.

Naturalisation Applications

131. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which alternative provision will be made to facilitate their application for naturalisation-update of stamp 4 in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36404/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is a sibling of an Irish citizen child of non-EEA Parents, born in the State prior to 1 January, 2005, whose mother was granted temporary permission to remain in the State on 24 January, 2006 under the revised arrangements for the non-EEA national parents of children born in Ireland prior to January, 2005, commonly known as the IBC/05 Scheme. The person concerned was granted permission to remain in the State on 11 April, 2008, in line with the period already granted to her mother. This permission was subsequently renewed on several occasions and is due to expire on 31 January, 2015.

Officials in the Citizenship Division of the INIS inform me that there is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to in the Deputy's question.

The position in general is that persons making an application for a certificate of naturalisation are required to provide evidence of their identity. If they do not have their passport, birth certificate or other supporting document, then they should obtain it, so that the State can have equivalent proofs of the identity of naturalised citizens as all other citizens. In rare circumstances where an applicant cannot obtain their passport, birth certificate or other supporting

documents for reasons genuinely beyond their control, then the applicant will be required to provide an explanation and submit evidence, such as correspondence from the relevant authorities responsible for the issuing of passports and birth certificates in their country, stating why they are not obtainable. The Citizenship Division will assess those reasons and if satisfied that they provide a genuine impediment, alternative means of validating the true identity of the person will be put in place.

I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual Immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by Email using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specially established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

Naturalisation Applications

132. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the determination of eligibility for long-term residency-naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36406/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned has been granted permission to remain in the State for the three year period ending 7th June, 2016. This decision was conveyed in writing to the person concerned by letter dated 7th June, 2013.

It will be open to the person concerned to apply to the Citizenship Division of my Department for a Certificate of Naturalisation when they are in a position to meet the lawful residency criteria applicable to the lodgement of such applications. Details on the criteria to be met by persons lodging such applications are available from the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Website (www.inis.gov.ie).

Given that the person concerned does not appear to have held an employment permit issued by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, they would not be in a position to meet the criteria applicable to an application for Long Term Residency.

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.

Immigration Status

133. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 196 of 11 July 2013, if she will review the circumstances surrounding the case of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36408/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a letter issued to

the person mentioned by the Deputy on 21 August 2014 regarding their circumstances in the State, to which INIS is awaiting a reply. A decision cannot be made on the case until the person concerned engages with INIS.

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.

Deportation Orders Re-examination

134. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will set aside a deportation order in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36409/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is subject of a Deportation Order made on 3rd May 2012. The person concerned has been evading deportation since 7th June 2012 and, as such, is liable to arrest and detention. The person concerned should, therefore, 'present' to the Garda National Immigration Bureau without further delay.

Representations were received on behalf of the person concerned from the Deputy, asking that the Deportation Order be revoked, in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act, 1999 (as amended). This application is under consideration at present. The Deputy might wish to note that any such decision will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Order. In the mean-time, the Deportation Order remain valid and in place.

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

Residency Permits

135. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the appropriate residency authorisation will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36411/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person in question arrived in the State on 05 June 2011 and was registered as a student for three years on non degree courses, until 11 August 2014. All non-EEA students resident in the State are subject to the student immigration rules set out under the "new immigration regime for full time non-EEA students" which was published in September 2010 and has been effect since 1 January 2011. These rules stipulate that non-EEA students may reside in Ireland as students for a maximum period of seven years, where only the first three years are permitted on non degree and language

courses.

If this person wishes to continue studying in the State, they must now be enrolled on a degree course before they can be registered again as a student in the State.

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

136. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the residency status-eligibility to apply for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36412/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Officials in the Citizenship Division of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) inform me that there is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to in the Deputy's question, who currently has permission to reside in the State until 7 March 2017.

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

- be of full age
- be of good character
- have had a period of one year's continuous residency in the State immediately before the date of application and, during the eight years immediately preceding that period, have had a total residence in the State amounting to four years
- intend in good faith to continue to reside in the State after naturalisation
- have, before a judge of the District Court in open court, in a citizenship ceremony or in such manner as the Minister, for special reasons, allows -
 - (i) made a declaration, in the prescribed manner, of fidelity to the nation and loyalty to the State, and
 - (ii) undertaken to faithfully observe the laws of the State and to respect its democratic values.

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

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

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

The person in question applied for Long-Term Residency on 23 July 2010. His application was approved on 12 March 2012.

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

Naturalisation Applications

137. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the determination of an application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 24; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36413/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): 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 was issued to the person concerned on 19 August 2014 requesting certain information and a copy of the letter has been issued on 23 September 2014. Upon receipt of the requested 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.

Work Permit Applications

138. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will facilitate the updating of a work permit in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36414/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred

to by the Deputy arrived in the State on 02/07/2003 on an employment permit which expired 22/06/2004 and would appear to have remained here without the appropriate permission. The issuing of Employment Permits is a matter for the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.

If the Deputy has a query in relation to the status of Immigration cases he may make them 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 the way of Parliamentary Questions.

Residency Permits

139. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the determination of entitlement in respect of residency in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 2; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36415/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the position in the State of the person concerned is as set out in my Reply to the Deputy's earlier Question - PQ No. 603 of Wednesday, 17th September, 2014 - copied beneath.

I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the subsidiary protection application made by the person concerned was refused on 31st July, 2014.

Following that refusal decision, and in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned has submitted written representations. These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under 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, in advance of a final decision being made.

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

Residency Permits

140. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will review the decision to refuse residency status in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36416/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that one of the persons concerned made an application for permission to remain in the State on 5 September, 2014 on the basis of their marriage to the other person concerned, who is an Irish national. That application is currently pending a decision. In the interest of taking a fair approach to all such applications, cases are processed in chronological order.

I understand that the refusal decision referred to by the Deputy may relate to a different application made by the person concerned, which was not an application for residency status.

Residency Permits

141. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding a long-term residency-eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36417/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned was granted temporary permission to remain in the State on 4 August, 2005 for 2 years under the revised arrangements for the non-EEA parents of children born in Ireland prior to 1 January, 2005, commonly known as the IBC/05 Scheme. This permission was renewed on a regular basis and it is currently valid up to 4 August, 2016.

An application for a certificate of naturalisation was received from the person concerned which was recently refused. The person concerned was informed of this refusal and the reasons for it in a letter issued on 25 July, 2014. However, it is open to the person in question to lodge a new application if and when she is in a position to meet the statutory requirements applicable at that time.

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 I know the Deputy will appreciate that it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual Immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by Email using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specially established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

Naturalisation Applications

142. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which an application for residency-naturalisation has been progressed in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36419/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): 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. Certain information was requested from the applicant and a response has been received. Processing of the application is ongoing and the case will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

The Deputy may wish to note that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has

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

Deportation Orders

143. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding residency status-eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36421/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned has been in the State without permission since 23rd March, 2013. Consequently, in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned was notified, by letter dated 29th April, 2014, that the then Minister proposed to make a Deportation Order in respect of them. They were 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 submitting written representations setting out the reasons why they should not have a Deportation Order made against them. To date no written representations have been received from the person concerned.

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

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.

Deportation Orders

144. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she has provided further consideration to the submissions made for long-term residency-eligibility for naturalisation in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Longford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36423/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order made on 11th March, 2005. The person concerned has been evading deportation since 19th May, 2005 and, as such, is liable to arrest and detention for the purposes of having the Deportation Order enforced. The person concerned should, therefore, 'present' to the Garda National Immigration Bureau without further delay.

Representations were received on behalf of the person concerned from the Deputy, pursuant to the provisions of Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), to have his Deportation Order revoked. This application is under consideration at present. The Deputy might

wish to note that any such decision will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Order. In the mean-time, the Deportation Order remains valid and in place.

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.

Deportation Orders

145. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding residency in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36429/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I wish to inform the Deputy that the person referred to has no entitlement to residency.

The person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order made on 12th November 2008. The person concerned has been evading deportation since 2nd December 2008 and, as such, is liable to arrest and detention. The person concerned should, therefore, 'present' to the Garda National Immigration Bureau without further delay.

Representations were received on behalf of the person concerned pursuant to the provisions of Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), to have her Deportation Order revoked. This application is under consideration at present. The Deputy might wish to note that any such decision will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Order. In the mean-time, the Deportation Order remains valid and in place.

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.

Question No. 146 answered with Question No. 126.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

147. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will include the case of a person (details supplied) in the inquiry into mother and baby homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36160/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Commission of Investigation into matter relating to Mother and Baby Homes, once established, will be statutory and independent and will operate in accordance with the Commission of Investigations Act 2004.

Discussions are on-going with my Government colleagues and the Attorney General with a view to finalising our deliberations on the Commission's terms of reference in early course.

The Report of the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Mother and Baby Homes, along with the views expressed by interested parties, is informing this task. One of the key recommendations in this Report is that the Commission on Mother and Baby Homes should not repeat the work of previous investigations, in particular the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse. It is noted that the institution mentioned in the details supplied by the Deputy, falls within those categories of 'institutions' already examined in detail by the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse. This included schools, industrial schools, reformatory schools, orphanages, hospitals, children's homes and other places where children were cared for other than as members of their families.

However, as an independent body, it will ultimately be a matter for the Commission itself to determine the approach to matters which fall within its specific terms of reference. My Department will arrange to pass the details supplied by the Deputy to the Chair of the Commission upon its establishment.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

148. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the date of publication of the terms of reference of the inquiry into the mother and baby homes; the level of consultation he and his predecessors have had with the interested parties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36178/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): This Government is committed to establishing an effective Commission of Investigation into matters relating to Mother and Baby Homes. Considerable progress has been achieved to date in this important task, including the publication of the Inter-Departmental Group's Report and the announcement that Judge Yvonne Murphy will Chair this independent statutory investigation. It is my intention to bring a Memorandum to Government as quickly as possible setting out the proposed Terms of Reference and to return to the Houses with a draft order to establish the Commission.

Discussions in this regard are on-going with the Attorney General and colleagues across Government with a view to finalising our deliberations in early course. In parallel with this work, my Department is advancing the legislative and logistical arrangements required to establish the Commission.

Given the breadth and scale of the issues involved, and our experience of previous statutory inquiries, it is apparent that precise terms of reference are required to ensure the Commission is set up on the most sound footing possible. This is a complex undertaking and it is right to take the necessary time for drafting to ensure the Commission can deliver on public expectations in a realistic manner.

My predecessor, Minister Flanagan, previously met with representatives of a number of key advocacy groups and Church leaders, including the Adoption Rights Alliance, First Mothers Group, Bethany Homes Survivors Group, Cúnamh, Adoption Loss and Archbishop Diarmuid Martin. I have also recently met with Archbishop Michael Jackson. The submissions made during these constructive discussions, together with more than 120 written submissions received by my Department, are a valuable input to the deliberative process.

The Inter-Departmental Group's Report has served to stimulate and further inform public debate on these important matters. As matters progress in the coming weeks it is my intention to arrange further engagements with opposition spokespersons and other stakeholders in order to update them on the emerging issues and seek their further views. I am confident that this in-

clusive approach will assist in establishing an inquiry which is capable of effectively addressing these important matters in a sensitive and timely manner.

National Carers Strategy Consultation

149. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will report on the work of his Department and the agencies under its aegis to devise a strategy or plan to reach out and support young carers who care for a parent, sibling or other relative and who often experience difficulties in seeking help and specific supports in their special situation. [36222/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Deputy will be aware that the National Carers Strategy is led by the Department of Health and many Departments including the Department of Children and Youth Affairs have a role to play in its implementation. Earlier this month officials from my Department and the Child and Family Agency met with the National Carers' Association to discuss the role of the Department and the Agency in relation to the National Carers' Strategy.

The Child and Family Agency Act 2013 brings together a range of existing services for children and families to one agency. As of 1st January 2014, the Child and Family Agency is responsible for the former Family Support Agency, the National Educational Welfare Board and also for the functions of Child and Family services previously provided by the HSE.

The Agency's functions include maintaining and developing services in order to support and promote the development, welfare and protection of children and to support effective functioning of families. In so doing the Agency will promote enhanced interagency cooperation to ensure that services are coordinated on the principle of the best interest of all children and their families.

The Educational Welfare Service (EWS) of the Child and Family Agency is in the process of refining and implementing a new strategic approach to service delivery through an integrated model of service committed to the principle of "One Child, One Team, One Plan". The EWS of the Child and Family Agency is developing national guidelines as a practical support for schools in the preparation of School Attendance Strategies as outlined in Section 22 of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000. The guidelines will assist schools to implement effective measures to support children at risk of poor attendance and participation, including those with caring responsibilities. It is anticipated that the guidelines will be completed before the beginning of the 2015/16 academic year.

In order to learn more about children that undertake caring roles, my Department requested the Central Statistics Office to help to identify the extent to which children have caring responsibilities.

The Census of Population 2011 found that 6,449 children, or 5.6 per 1,000 children provided regular unpaid personal help for a friend or family member with a long-term illness, health problems or disability. Rates ranged from 4.3 per 1,000 in Co. Louth to 8.2 per 1000 in Co. Leitrim. Under the National Strategy for Research and Data on Children's Lives (2011-2016) analysis of those figures in the 2011 Census will help to inform future policy as to how best to address the support needs of children and young people who undertake caring roles. This analysis will be published before the end of 2014.

Child and Family Agency Funding

150. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his views regarding the recent statements made by the chief executive of the Child and Family Agency regarding the major funding difficulties faced by the new agency; and if he will be seeking additional resources under his Department's Vote to ensure that the agency has sufficient resources to fulfil its statutory remit. [36225/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The financial allocation for Tusla, The Child and Family Agency, in 2014, its first year of operation, was set at €609 million. This is comprised of €602 million in current funding and €7 million in capital funding. It is acknowledged that delivering the range of service required of the Agency, within this budget, is challenging.

Notwithstanding the significant level of resources provided, certain areas of expenditure, such as legal costs, have in the past proven difficult to manage within the allocated budget. It is also noted that other areas of expenditure such as private residential and foster care have experienced strong demand in 2014.

The Agency is implementing significant reform to seek to achieve greater value for money and efficiencies in such areas and the progress in this regard is subject to ongoing monitoring and review with my Department.

Officials in my Department continue to closely monitor the cash position of the Agency and are working with the Agency to determine an evidence based full year cash requirement. No final determination has yet been reached in this regard.

In the event that supplementary funding is required to meet the running costs of the Agency in 2014 the matter will be discussed with DPER as part of the ongoing budgetary discussions.

Early Child Care Education

151. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the cost of extending the early childhood care and education scheme from three hours per day, five days per week, over 38 weeks to five hours per day, five days per week and six hours per day, five days per week over 38 weeks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36236/14]

152. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the cost of extending the early childhood care and education scheme from three hours per day, five days per week, over 38 weeks to 44, 46 and 48 weeks per year respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36237/14]

154. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the estimated cost of an additional five hours per week for the preschool year. [36267/14]

155. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the estimated cost of an additional free preschool year. [36268/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 151, 152, 154 and 155 together.

The Early Childhood Care and Education programme was introduced in January 2010 and provides a free pre-school year to all eligible children before commencing primary school.

Despite the challenging budgetary situation, the pre-school year has been maintained as a universal and free programme, ensuring that a significant number of children can avail of quality pre-school services that would not otherwise be in a position to do so.

There is an increasing body of Irish and International evidence quantifying the benefits of early years intervention in terms of improving outcomes for children and in delivering significant economic and societal return to the State. In this context I believe the introduction of a second year would benefit children's educational and developmental outcomes.

A second free pre-school year would represent €2,500 to €3,000 worth of free childcare to parents and would be likely to generate 4,000-5,000 new jobs, albeit mostly part-time.

However, the introduction of a second pre-school year would require considerable additional funding, broadly in line with the cost of the current one-year provision, which is €175 million per annum. This additional funding is not currently available due to the financial constraints under which the Government is operating. In addition, all of the available evidence indicates that the quality of the pre-school provision is key to good outcomes for children. The Early Years Quality Agenda that is being progressed by my Department, and which involves a range of actions in key areas aimed at improving quality within early years services and enhancing the regulatory regime, is a key building block for any further extension of universal childcare provision.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, the national policy framework for children and young people 2014-2020, recognises the value of early childhood care and education in supporting children's early cognitive, social and emotional development, and the Government is committed to the introduction of a second free pre-school year within the lifetime of the framework once the required quality standards are achieved and subject to the availability of resources. My Department and I will be keeping this commitment under review in the context of the progress of the Early Years Quality Agenda.

The approximate additional extra cost of extending the ECCE programme is:

4 hours per day, five days per week, for 38 weeks	=	€58m
5 hours per day, five days per week, for 38 weeks	=	€117m
6 hours per day, five days per week, for 38 weeks	=	€175m
3 hours per day, five days per week, for 44 weeks	=	€27.66m
3 hours per day, five days per week, for 46 weeks	=	€36.88m
3 hours per day, five days per week, for 48 weeks	=	€46.10m

It should be noted that there are factors outside cost which would impact on policy decisions in this area. For example, a programme that lasted for a 6 hour day would be very onerous for young children, and programmes that extended outside the primary school year could be difficult for parents to manage.

Child Detention Centres

153. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if his attention has been drawn to complaints regarding the treatment of clients and the use of funds at Oberstown campus, County Dublin; if he will investigate the matter. [36259/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I assume the Deputy's reference to clients concerns children in custody in the children detention schools.

I am not aware of any complaints regarding the treatment of children and the use of funds at the Oberstown campus. There are complaint mechanisms available to children who are in custody in Oberstown. The campus has a designated liaison officer who is available to all children and reviews any complaints made by young people. The Ombudsman for Children's Office has engaged with the Campus Manager in Oberstown on their role in the complaints process. Complaints may also be made to by a child to advocacy services such as Empowering People in Care (EPIC). The Oberstown campus is also subject to review and audit under the normal public financial procedures. In the absence of more detailed information it is not possible to comment further. If the Deputy has information about any specific matter I will arrange for it to be examined by my Department in conjunction with management on the Oberstown campus.

Questions Nos. 154 and 155 answered with Question No. 151.

Departmental Correspondence

156. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide a reply to correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36277/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The correspondence to which the Deputy refers relates to the closure of a Community Playschool. I understand that his service had insufficient children participating in the various childcare schemes and was therefore not sustainable, and took the decision to close. Only 2 children were signed up for the 2014/15 academic year. I am aware that the group made considerable efforts supported by both the local County Childcare Committee and Pobal to attract local parents to use the facility but to no avail. I recognise and appreciate the hard work and commitment of the group and staff in trying to maintain the service. Unfortunately in the circumstances, there is nothing further that can be done.

Youth Services

157. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which he has had dialogue with those involved in providing youth support services throughout the country with particular reference to the need to identify ongoing or upcoming requirements in terms of support or resources; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36294/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. In 2014, funding of €49.78m has been provided to my Department for these schemes. The funding schemes support national and local youth work provision to some 380,000 young people and involve, approximately 1,400 youth work staff in 477 projects and 40,000 volunteers working in youth work services and communities throughout the country.

Ongoing engagement and dialogue with the youth sector organisations and with young people themselves are priorities in the formulation of policies and provision of services to support young people's development and learning. My Department works closely with the youth sec-

tor interests in various fora in developing key initiatives. The National Youth Work Advisory Committee, whose members include representatives of the national youth organisations, Government departments and the Education and Training Boards, that support youth services at local level, has an important advisory role to me in matters to do with provision for young people. My Department has worked with the youth sector on the development of youth work responses to the challenges of youth unemployment, including the contribution that the youth services can make to the Government's employment agenda and the Action Plan For Jobs, 2014.

The youth sector is engaged in the development, by my Department, of the new National Youth Strategy 2014- 2020. The strategy will be a universal strategy for all young people, aged 10 to 24 years, while having particular regard to those young people who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing the poorest outcomes and, therefore, in most need of support. In consultation with the National Youth Work Advisory Committee, my Department has set up a National Youth Strategy Task Group to oversee the development of the new strategy. The Task Group, which meets regularly, is chaired by the Director of the National Youth Council of Ireland and comprises representatives from the youth sector, Government departments, Education and Training Boards, the Centre for Effective Services and the business community. It is anticipated that the new National Youth Strategy will be completed by my Department for the end of 2014.

I, and officials of my Department have met, and continue to meet regularly, with youth organisations and groups. Earlier this month, over 2 days, I met with the representatives of some 30 national and major regional youth organisations. My aim is to see how we can work together to bring about the best possible outcomes for young people, having regard to resources available to us and to ensure that the programmes and services being provided are relevant and responsive to young people's needs.

Juvenile Offenders

158. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which adequate accommodation remains available, or is likely to become available, in respect of juvenile offenders with particular reference to future and current needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36295/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The 3 children detention schools, all located at Oberstown, Lusk, Co. Dublin, currently provide a total of 46 detention places for young people ordered to be remanded or committed by the courts in relation to criminal matters. These comprise 6 places for girls up to the age of 18 on admission and 40 places for boys up to the age of 17 on admission.

Boys aged 17 on being ordered to be detained are currently accommodated by the Irish Prison Service. This practice will cease, meeting the commitment in the Programme for Government to end the practice of detaining children in adult prison facilities, when new children detention facilities currently being constructed on the Oberstown campus become available before the end of this year. Construction commenced on site on the Oberstown campus in September 2013 and the new facilities will increase the capacity on the campus to provide sufficient accommodation for all children under 18 years of age ordered to be detained by the courts in relation to criminal matters.

In the interim, there is ongoing contact with the Courts, Probation and An Garda Síochána regarding the availability of places in the children detention schools and, pending introduction of the expanded facilities, the existing facilities at the Oberstown campus will continue to be available to the Courts.

Child Abuse

159. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the degree to which his Department has received reports of the various forms of child abuse in the past 12 months; the extent to which it has been found possible to provide an adequate follow up response; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36296/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Statutory responsibility for the delivery of child welfare and protection services rests with the Child and Family Agency, Tusla, which is the appropriate body to receive all reports of concerns relating to all forms of child abuse.

Each referral received by the Agency is assessed and progressed on an individual basis by the relevant social work team. Preliminary screening is aimed at establishing the appropriateness of the referral to Children and Family Agency, Tusla services and if necessary is followed by an initial assessment of the nature and degree of any harm and an assessment of the child's needs.

The Agency has advised that there were 4,641 referrals for child abuse during quarter one of 2014 - 1,037 (22%) of these referrals received related to a concern of physical abuse - 1,576 (34%) related to a concern of emotional abuse - 806 (18%) related to sexual abuse and 1,222 (26%) referrals received related to neglect. Following the preliminary enquiry by the Agency of the 4641 referrals, there was a reduction by 41% in the number of individual cases going on to have an initial assessment. The reasons for this included the duplication of referrals, the child being known to the service and receiving attention, or that the referral was not appropriate for the agency.

The Agency publishes a range of reports on performance indicators on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis. Among these indicators is information relating to referral and assessment processes, and numbers of substantiated cases which have led to a child's name being placed on the Child Protection Notification System and having a Child Protection Plan. The Agency also provides an annual Review of Adequacy Report under Section 8 of the Child Care Act 1991. The annual service planning process provides an opportunity to set out service priorities in the context of available resources. In addition, information is provided to me by the Agency on specific issues as required or to inform me of policy or legislative issues arising in the services.

My Department's function is exercised through a range of interactions with officials in the Agency. Among the more formal engagements are regular meetings between myself and the Chief Executive Officer of the Agency along with our respective senior management teams. Officials from my Department also meet formally on a quarterly basis with their counterparts in the Agency to discuss Performance Indicators and to seek in general to maintain and where possible improve the service provided by the Agency to the wider public. The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) inspect Agency Child Protection and Welfare and services for children in care and publish reports of their findings. There are regular and ongoing meetings between my Department and HIQA where HIQA report on their monitoring of services for children at risk.

Bullying of Children

160. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which his Department has been alerted to incidents of bullying amongst children, teenagers and-or young adults; the extent to which the most commonly noted forms of such bullying

has been identified or categorised; if provision has been or may be made to address such issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36297/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, I am committed to working with colleagues in Government to ensure that integrated policy responses to combat bullying are high on our agenda and that the necessary supports are in place for a safe environment for children and young adults.

Some correspondence on bullying amongst children and young people has been received in my Department, mostly relating to bullying in the school setting. Correspondence of this nature is referred to the Department of Education and Skills. Issues raised in correspondence received that raise child welfare and protection concerns would be referred to the Child and Family Agency.

The new procedures under the Action Plan for Bullying, led by the Department of Education and Skills, which place a requirement on all schools to address incidences of bullying, are highly relevant to the contexts of young people's lives and not only in the school setting. They specifically include incidences of cyber-bullying that occur both in and out of the school context and the posting of hurtful messages, images or statements on social media sites, within the definition of bullying. They highlight the need for parents and young people to understand how to use modern technologies safely and to know how to protect themselves in school, at home and in their communities. The Office for Internet Safety, under the Department of Justice and Equality, takes a lead responsibility for internet safety in Ireland, particularly as it relates to children.

There is a range of support services, supported by various departments and their agencies, including my own Department, which can assist children and young people in coping with bullying situations. These include advice and guidance for families. For example, *www.webwise.ie* - an initiative of the Department of Education and Skills - provides information and advice for parents and teachers about risks and how to protect children against cyber bullying. At community level, many of the voluntary youth services funded by my Department provide education programmes, run awareness campaigns about bullying and provide programmes for young people to give them the knowledge and skills to build supportive links and counter bullying behaviours.

Revised *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* was published in 2011. The aim of *Children First* is to direct the identification, investigation, assessment, reporting, treatment and management of child abuse. Bullying is defined in section 9.4 of the National Guidance, as repeated aggression that is conducted by an individual or group against others. The guidance requires that serious instances of bullying behaviour should be referred to the Child and Family Agency.

Youth Services Funding

161. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which his Department has received applications for financial support from various youth organisations throughout the country in the current year; the extent to which he expects to be in a position to respond; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36298/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The

schemes include the Youth Service Grant Scheme under which funding is made available on an annual basis to 31 national and major regional youth organisations. Targeted supports for disadvantaged, marginalised and at risk young people are provided through the Special Projects for Youth Scheme, the Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund, Rounds 1 and 2, Local Drugs Task Force Projects and certain other programmes including the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme and Youth Information Centres. The funding schemes support national and local youth work provision to some 380,000 young people and involve approximately, 1,400 youth work staff in 477 projects and 40,000 volunteers working in youth work services and communities throughout the country. In 2014, funding of €49.78m has been provided to my Department for these schemes.

Youth organisations and projects in receipt of funding are required to complete an annual application form for my Department. The process also involves the submission of an annual progress report detailing the services provided and the cohort of young people who participate in youth activities.

In recent years, my Department, along with all government departments, has been required to deliver substantial savings on all funding programmes in line with the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure 2012-2014. My Department, in determining the annual allocations for youth programmes, while having regard to the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure savings requirements, has sought to ensure that, as far as is possible, the focus is maintained on the front line youth services particularly those for the most vulnerable young people.

The question of additional funding to my Department to support the provision of youth services is a matter for consideration in the context of the annual Estimates and Budgetary processes and having regard to the resources available to the Government.

I, and officials of my Department have met, and continue to meet regularly, with youth organisations and groups. Earlier this month, over 2 days, I met with the representatives of some 30 national and major regional youth organisations. My aim is to see how we can work together to bring about the best possible outcomes for young people, having regard to resources available to us and to ensure that the programmes and services being provided are relevant and responsive to young people's needs.

Cyber Bullying Issues

162. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps he has taken or will take to address the issue of Internet bullying in respect of children and young adults outside of an educational environment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36301/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, I am committed to working with colleagues in Government to ensure that integrated policy responses to combat bullying are high on our agenda and that the necessary supports are in place for a safe environment for children and young adults.

There is a range of support services, supported by various departments and their agencies, including my own Department, which can assist children and young people in coping with bullying situations. These include advice and guidance for families. For example, *www.webwise.ie* - an initiative of the Department of Education and Skills - provides information and advice for parents and teachers about risks and how to protect children against cyber bullying. At community level, many of the voluntary youth services funded by my Department provide

education programmes, run awareness campaigns about bullying and provide programmes for young people to give them the knowledge and skills to build supportive links and counter bullying behaviours.

The new procedures under the Action Plan for Bullying, led by the Department of Education and Skills, which place a requirement on all schools to address incidences of bullying, are highly relevant to the contexts of young people's lives and not only in the school setting. They specifically include incidences of cyber bullying that occur both in and out of the school context and the posting of hurtful messages, images or statements on social media sites, within the definition of bullying. They highlight the need for parents and young people to understand how to use modern technologies safely and to know how to protect themselves in school, at home and in their communities. The Office for Internet Safety, under the Department of Justice and Equality, takes a lead responsibility for internet safety in Ireland, particularly as it relates to children.

Under *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* serious incidents of bullying should be reported to the Child and Family Agency. I have been advised that, in such cases and where it is required, appropriate support will be put in place. In addition to support for the family and the child or young adult, which can be provided by the Child and Family Agency, there are services provided by the HSE, including the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, which may be relevant depending on the nature of the condition being experienced by a child or young adult.

My Department continues to work with other departments, child care services, education welfare services and the youth sector to raise awareness about bullying, its impact on children and young people, to improve access to information and support for them and their families and to advance measures to combat bullying and promote a safer environment for our young people.

Poverty Data

163. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which his Department continues to monitor issues of youth poverty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36302/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 - 2020 (BOBF) was published and launched by Government in 2014. BOBF comprehends the continuum from infancy through early and middle childhood to adolescence and early adulthood. It provides the overarching framework for the development and implementation of policy and services for children and young people.

As provided for in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 - 2020, the Department of Social Protection, under Commitment 4.2, has lead responsibility for a national child-specific social target to lift 70,000 children out of consistent poverty by 2020, a reduction of at least two-thirds on the 2011 level. This target will include reducing the poverty rate for households with children, which is consistently higher when compared to non-child households and for children as compared to adults. It is expected that this commitment will be addressed on a cross-departmental basis.

My Department is working on a number of initiatives which are relevant in addressing issues related to child and youth poverty. It is, for example, leading the implementation of the Area Based Childhood Programme. The ABC Programme is being co-funded by Atlantic Philan-

thropies and will have a total funding allocation of up to €29.7 million. The ABC Programme draws on best international practice to break the cycle of child poverty where it is most deeply entrenched, and improve the outcomes for children and young people and existing services.

In terms of other provision, my Department is spending €260 million annually on three child care support programmes which provide child care to 100,000 children. A number of these programmes are targeted at those on lowest incomes.

My Department also provides funding for targeted support for disadvantaged, marginalised and at risk young people through three schemes. The three programmes are Special Projects for Youth Scheme, the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund and Local Drugs Task Force. Projects. In addition, national and regional youth work organisations are supported under my Department's Youth Service Grant Scheme. In 2014, current funding of €49.78 million has been provided to my Department for these schemes.

The Youth Work Sector has a significant role to play in young people's personal and social development and progression and improving outcomes for all young people, including those in most need of support and at risk of poverty. The sector has particular expertise in working with young people and provides non-formal and informal learning opportunities which aid young people's preparedness, participation, and progression in key areas of their lives such as education, inclusion and employment.

The National Youth Strategy 2014 - 2020 which being developed by my Department as a constituent strategy of BOBF in collaboration with other Government departments and youth interests will have a particular focus on ensuring greater coordination in policy and provision across government for young people aged 10-24 years. The National Youth Strategy is for all young people aged 10 to 24 years, spanning the period 2014-2020 and will aim to be responsive to current and emerging issues which impact on young people's lives.

Within this universal strategy, there will be particular regard to young people experiencing or at risk of experiencing the poorest outcomes and in most need of support. It will set out the cross-cutting actions that will improve the effectiveness of services in supporting young people to attain the national outcomes. The Strategy will be evidence informed and implementation focused, with priorities underpinned by realistic and achievable actions tied to specific outcomes and measurable indicators.

Homelessness Strategy

164. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which his Department continues to monitor the issue of youth homelessness; the degree to which it has been found possible to respond to such queries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36303/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): My Department commissioned the Centre for Effective Services (CES) to undertake a review of the implementation of the Youth Homelessness Strategy, 2001 to establish the extent that the strategy has been successful and to identify any blockages or challenges to its implementation. The report found that there have been significant improvements in the service response to homelessness of children and this has contributed to a decrease in the number of children presenting to services as being homeless.

It should of course be noted that policy responsibility for homeless young people, insofar as it extends to my Department, relates to children under 18 and any child welfare and protection

concerns that may arise in the context of the Child Care Act 1991. Young people who are homeless, either singly or as part of a family unit and not falling within this category are the responsibility of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and local authorities. Young people who were formerly in the care of the State and presently in receipt of aftercare services will, as part of this support, have their accommodation needs identified.

Children under 16 who present as being homeless to emergency services are taken into care. Children aged 16 and 17 may be taken into care, or provided a service under Section 5 of the Child Care Act 1991. Such children are typically more challenging to care for as they may be out of school; have experienced neglect and serious family discord; problematic drug use; have mental health or learning difficulties. These children often wish to be only involved with peers and they may be less inclined to engage with social work services. Services need to provide early and flexible options to engage with these children and to support them beyond their 18 birthday.

Aftercare is the planning and support put in place to meet the needs of a young person who is leaving statutory care at 18 years of age, to assist him/her in making the transition to independent living. The children most vulnerable to homelessness as care leavers are those leaving residential care or short term foster care placements. Children, who come into care late, in their mid to late teens, may not have developed the relationships with staff or aftercare workers that helps them achieve positive outcomes. It is essential that these young people have an opportunity to develop a relationship with a dedicated aftercare worker who will work with them to identify their needs and ensure that services are in place to help provide them with the stability and support they need.

Furthermore, as the Deputy will be aware, it has been decided to strengthen the legislative provisions regarding aftercare. This is in response to concerns that there was insufficient focus in this area and that such planning was not taking place on a properly structured and consistent basis.

The prioritisation of services for young people receiving aftercare is considered in the context of the statutory and administrative criteria and rules relating to State provision of services and the requirement of all State bodies to provide services in accordance with resources available to them. The Agency and officials of the DCYA have been and continue to explore these matters further with the relevant Departments and agencies, on a bilateral basis, to continue to support the improvement of aftercare for this vulnerable cohort.

The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children, at its sitting on 1 April, considered the draft aftercare provisions. The Committee's report on the Bill was made available to the Department in mid-July and is currently under consideration, prior to refining the text of the provisions in conjunction with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel.

Youth Services Provision

165. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he has designated or will designate a point of contact in his Department to liaise with youth educators on the various departmental schemes across Government, in place to assist children in education and fitness, and the various eligibility criteria and so on to help youth educators better navigate the system. [36319/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Deputy may be aware that my Department supports and promotes non-formal education and developmental

opportunities for young people through which they can enhance their personal and social skills and competencies. Particular regard is had to the youth work needs of young people between the ages of 10 and 21, and to those who are socially or economically disadvantaged.

My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The schemes include the Youth Service Grant Scheme under which funding is made available on an annual basis to 31 national and major regional youth organisations. Targeted supports for disadvantaged, marginalised and at risk young people are provided through the Special Projects for Youth Scheme, the Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund, Rounds 1 and 2, Local Drugs Task Force Projects and certain other programmes including the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme. Funding is also made available for a network of Youth Information Centres throughout the country. The purpose of these Centres is to provide young people and those who work with them, with access to information on rights, opportunities, benefits, health, welfare and other matters.

The funding schemes support national and local youth work provision to some 380,000 young people and involve approximately, 1,400 youth work staff in 477 projects and 40,000 volunteers working in youth work services and communities throughout the country. In 2014, funding of €49.78m has been provided to my Department for these schemes. Information about the funding schemes and the provision of youth services is available on my Department's Website at www.dcy.gov.ie.

A wide and diverse range of programmes and activities are organised by youth services and projects throughout the country, for and with young people. These include programmes to promote personal and social development, including activities to encourage healthy lifestyles, physical and mental well-being and initiatives to raise awareness of the risks associated with drugs and alcohol abuse and other issues that impact on young people's lives and their engagement in their local communities.

Programmes and activities are organised and delivered at local level by professional youth workers in projects and well trained volunteers. This work is supported by a network of Youth Officers in the Education and Training Boards.

Youth Officers are a key resource in the co-ordination of youth service provision to my Department and a contact point in their respective localities. They have an important support role to the providers of youth services in the implementation of the National Quality Standards Framework - a Framework to ensure that the diverse range of programmes available for young people have a common approach to ensuring quality services that draw on best practice and are responsive to young people's needs. The National Youth Organisations that support the local services are the key contacts for information about the range and choice of youth facilities and youth programmes available to young people and how to access them.

The Youth Affairs Unit of my Department is engaged in an on-going basis with the providers of youth services throughout the country and with the network of Youth Officers. My Department works collaboratively with those key contacts, including the various structured Fora, to ensure that they have access to the tools and best practice resources that are available to support their work with young people.

Details of the Websites of the major national youth organisations are being compiled and will be forwarded to the deputy shortly.

166. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount of funding a resource centre (details supplied) in County Meath received in 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36355/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The information sought has been requested from the Child and Family Agency and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it is received.

Drugs Payment Scheme Expenditure

167. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the approximate cost of reducing the monthly threshold for the drugs payment scheme from €144 to €130, €120, €110 and €100, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36227/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the Health Service Executive (HSE) has statutory responsibility for the administration of the primary care schemes, therefore the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Prescription Charges

168. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the approximate cost of reducing the monthly maximum payment for prescription charges to €15 and €10, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36228/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the Health Service Executive (HSE) has statutory responsibility for the administration of the primary care schemes, therefore the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Prescription Charges

169. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the approximate cost of reducing prescription charges to €2 per item and reducing the monthly maximum payment for prescription charges to €15 and €10, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36229/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the Health Service Executive (HSE) has statutory responsibility for the administration of the primary care schemes, therefore the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services Provision

170. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the adequacy of support services for children and teenagers identified as having a tendency to self-harm; the number of instances of such vulnerable young persons brought to the attention of his Department in the past 12 months; the extent to which it has been

possible to make a positive intervention; if any particular deficiencies have been identified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36299/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The National Suicide Research Foundation (NSRF), which is funded by the National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) operates the National Registry of Deliberate Self Harm. This is a national system which monitors the occurrence of deliberate self-harm presenting to hospital Emergency Departments. The NSRF compiles and publishes data on the incidence of deliberate self harm on an annual basis. Emergency Departments have the expertise in deliberate self-harm, crisis intervention nurses and/or liaison psychiatry services to support anyone who attends after an episode of self-harm.

For the period from 1 January to 31 December, 2012, the Registry recorded 1,118 deliberate self harm presentations to hospital that were made by 960 children (296 boys and 664 girls) aged from 10 to 17 years. In 5% of cases involving children aged 10 to 17 years, the child left the emergency department before a next care recommendation could be made. Following their treatment in the emergency department, inpatient admission was the next stage of care recommended for 41%, irrespective of whether general or psychiatric admission was intended and whether admission was refused or not. Of all deliberate self harm cases, 37% resulted in admission to a ward of the treating hospital and 53% of cases were discharged following treatment in the emergency department.

Government policy on deliberate self-harm and suicide prevention is guided by our national strategy *Reach Out* which makes a number of recommendations in relation to fast track referrals to community-based mental health services, effective response to deliberate self-harm, training, reducing stigma and promoting positive mental health, initiatives aimed at helping young men and research. The HSE's National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) has primary responsibility for the implementation of *Reach Out*.

Action Area 12 in *Reach Out* aims to “*Develop and resource an effective response in the health services or people who present to services having engaged in deliberate self harm and design ways to reach out to those who self-harm but are reluctant to access traditional services and supports*”. In this regard, the NOSP fund a range of services including Pieta House; two on-line providers - SpunOut and Inspire Ireland, to provide direct information to parents, teachers and young people on self harm; a self-harm liaison nurse post in Temple Street Hospital; training for community gatekeepers and front-line services responding to self-harm from young people. In 2012 the NOSP also published an information leaflet for parents on dealing with and responding to self-harm. In addition, this Government has provided funding for an 232 additional posts for the development of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) teams since 2012, with approximately 190 in post by the end of June 2014.

Having regard to the resources available, and the many competing demands on the mental health services, I am satisfied that there is an adequate wide range of support services in place for children and teenagers identified as having a tendency to self-harm.

Mental Health Services Provision

171. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which Outreach or other supportive or interactive services remain available for young persons identified as being likely to self-harm; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36300/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a

service issue this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Services for People with Disabilities

172. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Health the level of funding which is being made available for residential placement in County Waterford; if it is acceptable for a parent now entering their 70th year to wait nine years for a residential placement for their son in view of the fact that their health is now failing and that their son has apparently been on a prioritised waiting list for the duration of this period; if he will acknowledge the serious shortfall within this sector of his Department and recognise the unacceptable position this person has been forced into; if he will now commit to calling for a full review by his Department of procedures and funding availability within this sector of his Department and if he will make the necessary funding available in order for this person's son to be adequately accommodated within the system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36434/14]

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 Applications

173. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be made on an application, made on 24 June, 2014 for a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36168/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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 Applications

174. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be made on an application for a medical card made on 19 June, 2014 in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36170/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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 Data

175. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health following the decision to reinstate discretionary medical cards, the number of cards that have been restored; the number waiting a decision; when this process will be complete; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36172/14]

218. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the number of discretionary medical cards that have been returned since 1 June 2014; if he will provide same in a tabular form on a monthly basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36370/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 175 and 218 together.

The Government decision announced in June 2014, enabled the HSE to make the necessary arrangements to return medical cards and GP visit cards to those with a lifelong medical condition, acute illness, or disability, who had been granted a card on a discretionary basis, and who lost their card following a review, since July 2011. The HSE has now completed the exercise and eligibility has been restored to 11,383 people in accordance with the Government decision. Final quality assurance tasks are in progress and enquiries can be made by calling 1890 252 919 - Monday to Friday - 8am to 8pm. At the time of the Government decision it was estimated that up to 15,305 people could have their cards restored. As the files have been reviewed in recent weeks it has become clear that some individuals included in the original estimate are no longer ill, some have had cards restored to one member of the family (as opposed to the entire family) and some have passed away.

This information is not available in tabular form on a monthly basis as it was not collated in that manner.

Medical Card Data

176. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of medical card applications currently with a medical officer awaiting a decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36174/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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

177. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the actions the Health Service Executive is taking to combat the rat infestation problem at a location (details supplied) in County Cork which is located in a highly populated area; when this eradication process will start; if there will be ongoing monitoring; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36187/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Deputy's question relates to the man-

agement and delivery of health and personal services which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act, 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the HSE to have the matter investigated and to reply directly to the Deputy.

Medical Card Applications

178. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health when a decision on a medical card application will be made in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; the reason for the delay in making the decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36189/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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 Applications

179. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health when a decision on a medical card application will be made in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; the reason for the delay in making the decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36190/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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 Applications

180. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health when a decision on a medical card application will be made in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; the reason for the delay in making the decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36192/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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 Applications

181. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health when a decision on a medical card application will be made in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; the reason for the delay in making the decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36193/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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 Applications

182. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health when a decision on a medical card application will be made in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; the reason for the delay in making the decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36194/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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 Applications

183. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health when a decision on a medical card application will be made in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Mayo; the reason for the delay in making the decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36195/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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 Applications

184. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health when a decision on a medical card application will be made in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; the

reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36196/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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 Applications

185. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be made on a medical card application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; and the reason for the delay. [36197/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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 Applications

186. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be made on a medical card application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36201/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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.

Disability Support Services Provision

187. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when a child (details supplied) in County Cork will be assessed by the early intervention services; when a full assessment of the need will be carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36208/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the particular issue raised by the Deputy relates to an individual case, this is a service matter for the Health Service Executive. Accordingly, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists

188. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Health when an operation in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway will take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36210/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The National Waiting List Management Policy, A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014, 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 the particular query raised by the Deputy, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to him on this matter.

Hospital Appointment Status

189. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Galway will receive an appointment for an MRI scan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36211/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In relation to the particular patient query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to him directly.

Medicinal Products Availability

190. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the availability of Fampridine; if a new application in respect of the drug has been submitted to the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36212/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive (HSE) has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicinal products under the community drug schemes in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

The HSE received an application for the inclusion of Fampridine in the GMS and community drugs schemes. The application was considered in line with the procedures and timescales agreed by the Department of Health and the HSE with the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association for the assessment of new medicines. In accordance with these procedures, the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE) conducted a pharmacoeconomic evaluation of Fampridine and concluded that, as the manufacturer was unable to demonstrate the cost effectiveness of Fampridine in the Irish healthcare setting, it was unable to recommend the reimbursement of the product. The report is available on the NCPE's website (www.ncpe.ie).

The HSE assessment process is intended to arrive at a decision on the funding of new medicines that is clinically appropriate, fair, consistent and sustainable. Due to the very difficult and challenging economic environment in which the Government targeted additional savings in

health expenditure of €619 million in 2014, which must be achieved while protecting front line services to the most vulnerable to the greatest extent possible, the HSE decided it was not in a position to add the drug to the List of Reimbursable Items supplied under the GMS and other community drug schemes.

It is open to the supplier, at any time, to submit a new application to the HSE incorporating new evidence which demonstrates the cost effectiveness of Fampridine. Biogen Idec's Irish management indicated to the HSE in November 2013 that it intended to re-submit an application in April 2014. The HSE has advised it received a revised application from Biogen Idec on Friday 25th July. This application is currently being assessed in line with the agreed procedures and timescales. No further comment is possible at this time as the HSE decision making process is ongoing.

Orthodontic Service Provision

191. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Health when orthodontic work will be carried out in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon; the current waiting time in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36213/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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.

Symphysiotomy Reports

192. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the current status of the Government's plans to establish an ex gratia scheme for women who underwent the procedure of symphysiotomy; if the scheme will be open to all women who underwent the procedure; the way all potential applicants will be made aware of the application process for the scheme [36217/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In July this year the Government announced a comprehensive response to the long standing and sensitive issue for around 350 women who have undergone surgical symphysiotomy. The key response is the establishment of an ex-gratia payment scheme, which will cost around €34 million. In addition, there is a commitment to the continued provision of medical services, including medical cards for the women.

This followed Government's examination of a report carried out by Professor Oonagh Walsh, on *Practice of Symphysiotomy in Ireland, between 1944 and 1984*; and an *Independent Review of Issues relating to Symphysiotomy* by Judge Yvonne Murphy which advised Government, inter alia, on the relative liabilities of insurers, indemnifiers and/or other parties in relation to symphysiotomy and on the merits and costs of proceeding with an ex gratia scheme relative to allowing the court process to proceed.

Judge Murphy outlined the case for a scheme in her report and her recommendations on levels of awards were accepted by Government. Subsequently, I asked Judge Murphy to draw up a detailed draft scheme. I have consulted through the summer with the Judge and have also been speaking to relevant parties about the proposed scheme. Judge Murphy submitted her more detailed proposal to me on 11 September, setting out how the scheme should operate. In

this context I met the support groups representing women who have undergone symphysiotomy last Friday. I wanted to hear from the support groups how they hope the scheme will operate, and to confirm to them that the scheme will be established as quickly as possible.

Key aspects of the proposed scheme include:

- Women who had a surgical symphysiotomy in the State between the years 1940 and 1990 may apply in accordance with, and subject to the terms of the scheme.
- The scheme will be run by an independent Assessor. If women have questions on any aspect of the scheme, the Assessor or secretariat, will be available to assist.
- The scheme will be simple, straightforward and non-adversarial. It will allow women to have legal and other advice available to them in preparing to submit an application. It will result in awards of between €50,000 and €150,000 for the women.
- Women who have had a surgical symphysiotomy and have medical evidence to prove it may accept an award of €50,000 without further assessment. If no medical records are available a medical assessment will be carried out.
- For those who wish to apply for higher awards (€100,000 or €150,000) a medical assessment may be necessary if up to date medical records are not available, or if the Assessor decides this is needed for final determination of the award.
- Women will not waive their rights to take their cases to court as a pre-condition to participating in the scheme. Women may opt out at any stage in application and assessment process, up to the time of accepting their awards. However, on accepting the offer of the award under the Scheme, women will have to agree to discontinue their legal proceedings against any party arising out of their symphysiotomy.

I intend to finalise the details of the scheme shortly and will bring a Memorandum to Government requesting approval to appoint an Assessor for the scheme instead of it being administered by the State Claims Agency and to a small number of other amendments to the Government decision of last July. The details concerning the scheme and its commencement date will be advertised in national and other media, as decided by the Assessor. I hope that when the women see the details of the scheme and the efforts made to ensure it is person-centred, simple and non-adversarial many of them will opt to join the scheme.

In agreeing to the ex gratia scheme, the Government has demonstrated its commitment to trying to bring a resolution for the women concerned. The Government has acknowledged the pain and suffering which the procedure caused to many of the women and is aware also of the uphill battle many of them will face in the courts with uncertainty about the outcome of that process.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

193. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of community mental health posts sanctioned in 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014; the number of these posts which have been filled to date and the number of outstanding vacancies which remain to be filled. [36218/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Since 2012,

an additional €90 million and some 1,150 posts have been funded comprising €35 m for 414 posts in 2012, €35 m for up to 477 posts in 2013, and €20 m for approximately 250 posts in 2014. The funding is being used to continue to strengthen Community Mental Health Teams for both adults and children, to enhance specialist community mental health services for older people with a mental illness, those with an intellectual disability and mental illness, forensic mental health services, and to enhance access to counselling and psychotherapy in primary care, and investment in suicide prevention measures.

Of the 414 posts allocated in 2012, 396 or 95% were in post at the end of June. The remainder are at various stages in the recruitment process. Of the 477 posts allocated in 2013, as at the end of June, 332 or 70% of the posts had been filled, with a further 12 posts or 3% with agreed start dates after 30th June 2014. The remainder are at various stages in the recruitment process. In summary, of the 891 posts approved over 2012/2013, approximately 740 (83%) have taken up duty.

In relation to the 250 posts approved for 2014, the HSE Mental Health Management Team, having considered the priorities identified, has agreed the initial tranche of posts to be filled. An initial list of 170 posts has been allocated to service areas, to enable the next cycle of recruitment to begin. The remaining posts from the 2014 allocation are currently being identified in the context of specific service improvement needs.

Accident and Emergency Departments Waiting Times

194. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the current target for waiting times for patients to be treated in the accident and emergency unit of Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9; the waiting times for treatment in the emergency department for the months of July, August and the first three weeks of September 2014. [36219/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In relation to the detailed query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to him directly.

Mental Health Act Review

195. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 749 of 8 July 2014, the current status of the review of the Mental Health Act 2001 and if the expert group has finished its deliberations and has provided its report to him. [36220/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch) (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): A final meeting of the Expert Group which I appointed to review the Mental Health Act 2001 has recently taken place and work is continuing on finalising the report of the Group following deliberations and decisions made at this meeting. I expect to receive the final report of the Expert Group in the near future.

Mobility Allowance Decision

196. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if plans to introduce the new statutory travel payment scheme to replace the motorised transport grant and other transport supports for persons with disabilities are now at an advanced stage; and when the new

scheme will be in place. [36221/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Conscious of the reports of the Ombudsman regarding the legal status of the Motorised Transport Grant and Mobility Allowance schemes, in the context of the Equal Status Acts, the Government decided to close both schemes on 26th February, 2013.

On 26th November 2013, the Government decided that the preparatory work required for a new travel subsidy scheme and associated statutory provisions should be progressed by the Minister for Health.

Work is ongoing on the policy proposals to be brought to Government for the drafting of primary legislation for a new scheme. Once approved by Government, the time frame for the introduction of a new scheme will become clearer.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

197. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the application for the nursing home support scheme in respect of a person (details supplied). [36240/14]

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

Health Services

198. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a health centre (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36241/14]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

199. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a case of a person (details supplied). [36243/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Department of Health and the Health Service Executive (HSE) are working in a structured way towards the development and implementation of a national individualised budgeting framework in the context of implementing the recommendations in the Value for Money (VFM) and Policy Review of Disability Services in Ireland. The move towards individualised budgeting in the disability sector also mirrors the wider changes in the health and social care sector described in *Future Health: A Strategic Framework for Reform of the Health Service 2012-2015*.

The move towards the development and implementation of a national individualised budgeting framework raises legal and practical issues, and will require careful consideration and planning. *Future Health* explains that central to the introduction of individualised budgeting will be suitable financial systems; transparent and comprehensive governance arrangements; a

National Standard Needs Assessment framework; underpinning legislation; and the introduction of a regulatory system for providers to ensure quality and safety for the recipients of social services.

Demonstration projects are already underway to examine the practical aspects of introducing this major change in the disability sector and to establish the costs and benefits. An analysis of the projects will be necessary to determine their wider applicability, clarify the issues which must be resolved before the projects can be scaled up, and identify the best way forward. The completion of this analysis is a primary recommendation in the VFM Review and is required for all significant public service expenditure proposals.

In relation to the specifics in this particular case, I have referred this question to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medical Card Eligibility

200. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to ensure that the discretionary medical card of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath, which was terminated some months ago without any explanation, is now reissued to this person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36247/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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.

Medicinal Products Licensing

201. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health his views on a request from the Irish Pharmacy Union (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36248/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA), is the competent authority for the regulation of medicines in Ireland. The HPRA is responsible for determining the method of sale and supply of a medicine and also determining whether it should be available on prescription, or not.

The HPRA is committed to the current Irish health care policy which aims, where appropriate, to provide patients with increased access to safe medicines, at the lowest level of complexity and cost. In July 2014, the HPRA published a list of 12 active substances contained in medicines currently classified as prescription-only medicines (POM), which could be safely reclassified to be available for sale “over the counter” (OTC) in pharmacies. This list includes products for the treatment of migraine, acid-reflux symptoms, hay fever, cold sores, muscle pain and inflammation, fungal skin and nail infections and other inflammatory skin conditions.

This was a significant development. It represented the outcome of measures which have been undertaken by the HPRA to explore unmet needs in the availability of non-prescription medicines in Ireland. It also follows recommendations made by an independent consultative

panel established by the HPRA to specifically assist its review of this area.

Arising from the publication of the above mentioned list, expressions of interest in reclassification of certain medicines have been received from the marketing authorisation holders (MAHs). The HPRA is now working with manufacturers and MAHs to progress.

In reclassifying a medicine there are number of factors that need to be considered. These include the safety profile of the product, the proposed condition for treatment, the expected duration of use, the suitability of a condition for self diagnosis with or without the intervention of a pharmacist, the potential for interactions with other medicines and the possibility of misuse. In the relation to the medicines highlighted by the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) (fluconazole, chloramphenicol and aspirin), the decision on reclassification is more complex due to additional safety concerns relating to the use of these medicines. The HPRA is continuing to review these concerns.

HPRA will continue to consider medicines which may be suitable for reclassification.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

202. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if an insulin pump will be provided to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36253/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In relation to the particular patient query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to him directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

203. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Cork who has been referred by a general practitioner to Cork University Hospital for a hip replacement will be provided with a date for the procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36278/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, 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 the particular query raised by the Deputy, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to him on this matter.

Autism Support Services

204. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Cork who has been referred to the autistic spectrum disorder, Cork, will be provided with an appointment with the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36279/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the particular issue raised by the Deputy relates to an individual case, this is a service matter for the Health Service Executive. Accordingly, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medical Card Applications

205. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Health when an application for a medical card in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Cork will be approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36280/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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 Applications

206. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health when a decision on a medical card application will issue in respect a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36286/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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 Applications

207. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will issue on a medical card application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon; the reason for the delay in same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36289/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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 Records

208. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reform the current system whereby a patient's medical records held by their general practitioner-family doctor are not readily available to hospitals upon admission and with the consent of the patient. [36305/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Developments in ICT offer solutions to enable a more integrated approach between Primary and Secondary Care. Examples of these are the use of the Health Link system, where the ordering and reporting of diagnostic tests and referrals from General Practice to Secondary Care are facilitated through a structured messaging infrastructure.

The HSE, in partnership with the Irish College of General Practitioners, is in the process of rolling out a secure e-mail solution called Healthmail. This will enable GPs to transmit a patient's clinical information to a Secondary Care setting in a secure manner.

National Lottery Funding Applications

209. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for national lottery funding by an organisation (details supplied) in County Cork. [36306/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department has received an application for funding from the 2014 National Lottery allocation from the organisation in question. This is one of a large number of applications currently being assessed by my Department. The organisation will be informed of the outcome of the application as soon as a decision has been made.

Services for People with Disabilities

210. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health if he has given consideration to providing temporary cover for maternity leave of front line staff in the Health Service Executive's disability sector, particularly in the cases of early intervention services such as occupational therapy, physiotherapy and speech therapy for children as the delay without such intervention can have a very negative result on those who rely on such services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36314/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As I have no direct role in this matter, I have forwarded your question to the HSE for direct reply.

Hospital Appointment Status

211. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment to be scheduled in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36315/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. 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 case raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Medicinal Products Availability

212. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if he will reinstate Istin and Crozier on the list of drugs covered under the medical card. [36336/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive (HSE) has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicinal products under the community drug schemes in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

People with Disabilities

213. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Health the total number of persons registered with an intellectual disability in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36357/14]

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 Applications

214. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36358/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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 Applications

215. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36359/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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.

Medicinal Products Availability

216. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if the information and advice that is available now was available in January 1998 or has the Department received any new guidelines-information since January 1998 with regard to the cancer drug Roaccutane; and the advice and guidelines that were in place in January 1998. [36365/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Roaccutane (containing the active substance, isotretinoin) is authorised for treating severe forms of acne which have been resistant to other standard therapies in Ireland and across the EU. It should only be prescribed by or under the supervision of doctors with expertise in using the product and with a full understanding of the risks of therapy and the monitoring requirements. It has never been approved for use in the treatment of cancer in Ireland.

The currently available product information (i.e. Summary of Product Characteristics and package leaflet) for Roaccutane has been the subject of a number of changes since 1998. As with all medicines, any change to this information requires approval by the Health Products Regulatory Authority (or another EU Member State) on foot of a formal application to vary the authorisation and the submission of relevant supporting data. In practice, product information is frequently updated as new data become available through various sources of post-marketing experience, including further studies, literature reviews, evaluation of adverse reaction data etc. In this context there have been numerous updates and changes to the product information for Roaccutane from January 1998, until now.

If the Deputy seeks more detailed information on the changes to product information, it would be helpful if the specific concerns he would like addressed were specified.

Cancer Incidence

217. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form the total number of patients referred to the cancer centre at UCHG in 2011, 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014; the number of these patients who were in-patients and the average length of time they spent in UCHG; if he will outline in each of those years the ratio of medical staff to patients at the UCHG Cancer Centre and the way this ratio compares for each of those years with other cancer centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36369/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Deputy's question relates to service delivery matters and accordingly I have asked the HSE to respond directly to him.

Question No. 218 answered with Question No. 175.

Speech and Language Therapy

219. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of speech and language therapists employed by the Health Service Executive; the overall cost of speech and language therapy services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36387/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As I have no direct role in this matter, I have forwarded your question to the HSE for direct reply.

Medical Card Applications

220. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if and when a medical card will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36405/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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.

Citizenship Applications

221. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding an application for citizenship through the foreign births registration in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36257/14]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The application for citizenship through Foreign Birth Registration (FBR) was received in the Consular Division of my Department on 25 August 2014. Applications for FBR submitted in Ireland can take up to 3 months to process. The applicant was informed in writing on 16 September that the application is incomplete. The applicant has been notified of the additional documentation that must be submitted in order to process the application further.

Departmental Staff Rehiring

222. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding a matter in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36424/14]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): My Department consulted with the Civil Service Occupational Health Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on this case. The decision was communicated directly to the officer in May 2014 and again in August 2014 following receipt of further correspondence from the officer.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

223. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 187 of 27 May 2014, if she will consider introducing an exemption from maths for children with the rare diagnosis of dyscalculia; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36165/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The approach to teaching and learning in schools is that teachers use differentiation to address different rates of learning to reflect the educational needs and in particular the learning skills and abilities of their pupils. My Department supports the holistic development of the young person and, other than in the case of Irish (which is under review), exempting pupils from a key subject area, such as

mathematics, is not recommended in view of the need to support the student's overall development. Mathematics and numeracy permeate so many aspects of the curriculum. The aim is to develop skills at the level and rate that suits the young person's abilities (and disabilities). Examinations at post-primary level are designed to provide opportunities for candidates across the achievement range to show what they know, understand and can do so as to be fair to candidates and to facilitate a spread of grades across the available range. The State Examinations Commission (SEC) operates a Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations at the Certificate Examinations (RACE scheme). The scheme is designed to assist candidates with special needs at the certificate examinations. Within the context of the RACE scheme the term 'special need' applies to candidates who have a physical disability, including visual and hearing impairments, or a specific learning difficulty.

Departmental Property Purchases

224. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps she will take to acquire the Rosminian facility, Gracepark Road, Drumcondra, Dublin 9 in order to secure the interests of the visually impaired and autistic children who use a section of that facility. [36333/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Deputy will note that the primary school and Pobalscoil Rosmini post-primary school buildings are not included in the land which is on the market. In addition, I wish to advise the Deputy that officials from my Department have sought and have been provided with assurances from the Rosminians (Institute of Charity) in relation to the future use of the campus and securing the interests of the educational provision for the children and continuity of other existing services there. Officials from my Department have also briefed officials in the Department of Health on these discussions.

School Staffing

225. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding a teaching position; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36163/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department has been in contact with the school referred to by the Deputy and has clarified the staffing arrangements for the 2014/15 school year.

Schools Building Projects Status

226. **Deputy Tom Barry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there have been findings of any significance from the archaeological dig taking place at the site of Coláiste Mhuire, Buttevant, County Cork; when the dig will be completed in order that construction may recommence. [36226/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The delivery of a new school building for Coláiste Mhuire, Buttevant, Co. Cork has been devolved to Cork Education and Training Board. The project went to construction on 21st July 2014. As part of the conditions of planning, Cork County Council requested an archaeologist to be on site during

the initial stage of construction. An archaeological dig resulted in findings related to a Bronze Age settlement of archaeological significance. While construction is scheduled to recommence on Monday, 29th September 2014, archaeological excavation on the south-eastern part of the site will continue for a few days.

Schools Building Contractors

227. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will support a matter regarding a community college (details supplied). [36245/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As the Deputy is aware my Department appointed Contractors Administration Services (CAS), to conduct random audits on school building projects. CAS has been requested to carry out a full monitoring service for the duration of the contract at the school in question. Should irregularities be uncovered in terms of non-compliance with relevant employment law, enforcement and prosecution falls under the remit of NERA and my Department will report any discrepancies found to it. If the audit uncovers any other matters of concern regarding tax compliance or social welfare fraud, such matters will be referred to either the Revenue Commissioners and/or the Department of Social Protection as appropriate.

Minor Works Scheme Suspension

228. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will review the discontinuation of the minor works scheme and grant approval to a school (details supplied) in County Kerry to carry out essential repairs and improvements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36252/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Circular Letter 0062/2013 which was published as the Minor Works Grant for the school year 2013/2014 issued last November states “the grant will only be paid in future years as funding permits”. The focus under the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Programme 2012-2016 is on meeting the demand for additional school places. Consequently, there is no funding provided at this time in the 2014 capital allocation for the payment of a Minor Works Grant.

I am aware that whenever my Department is in a position to issue a Minor Works Grant (to all primary schools with permanent recognition) that it is welcomed by school communities and management bodies as a valuable contribution towards the cost of maintaining school infrastructure.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

229. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to the fact that Limerick city is one of the only areas in the country that does not have any mainstream schools, primary or secondary, with autistic spectrum disorder units attached to educate autistic children; her plans to put same in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36261/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Deputy will be aware that the establishment of a network of autism-specific special classes in schools across the country to cater for children with autism has been a key educational priority in recent years.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from primary and post primary schools for special educational needs supports, including the establishment of special classes in various geographical areas as required. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support. I have arranged for the matter raised by the Deputy to be forwarded to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply.

School Enrolments

230. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are any schools at primary or second level which are confined to Traveller children; the reason this segregation occurred and her views regarding same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36264/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): A key recommendation of the Report and Recommendations on a Traveller Education Strategy is the phasing out of segregated education provision for travellers and, while significant progress has been made across the country generally, traveller-only provision continues in two schools in the Dublin area.

My Department's Traveller Consultative Forum whose membership includes representatives of the Traveller community, is keen to progress the phasing out of this remaining Traveller-only provision. However, as is the case with all schools, the decision in relation closure or amalgamation is a matter in the first instance for the Patron and Board of Management of each of the schools in question. It is hoped that progress can be made to implement this particular recommendation of the Traveller Education Strategy and officials of my Department are available to assist the Patron of the schools in question to achieve this objective if required.

School Funding

231. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide a list of funding awards currently available from her Department for primary schools. [36318/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department provides capitation funding to all recognised primary schools. The amount of grant paid to an individual primary school for capitation and ancillary services is determined by the school's enrolment, subject to a minimum grant for both capitation and ancillary services in respect of schools with enrolments up to 60, and a maximum ancillary services grant in the case of schools with enrolments of 500 or more. In 2014 the capitation grant is €173 per pupil, and the Ancillary Services Grant is €147 per pupil. The Deputy may wish to note that Circular 40/2009 clarifies issues relating to the allocation of funding for primary schools. The circular states that capitation funding provided for general running costs and funding provided for caretaking and secretarial services may be regarded as a common grant from which the Board of Management can allocate according to its own priorities.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

232. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the needs of a school, details supplied, in County Limerick. [36325/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I can inform the Deputy that my Department is aware of the situation and circumstances pertaining in the school detailed in his question and can inform him that a NEPS psychologist is this week completing assessment work on the pupils concerned for submission to the school and onwards to the NCSE where they will be given the appropriate consideration.

FÁS Training Programmes Data

233. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the completion and progression figures for FÁS courses over the past ten years. [36340/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): This information requested by the Deputy is held by SOLAS and I have asked them to contact the Deputy directly with this information.

FÁS Training Programmes Data

234. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the completion and progression figures for individual FÁS centres over the past ten years. [36342/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The information requested by the Deputy is held by SOLAS and I have asked them to contact the Deputy directly with this information.

Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme Numbers

235. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the completion and progression figures for VTOS courses over the past ten years. [36343/14]

247. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the completion and progression figures for individual VTOS centres. [36815/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 235 and 247 together. My Department does not collect information on individual VTOS centres. The following table sets out the completion and progression data on VTOS courses for the years 2004-2012, data for 2013 is not yet available.

Progression Destinations for those completing VTOS programmes 2004-2012

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Employment	840	879	853	726	622	358	393	517	480
Self Employment				81	53	45	44	63	56
PLC	1122	1293	1028	526	575	676	691	755	580
Higher Education				338	387	461	480	550	577
Training Course				180	212	184	184	68	127
CE/Rural Social Scheme				62	68	79	53	75	152
BTWA/ Enterprise Allowance				14	12	9	12	6	75
Live Register/ Original Status	733	686	613	618	715	957	1013	846	838

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Other	200	169	165	170	203	179	261	196	279
Total completing VTOS programmes	2895	3027	2659	2715	2847	2948	3131	3076	3164

State Examinations Statistics

236. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the percentage of school leavers who completed the leaving certificate in the years 2011, 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014. [36344/14]

237. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the percentage of school leavers completing the leaving certificate in the years 2011, 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014, broken down into areas of Dublin. [36345/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 236 and 237 together.

The information in the following table is taken from the 2005, 2006 and 2007 Retention reports by the Department of Education and Skills, on school retention in Ireland. It is based on a detailed analysis of the records held in the Department’s Post-Primary Pupils Database (PPPDB) for the cohort of entrants to the first year of the junior cycle in the years 2005, 2006 and 2007, who sat the Leaving Certificate Examinations in the years from 2010 to 2013. The Department will produce a report on the 2008 cohort for those who sat the Leaving Certificate in 2014 by the end of the year.

National Leaving Certificate Retention Rate for 2005-2007 cohorts

Year	Retention Rate (%)
2005	89.5
2006	90.2
2007	90.1

Retention Rates to the Leaving Certificate by Administrative County, 2005 -2007 cohort, Leaving Cert Retention (%)

County	2005	2006	2007
Dublin City	85.15	85.72	87.20
Dublin Fingal	90.89	91.19	91.64
Dublin South	87.19	88.31	88.87
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown	90.83	91.50	90.95

For more detailed information on these cohorts please visit the DES website for the full report: <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Retention-Rates-of-Pupils-in-Second-Level-Schools-2005-and-2006-Entry-Cohorts.pdf>

http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Statistical-Reports/stats_retention_report_2007_cohort.pdf

Third Level Participation

238. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the percentage of school leavers progressing to third level; and if she will distinguish between institutes of technology, universities and other colleges. [36346/14]

239. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the percentage of school leavers progressing to third level, broken down into areas of Dublin. [36347/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 238 and 239 together.

My Department's data indicate that, on average, 50% of students who finish second level education progress directly on to higher education in the year they complete school. In addition, a further 28% of school leavers progress directly on to a PLC or other further/second level course. Generally speaking, over 64% of any final year second level cohort will ultimately transfer to a third level institution before reaching the mature student age. If mature students are factored in, the Higher Education Authority estimates that the figure rises to around 69%. Annual statistical data provided by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) indicate that 49% of new entrants to higher education in 2012-13 went to the universities, 46% to the Institutes of Technology and 5% to other colleges. HEA figures include entrants who progress on to higher education directly from school, as well as those who progress at a later stage or as mature students. The vast majority (81%) of higher education entrants are age 17-20 years. In August, the HEA published a consultation paper on the development of the next national access plan for higher education. This paper included estimates of participation rates in higher education in 2011 among the 18-20 year old age cohort of young people from each Dublin postal district. It should be noted that as well as young people completing the leaving certificate, this population would include a number who left school before that point, who may be in the labour force (employed or unemployed) or in further education or training. The following table shows the estimated participation rates by Dublin postal code for (i) entrants to higher education of all ages and (ii) entrants to higher education from the 18-20 year old age cohort.

Postcode	2011 Admission Rate (All ages)	2011 Admission Rate (Age 18-20)
Dublin1	51%	23%
Dublin2	47%	26%
Dublin3	76%	60%
Dublin4	105%	84%
Dublin5	63%	47%
Dublin6	127%	99%
Dublin6w	102%	82%
Dublin7	63%	41%
Dublin8	63%	28%
Dublin9	76%	55%
Dublin10	26%	16%
Dublin11	42%	28%
Dublin12	52%	37%
Dublin13	45%	36%
Dublin14	88%	76%
Dublin15	69%	47%
Dublin16	95%	79%
Dublin17	21%	15%

Postcode	2011 Admission Rate (All ages)	2011 Admission Rate (Age 18-20)
Dublin18	66%	58%
Dublin20	38%	32%
Dublin22	38%	26%
Dublin24	39%	29%
Dublin County	67%	53%
Dublin Total	62%	47%

Education and Training Boards Administration

240. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide the minutes from the meetings of the Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board over the past year. [36348/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The minutes of the meetings of Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board requested by the Deputy are not provided to my Department. Consequently, I am not in a position to provide them to the Deputy. Education and Training Boards (ETBs) are required in accordance with paragraph 9 of Schedule 3 of the Education and Training Boards Act, 2013, to ensure that minutes of each meeting of the Board are prepared; submitted for confirmation at the next meeting of the Board; signed by the person chairing the meeting at which they were submitted for confirmation; retained and open to inspection at all reasonable times by a person authorised by the Minister for that purpose. There is no statutory requirement that a copy of the ETB minutes be routinely provided to the Department. Accordingly, the Department advised ETBs in February 2014 that they were not required to submit the minutes of each Board meeting to the Department and to discontinue the practice with immediate effect. However, ETBs were advised that minutes of Board meetings must be made available to the Minister if requested.

Education and Training Boards Administration

241. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide the most recent annual service plan and five-year strategy statement for the Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board. [36349/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Section 47 of the Education and Training Boards Act 2013 (the Act) requires that, following the receipt of provisional expenditure limits from the Minister, the chief executive of an ETB will prepare and submit to the board a service plan setting out the services that the board proposes to provide, and an estimate of income and expenditure of the board during the financial year commencing on 1 January of the relevant year. 2014 was the first year in which this process could have taken place and expenditure limits were issued to ETBs. However, Boards were only constituted in accordance with the requirements of Section 30 of the Act in August and September of 2014 and my Department took the view that it would be more appropriate to wait until the newly constituted Boards were operational before commencing the service plan process. Accordingly, it is intended that service plans will be in place in 2015. Section 27 of the Act requires the preparation and adoption of a strategy statement by each ETB. However, this has not commenced to date in view of the significant work the ETBs have undertaken in 2014 relation to the amalgamation of the VECs and incorporation of the training function formerly undertaken by FÁS. I anticipate that the process of preparing strategy statements will commence later this year.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

242. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost of a one point reduction in the pupil-teacher ratio at primary level. [36350/14]

243. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost of a one point reduction in the pupil-teacher ratio for the first four years at primary level. [36351/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 242 and 243 together.

Teacher allocations to all schools are approved annually by my Department in accordance with established rules based on recognised pupil enrolment. The staffing schedule at primary level operates on the basis of 1 classroom teacher for an average of every 28 pupils. More favourable ratios operate in DEIS schools. Each one point adjustment to the current 28.1 schedule at primary level is estimated to cost of the order of 250 posts (€15m). An adjustment relating to the first four years at primary level is estimated to account for circa 50% of this cost (€7.5m). Given the current budgetary environment there is no scope in the short term to consider improvements to pupil teacher allocation ratios. My Department’s focus for the foreseeable future is on targeting any additional resources to cater for the continuing increase in demographics at all levels in the education system.

Teacher Recruitment

244. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost of expediting teacher recruitment so that primary schools would be allocated teachers on the basis of the current school year’s enrolment figures as distinct from the previous year’s enrolment figures. [36352/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Data in relation to enrolment figures in primary schools in the current school are not yet available to my Department. The number of pupils enrolled in individual schools is provided in the National School Annual Census and refers to the number of pupils enrolled as of the 30th of September in the given academic year. The National School Annual Census is generally returned by schools to the Department by end October. The criteria used for the allocation of teachers to primary schools is published annually. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing arrangements for the 2014/15 school year are set out in Circular 0007/2014 which is available on the Department website. The staffing schedule includes the provision whereby schools experiencing rapid increases in enrolment can apply for additional permanent mainstream posts on developing grounds, using projected enrolment for September 2014. In addition, the staffing process includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board. The Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final. In addition, the staffing appeals process at primary level was extended for the current school year to allow schools that are not gaining an additional teaching post under the developing schools criterion to submit an appeal to the Primary Staffing Appeals Board. This appeal criterion is targeted at those schools that make a significant contribution to the provision of school places and so assist the response to demographic growth within their area and, as a result, are under significant pressure on their class sizes at infants level. Circular 0007/2014 provides details for schools wishing to make an

appeal. The allocation of all teaching posts is contingent on compliance with redeployment arrangements. The core function of the redeployment arrangements is to facilitate the redeployment of all surplus permanent teachers to other schools that have vacancies. The redeployment of all surplus permanent teachers is key to the Department's ability to manage within its payroll budget and ceiling on teacher numbers. I believe that allocating resources based on projected enrolments for the coming school year is not practical and would impact negatively on the teacher allocation and redeployment process and the timeframes in which this process is completed.

Teacher Training Provision

245. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will review the decision made by her predecessor in 2012 which removed the subsidy that was granted to student teachers to undertake a mandatory Gaeltacht placement; if her attention has been drawn to the huge additional costs being imposed on student teachers due to this decision; if she will confirm the annual cost of this subsidy to the State in 2012; her views on whether this decision was fair; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36354/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I acknowledge that the cost of the Gaeltacht Placement is a significant cost to students and their families. However, the decision to abolish the grants was not taken lightly, and it has to be viewed in the context of the prevailing requirement to reduce costs and achieve efficiencies where possible. In making difficult decisions such as this, priority was given to protecting resources for front line education services as far as possible in the coming years, which is especially challenging with rising numbers of school-going children. The requirement for two separate two week placements is part of the Teaching Council's revised requirements for Gaeilge in Initial Teacher Education. The DES supports the changes as they contribute to overall quality improvement. For the reasons I have outlined, I am not in a position at this time to reinstate funding to this area. In 2012 my Department paid a total of €862,682 to Irish Summer Colleges in respect of student teachers' attendance at Gaeltacht courses.

Apprenticeship Programmes

246. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the annual spend on apprenticeship training in each year since 2010; the number of apprentices in training in each year; the way this is broken down across employment sectors; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36384/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The information requested by the Deputy is held by SOLAS and I have asked it to reply directly to the Deputy with this information.

Question No. 247 answered with Question No. 235.

Water Charges Exemptions

248. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if persons with an ileo anal pouch will qualify for an increased water allowance. [36321/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I refer to the reply to Questions Nos. 1524, 1551, 1570 and 1618 of 17 September 2014.

Building Regulations Compliance

249. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the costings that have been provided for a reduction in Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 to 15%, 10%, 5%, or its complete abolition in terms of estimated social housing unit reductions and financial loss to local authorities on an annual basis from 2015 to 2020. [36328/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Part V Review carried out by the Housing Agency at my Department's request, has been completed and will be submitted to Government shortly. The review considered a wide range of options. It is anticipated that any legislative changes required on foot of the review will, subject to Government approval, be incorporated into the General Scheme of a new Planning Bill, which is expected to be published shortly. It would not be appropriate to set out the findings of the review until the Government has had the opportunity to consider them, but it is my intention to publish the Housing Agency's review in due course.

As the extent of social housing gain from Part V is directly related to private housing construction, the current situation is that there is very limited Part V delivery in terms of social housing. I am committed to the principle of a social housing gain from private development but to maximise that gain we need a properly functioning and sustainable construction sector. I believe that the Part V mechanism has the potential to again be a significant contributor to social housing in the context of a recovering housing market.

The Government's Construction 2020 strategy, published in May 2014, aims to build a competitive, innovative, and sustainable construction sector. My intention is that the Social Housing Strategy, required under Action 8 of Construction 2020 and now in preparation, will be both challenging and innovative, and will provide the basis for an enhanced approach to social housing provision in Ireland. I expect that the strategy will be considered by Government in the coming weeks and published thereafter.

Planning Issues

250. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the estimated yield from a vacant site levy on unused urban land at a rate of 3% of market value; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36329/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I intend to introduce a new Planning Bill later this year to facilitate the implementation of certain planning-related actions in the Government's Construction 2020 Strategy published in May 2014. Action 23 commits to examining the possibility of enabling local authorities, should they wish to do so, to adopt new measures to incentivise the use and development of vacant sites in urban areas. A final decision on this matter will be taken in the context of the forthcoming Planning Bill. Accordingly, it is not possible at this stage to provide an estimate of the yield that might be raised from such a measure which, as indicated, is still under consideration.

Housing Grant Payments

251. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide costings of the full restoration of capital housing grants to 2008 levels. [36330/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Housing Adaptation Grant Schemes for Older People and People with a Disability were introduced in November 2007 and are 80% funded by my Department, with a 20% contribution from the local authorities.

The amount allocated to these grants in 2008 was €72.197m, of which €14.439m was provided from the local authorities' own resources. The level of capital funding available to my Department has decreased significantly in the intervening period as part of the process of restoring stability to the public finances. For 2014, my Department has been able to provide increased allocations to all local authorities over last year's funding, with total allocations of €48m, including the local authorities' own contributions.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Eligibility

252. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide costings on the creation of a tenant purchase scheme for homes in the voluntary housing association sector. [36331/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Approved housing bodies (AHBs) are organisations approved under section 6 of the Housing (scellaneous Provisions) Act 1992 to provide social housing support in conjunction with local authorities. These organisations include voluntary housing associations.

Since the late 1980s, close to 25,000 units of accommodation have been provided under capital funding schemes underpinned by mortgages. More recently, a scheme was introduced that provides an up-front capital payment of up to 30% of the property value to facilitate AHBs in raising private finance to acquire or build new social housing units. The capital advanced is repayable at the end of a payment and availability agreement, usually after 30 years.

Under the terms of these various funding schemes, AHBs are the *de facto* owners of these properties and are required to make them available for social renting for the duration of the mortgage or, as the case may be, the availability agreement. My Department cannot unilaterally make provision for their sale to tenants. Any such decision would have to involve the AHB concerned and have regard to the mortgage on the property. On expiry of the mortgage period and subject to compliance with the terms of the funding agreement, the AHB becomes the owner of the property.

Section 45 of the Housing (scellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 does provide for the sale by housing authorities and AHBs of designated new houses to eligible households, subject to specified terms and conditions. However, any such sales would have to be done in consultation with AHBs. There are currently no proposals or plans for a tenant purchase scheme in relation to AHB houses and therefore no costings have been developed.

Waste Management

253. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the contingency plans in place in the event of a company (details supplied) being

found to be in breach of health and safety legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36159/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Section 60(3) of the Waste Management Act 1996 precludes me from the exercise of any power or control in relation to the performance by a local authority, in particular circumstances, of a statutory function vested in under the Act. Waste collection is the statutory responsibility of local authorities, in this case, Dublin City Council. Under section 33 of the Waste Management Act 1996 (as amended) there is a general duty on a local authority to either itself collect the household waste in its functional area or alternatively to arrange for its collection by third parties.

Given the strategic importance of waste management to the welfare of the environment and society in general, my Department wrote earlier this month to Dublin City Council requesting a written report on the contingency/scenario planning that has been undertaken by the City Council to provide/arrange for the provision of an alternative household waste collection service in the event of an inability of the particular company in question to maintain collection services to their customers in the City Council area. The City Council confirmed that it was satisfied that there are a sufficient number of other permitted operators in a position to provide a household waste collection service to households in the City Council area at a competitive price.

I understand that the industrial relations dispute referred to has now been resolved and that normal collections have been restored.

Water Charges Administration

254. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on correspondence (details supplied) on water charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36164/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides Irish Water with the power to charge customers in respect of the services provided. The Act also provides that responsibility for the independent economic regulation of the water sector is assigned to the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) and the CER has been given statutory responsibility for protecting the interests of customers. The Act defines the customer as the occupier of the premises in respect of which the water services are provided. It also provides, unless the contrary is proved, that the owner of a premises is also the occupier of the premises. Irish Water is currently undertaking a customer verification exercise to obtain the details of customers in receipt of services from Irish Water.

The Act also requires that Irish Water prepare codes of practice on a range of matters, including standards in relation to the performance by Irish Water of its functions and billing by Irish Water of persons in respect of water services provided. The CER recently held a public consultation which covered a range of issues, including a number of proposed payment options. The CER is currently reviewing submissions received on the consultation and a determination will be made by the CER later this month. Full details of the CER public consultation are available on www.cer.ie.

Water Charges Administration

255. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update on negotiations between his Department and Irish Water regarding the taking in charge of housing estates (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36173/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Section 180 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 provides that where an estate is completed to the satisfaction of the planning authority in accordance with the planning permission (and any conditions attached to the permission), the planning authority must initiate taking in charge procedures as soon as possible following a request to do so by the developer or by the majority of the owners. Similarly, where an estate has not been completed to the standard outlined in the planning permission and the planning authority has not taken enforcement action within seven years of the expiry of the permission authorising the development, section 180 also provides that the planning authority must initiate taking in charge procedures if requested to do so by the owners of the units concerned. The decision as to whether an estate should be taken in charge is ultimately one for the elected members of the planning authority.

Section 180 was amended in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 to provide that a local authority may take in charge an unfinished estate, at the request of the owners of the housing units, at any time after the expiration of the planning permission, in situations where enforcement actions have commenced or where the local authority considers that enforcement action will not result in the satisfactory completion of the estate by the developer.

Contrary to certain misunderstandings that may exist, there is no specific legal impediment to the taking in charge of water services infrastructure by local authorities. The Water Services Acts 2013, which provided for the transfer of water services functions to Irish Water, did not alter the role of planning authorities in relation to planning legislation. The potential to streamline this process for the future is currently under review.

In Circular Letter PL 21/13, issued by my Department to planning authorities on 30 December 2013 in the light of the transfer of certain statutory water services functions from local authorities to Irish Water with effect from 1 January 2014, it was stated that legislative amendments to further clarify the existing provisions on the taking in charge of housing estates would be made in 2014.

In order to clarify the current up-to-date position with regard to the taking in charge of estates, my Department will shortly issue a further circular letter to planning authorities with a view to clearing up any misunderstandings that may exist in this regard.

My Department has no responsibility for, or role to play in, the day to day management, maintenance or operation of water or waste water infrastructure. However, it is aware of problems with some water services infrastructure that was provided by developers and which is not connected to the public network. My Department is currently considering what long-term solutions might be appropriate in such cases and is engaging with local authorities, including Cork County Council, regarding possible approaches to deal with these cases.

Waste Management

256. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which his Department is involved with the health and safety concerns at a refuse centre (details supplied) in County Cork; the actions he will take to ensure that the concerns of the residents are being met; the assurances he will provide; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [36188/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The facility in question operates under a waste licence granted by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). I have no role in relation to the monitoring and enforcement of conditions attaching to waste licences. These are matters for the EPA and I am precluded under section 60(3) of the Waste Management Act 1996 from exercising any power in relation to the performance by the EPA of its licensing functions in specific cases under the Act.

Planning Issues

257. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to review and streamline the planning process across councils and to reduce the cost involved and the necessity for various drawings and photomontages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36214/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department placed a public advertisement on 31 January 2014 stating that it was intended to review and update the Development Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2007 and that as part of that process, the Department would consider, in relation to the planning application process, whether changes should be made in order to improve the efficiency of the process while continuing to provide for appropriate and necessary public participation and environmental assessment. It was also stated that the Department will also consider whether further changes should be made to the exempted development provisions of the Regulations, specifically whether it is appropriate to exempt further development from the requirement to obtain planning permission.

Approximately 65, generally detailed, submissions were received and these are being considered in my Department. Any person or body who did not make a submission may still do so.

Also the High Level Group on Business Regulation, which comes under the remit of the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise, and Innovation has set up a Planning Sub-Group, representative of both Government Departments, business interests and professional planning agents/planners. The Sub-Group, which held its first meeting recently, intends to make recommendations for any appropriate amendments to improve the planning application process.

My Department has decided to deal firstly with the matter of the exemption of further development from the requirement to obtain permission, and it is intended to bring Regulations on this matter to the Oireachtas, as required by section 262 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, in early 2015.

Following that, it is intended to give legislative effect to any recommendations for the streamlining of the planning application process, which might arise from my Department's consideration of the submissions referred to above, and the input of the Planning Sub-Group of the High Level Group on Business Regulation.

Water Meters

258. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if Irish Water is working on developing a means for householders to read their own water meters in order to assist them in monitoring their water usage, such that

Irish Water would have a similar system in place to the electricity and gas meters installed in households across the country. [36224/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I refer to the reply to Question No. 243 of 18 September 2014. The position is unchanged.

Shared Ownership Scheme

259. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding the review of the shared ownership scheme with particular reference to the 4.5% rental increase which had previously been suspended and which is causing hardship for many householders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36291/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): In 2013, I asked the Housing Agency to conduct a standalone review of the shared ownership scheme, including identification of the main difficulties and recommendations for mitigating measures. While I have received an initial draft of the review from the Agency, a number of issues have been identified that need further detailed financial analysis in order to fully assess the impact on local authority finances of possible mitigating measures. This data collection exercise has been initiated and will inform future actions. Pending full conclusion of this review, my Department issued a circular letter to local authorities setting out some of the options and interim actions that might be explored to alleviate the difficulties of those in shared ownership distress such as allowing use of the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process and room rental for Shared Ownership mortgage holders. It is accepted that these proposals are not a complete solution to the issues that arise for such mortgage holders but are intended as an interim measure pending the outcome of the review.

I fully recognise that shared ownership home owners, amongst others, have been affected by issues such as unemployment and possible negative equity. In such cases, borrowers should actively engage with their lenders, whether a commercial financial institution or a local authority, to seek to avail of one of the options available to provide sustainable solutions to distressed mortgages.

Land Transfers

260. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the reason his Department is delaying the legal transfer of 30 land parcels from ten local authorities (details supplied) to the Housing Agency under the land aggregation scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36316/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Under the terms of the Land Aggregation Scheme, lands accepted into the scheme must be transferred to the ownership of the Housing Agency. The Housing Agency is responsible for managing the transfer process including technical and legal aspects. Of the 73 sites accepted into the Land Aggregation Scheme, 44 have now transferred to the ownership of the Housing Agency. The rate of land transfers under the scheme has increased in recent months, with 10 additional sites transferred in the period from November 2013 to September 2014.

Under the Scheme a technical and legal ‘due diligence assessment’ is carried out by the Housing Agency to determine if each site is suitable for inclusion. As part of the due diligence

assessment the Housing Agency can direct that, as a condition of site transfer, particular works be carried out or that other issues identified, in respect of a particular site under consideration, be resolved. The Housing Agency would in turn advise local authorities of any such requirements.

It is a matter for the relevant local authority and the Housing Agency to resolve all outstanding matters affecting the transfer. In particular, the relevant local authority must ensure that transfer conditions are met and the Housing Agency must satisfy itself that the required actions have been satisfactorily undertaken prior to any land transfer.

My Department continues to maintain regular contact with the Housing Agency regarding progress made on land transfers and the potential development of such lands. I have asked the Housing Agency to continue to prioritise the transfer of lands and to work with local authorities in progressing transfers.

Water Meters Installation

261. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a detailed timetable or schedule with a breakdown by area showing when water meters will be installed in Waterford city and county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36324/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Water Services Act 2013 provided for the establishment of Irish Water as an independent subsidiary within the Bord Gáis Éireann Group and assigned the necessary powers to allow Irish Water to undertake the water metering programme. The meter installation programme commenced in August 2013 and will be completed by mid-2016. The timeframe and the allocation of resources for the installation of meters in each region is an operational matter for Irish Water.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. They may be contacted via email at: oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on 1890 278 278.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Status

262. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide in tabular form the town and village sewerage scheme proposals from each local authority; the status of each scheme; the type of treatment plant proposed; the schemes where sites are purchased; the estimated cost to develop each scheme proposed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36334/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Since 1 January 2014 Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels including the delivery of water services capital infrastructure. Irish Water has published its Proposed Capital Investment Plan for 2014-2016 and this is available on the Irish Water website, www.water.ie.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via an email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on 1890 278 278.

Water Charges Administration

263. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the intention by Irish Water to reduce pressure or supply to a home where there is a dispute over payment of charges will impact upon the ability of the emergency services, in particular the fire brigade; if a health and safety audit has been undertaken with regard to this issue and if he will publish the findings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36361/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): With effect from 1 January 2014, Irish Water is responsible for public water services. Section 21 of the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides that Irish Water can collect charges from its customers in receipt of water services provided by it. Section 21(6) of the Act provides that such charges do not apply to a fire authority within the meaning of the Fire Services Act. Irish Water has also confirmed to my Department that its operations will not interfere with the work of a fire authority.

Water Charges Introduction

264. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if, considering the large volumes of water that are typically used during construction and which are sourced on-site, he will indicate the likeliest scenario where construction work is required on a home following an accident such as a fire or a flood and the insurance company involved must now pay for the water used; if Irish Water has consulted with insurance industry representatives on this issue; if Irish Water has forewarned customers that there is a possibility that home insurance premia will rise as a result of the introduction of water charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36363/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I refer to the reply to Question No. 475 of 23 September 2014 which deals with this matter. It should also be noted that construction and building activity constitutes a non-domestic use of water.

Capital Assistance Scheme Funding

265. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the assistance and financial supports available for local communities who are interested in developing independent living facilities in their area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36371/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department's Capital Assistance Scheme provides funding to approved housing bodies, through the local authorities, of up to 100% of the approved costs of accommodation for people with specific categories of housing need, including older persons, people with an intellectual, physical or mental health disability, the homeless, returning emigrants and victims of domestic violence.

More specific details for local communities who are interested in developing independent living facilities in their areas can be accessed through their local authority.

Wastewater Treatment

266. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on the feasibility of reed bed treatment plants for public sewerage schemes on an environment friendly, energy saving and overall cost benefit basis and if he will be pursuing a policy of promoting these proposals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36373/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department published the Integrated Constructed Wetlands (ICW) - Guidance Document for Farmyard Soiled Water and Domestic Wastewater Applications, in November 2010. Support for ICWs was provided in the past by my Department under the water services capital programme as it was considered that such wetlands could provide a sustainable, cost-effective means of treating wastewater and could also provide ancillary services such as carbon sequestration, habitat provision and flood attenuation.

Since 1 January 2014 Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels including the delivery of water services capital infrastructure.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via an email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on 1890 278 278.

Water Supply

267. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if Irish Water will release the final details of the first fix free policy; if this policy will not commence until 1 January 2015 as reported; the way it is planned to deal with leaks which have already been identified; if Irish Water expects leaks to go unfixed until the policy is in place or if the citizen will be forced to pay where the leak is on their side; if Irish Water has a list of such cases; how and in what timeframe it is addressing each case on the list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36375/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I refer to the answer to Questions Nos. 188 and 189 of 24 September 2014. The position is unchanged.

Irish Water Administration

268. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the steps his Department will take or the action that has already been taken with Irish Water to address the sending of letters to incorrect addresses and wrong individuals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36378/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Throughout September, Irish Water has been sending out customer application packs and letters to over two million householders to enable customers to confirm their details and to ensure that a correct and up-to-date database of customers exists. As part of this process, Irish Water has sent letters to owners of multiple properties asking them to confirm the details of properties they own. On 4 September, Irish Water became aware that incorrect names have ap-

peared on correspondence issued to 6,329 of these individuals. Irish Water acted immediately to resolve this issue and all of the property owners affected were advised accordingly. Irish Water also immediately informed the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner. Irish Water has advised my Department that the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner was satisfied with how Irish Water dealt with the issue. Irish Water has also apologised for any confusion and concern that this might have caused affected customers.

The compilation of its customer database is an operational matter for Irish Water and neither I nor my Department have any role in the matter. Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. They may be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on 1890 278 278.

Water Charges Administration

269. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will, in the context of water charges, consider making an additional allowance available to families who care for a family member on a full-time basis but do not, for various reasons, meet the criteria for a formal carer's allowance payment; if he will acknowledge that there are many such families struggling to maintain a family life for their children while caring for an elderly or infirm relative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36432/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): With effect from 1 January 2014, Irish Water is responsible for public water services. The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides that Irish Water can collect charges from its customers in receipt of water services provided by it. The Act also provides that responsibility for the independent economic regulation of the water sector is assigned to the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) and the CER has been given statutory responsibility for protecting the interests of customers.

The proposed approach to charging was outlined by Irish Water in a water charges plan which it has submitted to the CER in line with the provisions of the Act. The CER recently held a public consultation on this plan which covered a range of issues relating to water charges and allowances. The CER is currently reviewing submissions received on the consultation and a determination will be made by the CER later this month. Full details of the CER public consultation are available on www.cer.ie.

In making its decision on the approval or otherwise of the water charges plan, the CER must take account of the decisions made by the Government on the funding model for Irish Water and a direction made under Section 42 of the Water Services (No. 2) Act in July 2014. This policy direction addressed a number of matters relating to domestic water charges including the provision of a free allowance of 30,000 litres of water supplied and waste water treated per annum for a primary residence on a public supply and a free allowance to cover the normal usage of water services by every child in their primary residence based on the same qualifying conditions as the child benefit allowance. The policy direction also requires that special provision be made for customers of Irish Water who have specific medical conditions which require increased water consumption, involving capping of charges at the relevant assessed charge. The direction also indicates that the medical conditions to be covered will be set out following consultation with the Minister for Health. I hope to conclude the necessary consultation shortly and announce arrangements in advance of 1 October 2014.

In addition to the above, the Government has agreed to put in place further affordability measures to assist pensioners, persons with disabilities, and carers who receive the Household

Benefits Package. The conditions and administrative approach to this additional measure are being developed by the Department of Social Protection. There are no plans to provide additional allowances or affordability measures, other than those announced in the Government decision.

Water Supply

270. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the percentage of lead piping within residential properties situated in Waterford city and county; if it will be part of the metering contract to replace any existing lead piping, particularly where the property is owned by the local authority; where it is acknowledged by the local authority that lead piping is in existence within a property and the solution put forward by it to the resident is to flush the cold water tap prior to use, filling the kitchen sink and discarding flushing of 20 to 30 litres, on average, of unused water, perhaps as often as three to four times per day, if he will be offering an additional usage allowance for these families (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36435/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides that Irish Water can collect charges from its customers in receipt of water services provided by it. The Act also provides that responsibility for the independent economic regulation of the water sector is assigned to the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) and the water charges plan to be prepared by Irish Water is subject to the approval of the CER.

Under the European Communities (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014, a copy of which is available in the Oireachtas library, suppliers of drinking water are required to ensure that the water supplied complies with the chemical and microbiological parameters set out in the Regulations. The maximum allowable value for lead is 10 microgrammes per litre, which came into effect at the end of 2013. At this concentration, there is a risk of exceeding the limits wherever there is lead piping and in particular where the water has been sitting in the pipe overnight. Irish Water has informed my Department that of its estimated 58,000 kilometres of distribution system, there is a very small proportion of lead piping, consisting of approximately 190 short lengths across 14 local authorities. Irish Water is working on the replacement of these pipes as quickly as possible.

However, there are a significant number of lead public service pipes between the water mains and the customer stopcock or water meter. Irish Water is identifying the location of such lead service connections during the meter installation programme. The numbers currently being identified are about 5% of houses, but this is expected to be higher in town centre areas. Irish Water also estimates that there may be a further 30,000 to 40,000 houses with shared lead backyard service connections. Irish Water has informed my Department that it intends to invest in public lead pipe replacement schemes, primarily communications pipes, with a view to eliminating lead mains, including shared backyard service connections over the next ten years. Irish Water is also reviewing its water treatment processes to ensure that they can mitigate the risk in the short term. Given the age of the housing stock in Waterford city and some areas of the county and the presence of back yard services, the percentage of houses with lead plumbing could be higher than the estimated national average. A number of schemes were carried out to replace these pipes in recent years in Waterford City by the City Council and Irish Water will continue this programme.

The Water Services Act 2007 provides that the owner of a premises is responsible for the maintenance and renewal of the internal water distribution system and shall ensure that it is kept in good order and repair, so as to prevent a risk to human health or the environment and that the

water meets prescribed quality standards. Responsibility for replacing lead pipes from the main stopcock to the house and within the house rests with the homeowner. As a precaution, Irish Water recommends persons in premises that have lead piping, to flush the supply at the kitchen tap first thing in the morning, before using for drinking.

The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 requires the CER to perform its functions in a manner that best serves the interests of the customers of Irish Water. This is similar to the CER's statutory role in respect of the gas and electricity sectors. I fully expect that the CER will consider compliance with statutory standards by Irish Water in the discharge of its functions. The proposed approach to charging was outlined by Irish Water in a water charges plan which it submitted to the CER in line with the provisions of the Act.

The CER recently held a public consultation on this plan which covered a range of issues relating to water charges and allowances. The CER is currently reviewing submissions received on the consultation and a determination will be made by the CER later this month. Full details of the CER public consultation are available on www.cer.ie.

Electricity Transmission Network

271. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when the McGuinness commission will report; if EirGrid's planning application for Grid Link will be delayed or is it considered still possible to meet the original timeframe; if a corridor for the proposed line has been selected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36215/14]

274. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the position regarding the work of the expert group reviewing the Grid Link project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36339/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 271 and 274 together.

The Independent Expert Panel (the Panel) was asked by the Government to oversee the integrity of a process to be undertaken by EirGrid to report on the Grid West and Grid Link projects. That process is underway and the Panel expects to be in a position to provide an opinion to the Minister on the Grid West project in January 2015. An opinion on the Grid Link project is expected to be provided by the Panel to the Minister towards the end of July 2015.

The Grid Link project is part of EirGrid's "Grid25" plan to develop and upgrade the electricity transmission network to meet Ireland's future electricity transmission needs, from security, sustainability and competitiveness perspectives. Various overhead line route corridor options have been identified for the project. Work is ongoing to identify options for underground cable routes.

EirGrid does not anticipate that it will be in a position to submit a planning application for the Grid Link project to An Bord Pleanála until 2016.

Broadband Service Speeds

272. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the position regarding the roll-out of improved broadband services in an area (details supplied) in County Kildare; when he expects the mapping process to be concluded and pub-

lished; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36335/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The Government's Statement of Priorities for the period 2014 to 2016 reaffirms our commitment to delivering a State-led broadband intervention in rural areas. Through the National Broadband Plan (NBP) the Government aims to ensure that high speed broadband is available to all citizens and businesses. This is being achieved through measures designed to accelerate commercial investment and the development of a State-led intervention for non-commercial areas.

Under EU State Aid Guidelines Member States cannot intervene where commercial investors have plans to roll out services. A comprehensive mapping exercise is underway in my Department to identify those areas that require a State intervention. An initial list of areas has already been identified and includes 18 areas including Kilmeade in County Kildare. I am aware also that there are extensive plans for the commercial rollout of high speed services in Kildare.

As part of the mapping process, an initial stakeholder consultation on certain technical aspects of the proposed Plan was launched in June with a deadline of 15th September. 31 submissions were received as part of this process and non-commercially sensitive versions of these responses will be published over the coming weeks.

I expect to publish the maps for public consultation later this year. These will include details of the areas requiring State intervention. It is important to note that these maps will be dynamic and will be subject to change if new commercial investments are announced in the future.

A further public consultation on a proposed comprehensive intervention strategy will be launched in mid-2015.

EU State Aid clearance will be required for the proposed State intervention. My Department will be working closely with the European Commission on this important aspect of the programme.

Finally, a detailed procurement process will have to be undertaken in order to select a potential preferred bidder(s) prior to commencing the roll out of high speed broadband services.

This complex and ambitious project is a key priority for Government and for my Department. It aims to conclusively address current connectivity challenges in a sustainable and meaningful way. Our goal is to ensure that quality broadband services are available to all citizens regardless of where they are located.

Green Paper on Energy Publication

273. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the position regarding the review of the Green Paper on energy policy; the consultation process of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36337/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The Green Paper on Energy Policy in Ireland was published in May. The publication commenced a period of public consultation under which written contributions were sought by the end of July.

1,241 submissions were received. My Department has conducted an initial analysis of the valuable contributions made by interested parties, and the key issues raised in relation to each of the areas set out have been identified. Further engagement with stakeholders is ongoing and

will continue over the coming months, firstly through seminars to be hosted by officials from my Department on all of the priorities set out in the Green Paper, to ensure that all of the issues identified in the submissions are fully understood. My Department is focused on ensuring that the assumptions on which the final policy paper will be written are tested and accurate, so as to produce a dynamic and responsive evidence based framework which will facilitate us in steering an appropriate course as we seek to address sustainability, security and competitiveness challenges and opportunities.

Further engagement will be arranged in order to obtain views from as wide a spectrum as possible, including from consumers and local communities in addition to other key stakeholders. There is an absolute necessity for the final policy paper to set a balanced, robust and enabling framework for Ireland's Energy transition.

At an event hosted by my Department on 24 September to launch the next phase of the policy development process, I announced that I will chair a Steering Group which will advise on the finalisation of the policy. John FitzGerald, Research Professor at the Economic and Social Research Institute, Dr. Brian Motherway, Chief Executive of the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, and Ms Helen Donoghue, formerly of DG Energy at the European Commission, have accepted my invitation to participate on a Steering Group, together with officials from my Department.

Drafting of the policy paper will begin after the planned seminars are completed at the end of this year. The text of the policy paper will be progressed during the first half of 2015 with a view to publication of the final policy paper by September 2015. The new energy policy framework will be timely in that it will be guided by Ireland's input to the EU's 2030 Framework for Climate and Energy policies and the preparations for the UN's COP21 (the 21st Conference of the Parties within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) in Paris in December next year.

Question No. 274 answered with Question No. 271.

Broadband Service Provision

275. Deputy Martin Heydon asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the reason the national broadband service provided by 3 Ireland was discontinued; the provisions his Department is making for those living in rural Ireland who had relied on this service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36366/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The provision of telecommunications services, including broadband services, is a matter in the first instance for private sector service providers operating in a liberalised market, regulated by the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg). Developments in the broadband market over recent years mean that there is now a choice of commercial operators offering broadband services over a diverse range of technology platforms throughout much of rural Ireland, including the area previously covered by the National Broadband Scheme. Details of commercial services available in each county can be found on a number of websites, including the websites of individual operators.

The State can only intervene to ensure access to broadband services in areas where the competitive market has failed to deliver such services, as in the case of the National Broadband Scheme (NBS). Following a competitive tendering process, my Department entered into a contract in late 2008 with Hutchison 3G Ireland Ltd. ("3") for the delivery of the NBS. The

Scheme offered a basic and affordable broadband service to fixed residences and businesses located within certain designated rural areas where the extent of broadband coverage by commercial operators, at the time the Scheme was launched in 2008, was deemed to be inadequate. EU State Aid approval was granted for a scheme of limited duration and, following a 68 month operational period, the Scheme expired on 25th August 2014.

“3” have confirmed that, following the expiry of the Scheme, they will continue to provide coverage throughout NBS areas on a commercial basis offering consumers the same choice of Broadband plans and tariffs as those offered to consumers outside of the NBS areas. Furthermore, they have also informed my Department of their plans to extend 4G coverage across all of the NBS Coverage Areas within the next 3 years. Digiweb, who provided the NBS satellite service on behalf of Three, will continue to offer satellite broadband on a commercial basis. I can therefore assure the Deputy that there is no discontinuation of services in former NBS areas.

The Government’s Statement of Priorities for the period 2014 to 2016 reaffirms our commitment to delivering a State-led broadband intervention in rural areas. Through the National Broadband Plan (NBP) the Government aims to ensure that high speed broadband is available to all citizens and businesses in Ireland. This is being achieved through measures designed to accelerate commercial investment and the development of a State-led intervention for non-commercial areas.

Under EU State Aid Guidelines Member States cannot intervene where commercial investors have plans to roll out services. A comprehensive mapping exercise is underway in my Department to identify those areas that require a State intervention.

As part of the mapping process, an initial stakeholder consultation on certain technical aspects of the proposed Plan was launched in June with a deadline of 15th September. 31 submissions were received as part of this process and non-commercially sensitive versions of these responses will be published over the coming weeks.

I expect to publish the maps for public consultation later this year. These will include details of the areas requiring State intervention. It is important to note that these maps will be dynamic and will be subject to change if new commercial investments are announced in the future.

EU State Aid clearance will be required for the proposed State intervention. My Department will be working closely with the European Commission on this important aspect of the programme.

Finally, a detailed procurement process will have to be undertaken in order to select a potential preferred bidder(s) prior to commencing the roll out of high speed broadband services.

This complex and ambitious project is a key priority for Government and for my Department. It aims to conclusively address current connectivity challenges in a sustainable and meaningful way. Our goal is to ensure that quality broadband services are available to all citizens regardless of where they are located.

Driver Licence Renewals

276. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he will take with the Road Safety Authority and the National Driver Licence Service to ensure that drivers whose licences are due for renewal are duly informed in a timely fashion of the fact that they are due for renewal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36262/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Road Safety Authority has responsibility for the operation of the National Driver Licensing Service.

The RSA informs me that letters are issued on a monthly basis to those whose licences are due for renewal. However, given that the expiry date of a licence is clearly visible on a driver licence, drivers must bear some level of responsibility to check when their licence is due for renewal and to apply for a new licence in a timely fashion.

Taxi Regulations

277. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of enforcement officers who have been appointed to control the taxi industry; the number of taxi drivers who have been stopped and had their credentials checked; the number and category of irregularities identified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36161/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) sector is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act, 2013.

Enforcement is undertaken by both the NTA's Enforcement Officers and by An Garda Síochána whose members are authorised persons for the purposes of the regulations governing SPSV services.

I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

National Car Test

278. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the company who operate the national car test is now asking customers to absolve the company of any responsibility, in writing, for damage caused to a vehicle while testing; his views that this is a satisfactory situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36182/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Under the Road Safety Authority Act 2006 (Conferral of Functions) Order 2006 (S.I. No 477 of 2006) the Road Safety Authority has responsibility for the delivery of the National Car Test. The RSA has overall responsibility for the operation, oversight, development, quality assurance and delivery of vehicle testing arrangements. The testing function is currently carried out by Applus+ under a contractual arrangement with the RSA.

As the subject matter of this question is a matter for the RSA I have requested that the RSA respond directly to the Deputy's question. If you have not received a response within ten days please contact my office.

Public Transport

279. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of public service vehicles, including buses, directly operated or contracted by the State that are not fitted with safety belts; his views on this; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[36183/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The information the Deputy is seeking is not available.

Ireland's Entry into Service regulations requires all buses to have Type Approval, which includes the specified standards for safety belts, where they are required, before they are used on the road.

Buses designed to operate in an urban environment, operating at reduced speeds (maximum 65km/h in Ireland if carrying standees) and with passengers in many instances, only having a short journey time, are not required to be fitted with safety belts. Due to the number of people these vehicles can carry, often for short distances, and at reduced speeds for safety reasons their design takes these factors into account while also considering the efficient and swift movement of passengers getting on and off the vehicle.

Tourism Project Funding

280. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if grant aid is available to new or start-up travel companies, especially companies that aim to target non-traditional markets in a bid to attract additional tourists to Ireland. [36191/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies primarily in the area of national policy and it is not involved in the administration of tourism funding programmes. Fáilte Ireland provides a range of business supports to individual tourism businesses throughout the country, but they do not provide grants for business expansion. To access these supports the company should contact Fáilte Ireland's dedicated customer support team.

I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for additional information and direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not hear within ten working days.

New businesses should also consider approaching a Local Enterprise Office (LEO) which is in a position to offer a range of grants including grants for feasibility studies and business expansion. There is a network of 31 LEO offices across the country.

Public Transport

281. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when and if there will be an end to the freeze in taking on permanent staff in Irish Rail. [36251/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The issue raised is a matter for Irish Rail 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 response within ten working days.

Public Transport Initiatives

282. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of implementing in full the swiftway bus rapid transit plan put forward by the

National Transport Authority; the cost of implementing the Swords to city centre plan only; the cost of implementing the UCD to Blanchardstown plan only; the cost of implementing the Clongriffin to Tallaght plan only; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36275/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for developing public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) including Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) projects.

Under this statutory remit the NTA, in its Implementation Plan 2013-20, has identified that BRT schemes could play a significant role in the improvement of public transport in the Dublin region and has accordingly proposed three BRT schemes for Dublin, of which the Swords/Airport corridor has been prioritised. However the Plan also states that implementation of the schemes is subject to availability of funding.

I have made no decision as regards the development of these routes as yet and no formal application or request has been received in that regard by my Department from the NTA.

I will however be considering the BRT option as well as other competing projects for the Dublin region having regard to the outcome of studies underway on the other major public transport projects proposed in recent years for Dublin and in the context of priorities and funding available under the next capital plan.

The NTA have advised me that preliminary estimate ranges for the three BRT routes are as follows:

- Swords/Airport to City Centre - €150 million to €200 million;
- Blanchardstown to UCD - €150 million to €200 million; and
- Clongriffin to Tallaght - €200million to €250 million.

Road Projects Expenditure

283. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of completing the M7 Naas to Newbridge bypass upgrade scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36276/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): 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 (such as the Naas to Newbridge Bypass Upgrade Scheme) is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for the NRA in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

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

Taxi Licences Renewals

284. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason

a person (details supplied) has been allowed to continue to operate an SPSV for hire given his or her conviction for issuing a death threat in 2011; and if, under new legislation, the person's status will be in question. [36288/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The licensing authority for small public service vehicle (SPSV) driver applications or renewals is currently An Garda Síochána while the licensing authority for SPSV vehicle applications or renewals is the National Transport Authority (NTA). The provisions relating to the suitability of a person to hold a licence contained in Section 10(1) of the Taxi Regulation Act, 2013, apply to both the driver and vehicle licence.

In relation to the driver licence in this instance, I would advise that you raise the matter with An Garda Síochána.

I have referred the matter of the vehicle licence to the NTA for its consideration and direct reply to you.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Public Transport

285. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding commuter fare increases (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36290/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The National Transport Authority (NTA) is the statutory body with responsibility for overseeing the delivery of public transport services and also regulation of fares charged by all operators, including Iarnród Éireann.

I have already stated that I do not propose any further reductions in the overall public transport subvention which is allocated to the NTA. The allocation and payment of the subvention to all operators, including the amount payable to Iarnród Éireann, is decided by the NTA in accordance with their Public Service Obligation (PSO) contract with the company.

I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Driver Licences

286. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the progress in negotiations to introduce an exchange programme for Irish driving licence holders with Newfoundland and Labrador in Canada; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36293/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Road Safety Authority (RSA), which takes responsibility for the negotiation of mutual recognition of driving licences with other jurisdictions, has been engaged for some time with the Canadian provinces with the assistance of the Irish Embassy in Ottawa. It was decided to prioritise negotiations with Ontario due to the large number of Irish living there.

Reaching an agreement is not a straightforward process. It involves the licensing authorities in both jurisdictions closely comparing the two systems to be sure that they are compatible.

As you may be aware, an agreement to allow for the mutual exchange of driving licences between Ireland and Ontario was concluded recently. This was the first such agreement between Ireland and any of the Canadian provinces, and I believe the fact that it has been reached should help to expedite progress with the other provinces.

I understand from the RSA that they have made very substantial progress with Newfoundland & Labrador and I hope to see an agreement in place shortly.

Parking Provision

287. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding his discussions with the National Transport Authority on the feasibility of a pilot partial footpath parking scheme for a limited number of specific locations in Dublin, as per previous replies. [36320/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Further to the response provided by my predecessor to Dáil Question No. 205 of 18 June, officials within my Department wrote to the National Transport Authority (NTA) with regard to a review of the issues arising from footpath parking and, in consultation with all interested parties, to consider the possibility of introducing a pilot partial footpath parking scheme.

I understand that the NTA is currently examining the matter and will issue a response soon.

State Airports

288. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the current debt level at the Dublin Airport Authority; if he will provide a breakdown of this debt as it pertains to Dublin, Shannon and Cork airports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36323/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, Dublin Airport Authority (DAA) has statutory responsibility to operate, manage and develop Dublin and Cork Airports and, as provided in the recently enacted State Airports (Shannon Group) Act 2014, Shannon Group has similar responsibilities in respect of Shannon Airport since 5 September last. As such the debt level at all three airports is a matter for DAA and Shannon Group respectively.

The 2013 Annual Report and Accounts for the DAA and Shannon Airport Authority (which had responsibility for Shannon Airport at that time) was laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas and can be found in the Library of the Houses.

Deer Hunting

289. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the measures being taken to stop illegal hunting of deer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36198/14]

290. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will consider introducing a tagging system for deer hunting; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36199/14]

291. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of deer that were killed illegally last year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36200/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 289 to 291, inclusive, together.

Deer hunting licences are issued by my Department on an annual basis under the Wildlife Acts. On average just over 4,400 such licences have been issued each year in the past five hunting seasons. The hunting season for deer is regulated by the Open Seasons Order, which prescribes the periods for hunting different deer species. These periods vary depending on the gender and age of the deer, which reflects the conservation needs of the species concerned.

In addition, hunters must comply with a range of requirements contained in the Wildlife Acts, which relate to the type of firearm used, the use of vehicles, hunting at night and the use of lamps. Persons hunting deer without a deer hunting licence or failing to comply with any of the requirements of the Wildlife Acts would be guilty of an offence. I have no plans at this time to introduce a tagging system in addition to these requirements.

My Department does not have data on the number of deer killed illegally each year. Staff from my Department's National Parks and Wildlife Service have, however, carried out an increased number of patrols, including night patrols, where there has been information available in relation to incidents of increased illegal deer killings. Persons involved in such activity may be subject to prosecution. Both staff from my Department and An Garda Síochána have worked diligently on such prosecution cases.