

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.

Public Sector Staff

6. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to tackle the increasing age profile across the civil and public services; his plans to take steps to encourage skilled public servants who have emigrated to return here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38163/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I share the Deputy's concern regarding the age profile of the civil and public service. As much as any organisation, it is important to seek to ensure that the demographic profile of staff working in the public sector is appropriately balanced. Unfortunately, the severe restrictions it has been necessary to apply to recruitment into the civil and public service on account of the impact of the economic and budgetary crisis, have contributed to an ageing public sector workforce. As this situation reflects developments over a number of years, it is clearly not susceptible to immediate solutions. Moreover, as the Deputy will be aware there are important legal and regulatory requirements that preclude discrimination on the basis of age in civil and public service recruitment. For example, recruitment to the civil service takes place under the Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) Act 2004. The Act sets out that recruitment competitions be run under the Codes of Practice published by the Commission for Public Service Appointments (CPSA). The Codes set out that recruitment processes be conducted in manner which is fair, open and merit based. Consequently, it is not possible under the CPSA Codes to restrict a candidate's access to a competition on the basis of age.

I believe the key to addressing this issue lies in the further development of the workforce planning process included in the Government's Public Service Reform Plan 2014-2016 by providing robust evidence on future staffing requirements. The key principle of workforce planning is having the right number of people with the right skills in the right jobs at the right time. It requires organisations to focus on the range of skills they need to deliver on their objectives and to identify emerging skills gaps, whether arising from staff turnover or from changes in the external environment which may require new skillsets. Workforce planning, therefore, assists public bodies to identify the number of staff and the skills and experience required and provides the basis on which planned and structured recruitment campaigns can be initiated which are likely to help re-balance over time the age profile across the public service.

Recruitment competitions are open to all qualified candidates, including those previous public servants who have emigrated. The Deputy may be aware that the Public Appointments Service does seek in advertising recruitment opportunities to ensure that the information is

available and the recruitment process is accessible to qualified candidates whether they are residing in Ireland or elsewhere.

Questions Nos. 7 to 9, inclusive, answered orally.

Departmental Expenditure

10. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the Departments most seriously threatened by budgetary overruns in the course of the past three and a half years; if these Departments will operate within their respective budgets in the coming year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38167/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Gross voted expenditure has been reduced from its peak of €63.1 billion in 2009 to €54.5 billion in 2013. This represents a reduction of approximately 13½ per cent between 2009 and 2013. The gross voted expenditure allocation for 2014 is €53 billion.

Managing the delivery of public services within its Budgetary allocation is a key responsibility of each Minister and Department, and several measures are in place to help ensure that these budgetary targets continue to be met. My Department is in regular communication with all Departments and Offices to ensure that expenditure is being managed effectively. We monitor their drawdown of funds from the Exchequer against the published expenditure profiles with information published monthly as part of the Exchequer Statement.

In recent years, there have been a number of cases in which Government Departments have required supplementary estimates. Much of the expenditure overruns, that resulted in these supplementary estimates, were due to the exposure of certain areas to the economic cycle and expenditure pressures arising across a number of Government Departments due to increased demands for services. For example, in periods where the numbers on the Live Register were increasing, this had the effect of both increasing expenditure on Jobseeker's payments, while also increasing the numbers of citizens eligible for a Medical Card.

In the coming year, as the Government looks to bring the deficit below 3 per cent of GDP in 2015, there is an ongoing requirement to ensure that Departmental expenditure is managed to meet this key fiscal policy objective. As such, the prioritisation of resources and effective management of expenditure within allocations will continue to be a key responsibility of all Ministers and their Departments.

Questions Nos. 11 to 13, inclusive, answered orally.

Drainage Schemes Status

14. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department has sought tenders for the review of the environmental impact assessment and environmental impact statement of the River Clare drainage scheme in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38171/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): Statutory Instruments No. 469 and 470 of 2012 give effect in Irish law to EU Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment. As the Consent Authority for flood alleviation schemes under Section 7 of the Arterial Drainage Acts

1945-1995, the Regulations require the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to:-

(A) carry out an Environmental Impact Assessment of drainage or flood relief schemes prior to Confirmation or approval of the proposed schemes

(B) Publicise his decision to Confirm or refuse to Confirm a proposed drainage scheme, inform the Commissioners and the public of the decision and to provide for a process for appeal/review of the decision and inform the public of this process

The Clare River (Claregalway) Drainage Scheme was submitted to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) for Ministerial Confirmation on 2nd November 2013. In accordance with normal procedure, the scheme documentation submitted to DPER included an Environmental Impact Statement which is a consultants report of the environmental impacts of the works and the OPW's proposals to mitigate these impacts as far as possible.

The Claregalway scheme is the first flood relief scheme submitted for Confirmation following the coming into effect of the 2012 Regulations and DPER needed to fully consider the implications for the Confirmation process of the new Regulations.

Consultations took place with the Attorney General's Office in order to get clarification on how the new Regulations should be interpreted and implemented in the context of the Confirmation process for drainage schemes under the Arterial Drainage Acts.

Based on advice received from the Attorney General's Office, DPER is in the process of engaging experts to carry out an independent review as part of the assessment of the Environmental Impact Statement of the Claregalway scheme that was submitted by the OPW. The tender process is nearing completion and DPER expects to be in a position to place a contract shortly.

Pending the outcome of the expert's review and the conclusion of the required public notification process, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform is not in a position to confirm the Claregalway scheme. It is not possible therefore at this point to say when the scheme can proceed to Construction.

However, I am confident that the proposed works will be found to be environmentally acceptable and therefore that the scheme can be confirmed by the Minister and proceed without too much further delay. I would like to assure the House that I and the OPW remain committed to ensuring that the scheme will be completed as soon as possible. The OPW has provided for the cost of the works in its profiles of capital expenditure to 2016.

Parliamentary Questions

15. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to proceed with the proposal to impose a statutory duty on bodies established by or under statute, or with a majority ownership or funding by the State, to submit to the same parliamentary questions regime as applies to Departments, including an obligation to provide answers to written questions within a specified number of Dáil Éireann sitting days; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38161/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): This proposal is part of the Government's political reform programme outlined in the Programme for Government. My Department has, in the context of its examination of this issue, had some initial discussions with the Houses of the Oireachtas on the operational issues in relation to this commitment, and the possible approaches that may be taken to its efficient implementation.

The Deputy will note that the proposed creation of a statutory duty on public bodies does give rise to some significant legislative issues requiring careful consideration, including in relation to the alignment and consistency of such an approach with existing accountability requirements included in the governing legislation for public bodies.

In relation to the Parliamentary Question regime generally, significant progress has already been made to improve the effectiveness of the parliamentary question system.

This is in addition to political reforms such as increasing Dáil sitting time, Friday sittings for Committee reports and Private Members Bills, opening-up of the pre-legislative process, restricting the use of the Guillotine, and enhancing debate of topical issues.

In addition, the new Freedom of Information Bill 2013 which has completed its passage through the Houses of the Oireachtas extends its remit to all public bodies, as well as to non-public bodies in receipt of significant funding by the Exchequer by way of Ministerial Order. This will result in a number of long-established high profile exclusions from FOI being brought under the scope of the legislation.

Issues of strengthening accountability and performance, particularly within the Civil Service, are also key themes in the Civil Service Renewal Process. The outcome of this process is currently being finalised and I hope to be in a position to seek Government agreement to the Civil Service Renewal Plan over the coming weeks.

Ministerial Staff

16. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will consider reforming the process of appointment for ministerial private secretaries to have more transparency in the appointments or to have it overseen by the Commissioners for Public Service Appointments or the Public Appointments Commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38010/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I am satisfied that there is appropriate transparency in the appointment of the posts referred to in the Deputy's question. The Department of the Public Service Circular 6/1984 - Private Secretaries and Confidential Clerical Assistants sets out instructions concerning private secretaries and confidential clerical assistants. The circular provides that the persons selected to act as Private Secretary should be drawn from the grades of Executive Officer, Higher Executive Officer or Administrative Officer in the Civil Service.

It is my understanding that most, if not all, officials appointed as Private Secretary to a Minister are appointed by way of a lateral transfer of a serving civil servant within the Minister's Department.

Budget 2015

17. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will report on his Department's consultations and meetings with the Department of Health in the preparation of budget 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38189/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): My Department is engaged in intensive discussions with the Department of Health and HSE officials regarding Budget 2015 and the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure as part of the 2015 Budget

and Estimates process.

As part of the ongoing Comprehensive Review of Expenditure due to be published on Budget day, all Government Departments have been asked to review their spending and to identify measures that will support achieving our fiscal objective. The CRE is framed in the context of the 2015 expenditure ceilings that were published in Expenditure Report 2014. Within this context, the recent welcome developments on the fiscal front will allow the Government some space to make decisions to address certain pressures and priorities.

Final decisions in relation to the Budget will reflect updated information on key economic indicators and receipts from taxation.

Government policy on Budget 2015 will be announced on Budget Day 14th of October 2014.

Value for Money Reviews

18. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to provide to the Comptroller and Auditor General additional powers needed to carry out value-for-money audits of State programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38164/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Programme for Government committed to giving the Comptroller and Auditor General extra powers to carry out value-for-money (VFM) audits of State programmes. This commitment for enhanced powers for the Comptroller and Auditor General is being progressed as part of the wider public service reform agenda.

Any consideration of the role of the Comptroller and Auditor General must take account of initiatives for the management and reporting of public expenditure. This includes, for example, as part of the annual estimates process, the introduction and development of performance budgeting; developments at EU level regarding the introduction of common standards for the accounts of public bodies; and, as part of a joint initiative with the Department of Finance, in which the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General is participating, consideration of enhanced fiscal transparency measures. Other related and significant developments include civil service accountability and performance.

The strengthening of accountability systems requires a clear sighted examination of the forms and structures of accountability that best support the broader agenda of public service reform and its core objective of high quality and more efficient provision of public services. This wider accountability framework includes the work of the Comptroller and Auditor General in terms of both financial auditing and value for money reports.

The Programme for Government commitments and associated reform proposals, including those relating to the Comptroller and Auditor General, focus on enhancing performance and accountability arrangements so that the public service can be empowered to be more effective and to demonstrate that well informed choices are being made as to how public money is spent.

Public Sector Staff Data

19. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of contracts of indefinite duration that have been sought and the number that have been granted in the years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014 in the public sector

under the remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38261/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): On a general point, the Deputy is probably aware that a contract of indefinite duration (CID) is similar to a permanent contract and can arise by operation of law under the Protection of Employees (Fixed Term Work) Act 2003. Under the provisions of this Act, if an employee is employed on two or more successive fixed term contracts in continuous employment for a period of four years then extending that contract for a further fixed term is unlawful (unless the employer can justify the award of a further fixed term contract on objective grounds), and the employee is entitled to a contract of indefinite duration.

It is a matter for Human Resource Units in all Departments/Agencies etc. to have procedures in place for dealing with the recruitment and employment of fixed-term employees and the management of their contracts. My Department issues Guidelines on “Best Practice for the Recruitment and Management of Fixed-term Employees in the Irish Civil Service”. These are revised from time to time as required. The most recent version issued in April 2014 and took account of changes arising as result of the Single Pension Scheme and the Haddington Road Agreement. The Guidelines can be found on my Department’s HR Management website at <http://hr.per.gov.ie/recruitment-policy/>.

The position in relation to my own Department and those Offices under its aegis is as follows:

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

My Department was established in July 2011 and in the period since then there has only been one request for a contract of indefinite duration. This was refused on the grounds that the person concerned did not qualify for such a contract.

Office of Public Works

The Office of Public Works received requests for contracts of indefinite duration from three of its State Industrial Employees and all three were granted CIDs

Valuation Office

The Valuation Office issued two contracts of indefinite duration to cleaning staff since 2007.

Capital Programme

20. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on a direct labour public works scheme for infrastructure projects; if he will report on plans for future public private partnerships and other such collaboration with the private sector in delivering public services and infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38260/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): My Department is currently undertaking a review of the public capital programme, in parallel with the comprehensive review of expenditure, which will culminate in the publication of the Government’s five year investment strategy on Budget day. The focus of the Framework will be on infrastructural investment that can aid economic growth and address urgent social requirements. While this is the primary purpose of public capital infrastructure investment, the positive employment impact in the shorter term during the infrastructure delivery or construction period is also a notable benefit.

A 2009 survey, carried out by the Department of Finance, found that the labour intensity of capital projects generally falls within the range of 8 to 12 jobs for every €1 million invested. While this estimate for labour intensity is used as a general rule of thumb, it is important to note that the amount of employment generated by capital expenditure depends on how that expenditure is invested. For example, the purchase of new rail rolling stock would typically generate little direct employment in Ireland as such stock is generally produced abroad. Furthermore, different types of public construction project have different levels of labour intensity. Smaller scale projects such as school building and repair, or smaller local and regional road-works, tend to be more labour intensive than major national infrastructural projects.

As part of the capital review process, my Department has revisited the 2009 Department of Finance work in this area and updated the analysis. The results of that piece of work will be published on my Department's website in the coming weeks.

In July 2012, I announced a new Government Stimulus Initiative amounting to a package of €2.25 billion aimed at leveraging funding to support a new PPP programme of projects in key areas of infrastructure across the Education, Health, Justice and Transport sectors. This is a significant construction programme and the projects are of the construction type that promote employment.

All of the projects have been issued to market. Construction has started on the N17/18 Gort to Tuam route and financial close is targeted for the remainder of the programme at varying dates during 2015. Construction commencement will follow shortly thereafter.

The National Development Finance Agency Act, 2002 provides that all Government Departments and Agencies must seek the advice of the NDFA on the best financing approach, traditional or Public Private Partnership, before undertaking a capital project. This requirement applies to all projects that have a capital value over €20 million.

Officials in my Department keep under regular review possible opportunities for further investment in PPP projects in a sustainable affordable manner.

Departmental Records

21. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in view of the extensive annual financial commitment across Departments on the storage of records and archive material at various sites and the extensive associated retrieval costs, the savings to the Exchequer that could be made by moving toward a more streamlined storage service and by the employment of archivists; the work being undertaken within the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer on digital preservation of records in Departments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38282/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) is currently undertaking a joint project within my department and the Department of Finance to develop a system that would allow records to be stored electronically.

A potential outcome from that project is the development of a standard that could be adopted by other departments and public bodies, which are also subject to the National Archives Act. Any potential savings from storing records electronically would have to be explored and realised by the bodies subject to the Act, in partnership with the National Archives.

Departmental Expenditure

22. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the actions he has taken on foot of the recently published Comptroller and Auditor General report to ensure expenditure occurs in the best interests of the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38158/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The focus of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is on well-managed and well-targeted public spending, through modernised, effective and accountable public services. The recently published Comptroller and Auditor General Report on the ‘Accounts of the Public Service 2013’ is part of the wider accountability framework for the delivery of these services.

The report in question is concerned with the accountability of departments and offices in respect of their administration of public funds. As outlined by the Comptroller and Auditor General, it was prepared on the basis of audited information, where available, and other information, documentation and explanations obtained from the relevant government departments and offices. Drafts of relevant parts of the Report were sent to the departments and offices concerned and their comments were requested. Where appropriate, those comments are incorporated into the Report. As such, the Report itself contains information on the actions being taken across the relevant Departments on foot of the recommendations of the Comptroller and Auditor General. In this context, the majority of the recommendations made by the Comptroller and Auditor General have been agreed by the relevant Accounting Officers and indeed, where appropriate, by my own Department.

In due course, the Committee of Public Accounts will examine and report to Dáil Éireann on this Report and my Department will prepare a formal response to the recommendations, (the ‘Minute of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform’) in consultation with the departments and offices concerned.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

23. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will lift the public sector recruitment embargo in order to secure the effective delivery of necessary public services. [38169/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As I have previously advised the House, there is no embargo on recruitment in the Public Service. To safeguard frontline and priority services, the Government has allowed for critical posts to be filled throughout the period of reduction of public service numbers. In addition to this ongoing recruitment, special provision was made in last October’s Budget for the recruitment into key front line sectors, including more than 900 extra resource teachers for the school system. Public service numbers have actually increased this year compared with last year.

The ongoing objective of the Government will be to ensure that we have an efficient and effective Public Service for the future, and one that is also affordable and sustainable. This is why resource needs over the medium term have been examined as part of the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure, the outcome of which will help inform Budget decisions and measures to be announced next week.

Departmental Expenditure

24. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which public expenditure reductions and reform throughout the public service have brought spending into line with income over the past three and a half year; if he foresees any room for manoeuvre in 2015 under any heading having regard to the success of the measures taken to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38166/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Gross voted expenditure has been reduced from its peak of €63.1 billion in 2009 to €54.5 billion in 2013. This represents a reduction of approximately 13½ per cent between 2009 and 2013. The gross voted expenditure allocation for 2014 is €53 billion.

The implementation of these expenditure adjustments has contributed towards a radical improvement in the sustainability of the public finances. This has been delivered through the efforts of all Departments and their agencies to seek savings, pursue efficiencies, and manage within constrained budgets, often while meeting increasing demands for the public services they deliver. In this respect the Public Service Reform Plan has been an essential part of the Government's approach in addressing the challenges posed by reduced resources. The Reform Plan requires a refocus on business processes and adjustments to the way all public bodies use available resources. It promotes changes to the way individual public servants go about their daily work and greater flexibility in the way services are provided, for example with greater use of technology and shared services. With the establishment of the Office of Government Procurement, reform in the area of procurement is focussed on delivering better value for the tax-payer by centralising procurement expertise, driving further professionalisation of the function and reducing risk for the State.

The Government's overarching fiscal policy objective for 2015 continues to be delivering a budget deficit below 3% of GDP. Given the improved fiscal and economic outlook, and the ongoing expenditure restraint, it is expected that the budgetary objective of a deficit of less than 3% of GDP can be achieved with a broadly neutral budget.

Public Procurement Contracts Social Clause

25. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the progress made to date by the social clauses project group he established in June 2014. [38186/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Social clauses in contracts place obligations on suppliers to perform actions focussed on broader policy considerations. They can be used in public procurement in cases where they are targeted at factoring into the procurement process consideration of social issues such as employment opportunities, equal opportunities and social inclusion. In order to be compatible with EU law, they must be made known to all interested parties at tender stage and must not restrict participation by contractors from other Member States.

On 9 June I announced the establishment of a Social Clauses Project Group to be led by the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) to pro-actively look at projects with a view to including social clauses to ensure those awarded contracts contribute to employment or training opportunities for long term unemployed.

Specific projects that are currently in planning and are deemed potentially suitable for the inclusion of employment opportunities and social inclusion will be identified and targeted to maximise the potential opportunities from these projects.

The Project group has the following functions:

- Departments with responsibility for employment and training will identify the important social considerations and actively assist the procuring bodies and successful tenderers through the provision of training and accreditation,
- the OGP will assist departments/agencies in the design of the social clause most suited to the specific contract,
- the procuring body will monitor the impact of the social clause(s),
- the OGP will collate this information.

I have asked the Office of Government Procurement to review this approach after 12 months and then to issue guidance. The objective is to learn from the practical experience of the pilot projects, as well as from the experience of other jurisdictions, in order to develop a robust social procurement framework that is effective.

To date the Social Clauses Group has met twice; on 10 July and 11 September. A range of priority areas to be addressed by the inclusion of social clauses in public contracts have been identified including assisting the long-term unemployed, training and apprenticeships. These priority areas have been forwarded to the relevant procurement sectors with a view to identifying potential projects where social clauses can be usefully inserted.

Public Procurement Regulations

26. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views that the number of State contracts that are awarded to companies outside the State is above the European average; the way this can be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38162/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Under EU and national rules, the public procurement of works, supplies and service contracts above certain thresholds must be awarded on the basis of objective and non-restrictive criteria. The aim of these European rules is to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers best value for money. It would be a breach of the rules for a public body to favour or discriminate against particular bidders on grounds of nationality and there are legal remedies which may be used against any public body infringing these rules.

The Office of Government Procurement produces statistical information in relation to above-EU threshold procurement activity by the Irish public sector and for providing these statistics to the European Commission. The EU average for cross-border activity in relation to activity above these thresholds is 1.4%. The following is based on data available on above EU threshold awards.

In 2011, the value of contracts that were awarded above this threshold to non-domestic companies was €240 million. This represents less than 5% of the overall 2011 annual public procurement spend (approximately €13.1 billion). I am advised by the Office of Government Procurement that more up to date data on above EU threshold contracts for 2012 and 2013 will be available shortly.

The reasons for this level of cross-border procurement would include:

- a significant number of procurement categories are not supplied locally (i.e. fuel, vehicles,

aircraft, heavy machinery and certain pharmaceuticals); and,

- that the vast majority of public procurement opportunities in Ireland are advertised in English which makes our tender documents accessible to businesses across Europe, for whom English is the preferred second language;

The reform of public procurement across the public service is on-going and will continue to provide opportunities to the SME sector to win business. My Department continues to introduce changes to assist SME's in competing for government contracts. In April 2014, I introduced Circular 10/14 which provided guidance to contracting authorities on measures to reduce barriers for SME's in tendering for public contracts. In addition, the Office of Government Procurement continues to engage with industry bodies through the SME Working Group to identify issues in public procurement and implement solutions.

The public procurement market in the EU is estimated to be valued in excess of €2.4 trillion. It is important to remember that open tendering is a two way street and that it provides Irish companies with opportunities to compete abroad and reliable EU studies indicate that many Irish businesses are successful in this regard.

Consultancy Contracts

27. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his policy regarding public expenditure on, or his plans to further regulate Government-funded use of, private consultants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38185/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): All public bodies are already required under guidelines for the engagement of consultants to ensure that:

- a firm business case is properly established prior to the engagement process;
- consultancy services are acquired in the most economical manner in accordance with national and EU rules on procurement, specifically that consultants are appointed in an open, competitive and non-discriminatory manner that delivers best value for money;
- consultancies are managed effectively once engaged; and
- the output and impact of consultancies are adequately assessed.

The policy, therefore, on expenditure on consultancy services is quite firm: it must result in value for money for the public.

Public Procurement Contracts Data

28. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of persons employed by his Department to collect data on public procurement; their level of remuneration; and when the Government will begin publishing the awarding of contracts in the future. [38012/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): One of the key priorities set out in the Public Service Reform Plan is to reduce costs and achieve better value for money through reform of public procurement. The Office of Government Procurement (OGP) was launched in July 2013 and operates as an office of the Department of Public

Expenditure and Reform. The OGP is responsible for procurement policy and procedures and together with the four key Sectors of Health, Education, Local Government and Defence will source goods and service for the whole of the public sector. A key enabler to the success of this project is the ability to centrally collect and analyse historical, current and future spend (non-pay) data from all Public Service bodies and extract and analyse other procurement data from various systems to generate intelligent reports to help drive procurement strategy and reform. The IT system that will enable this data collection and reporting is called a Business Intelligence system.

This data collection project is currently managed by one Product Manager who is responsible for delivering this Business Intelligence system and one Data Analyst who assists with the data collection and performs analysis of the procurement data. OGP are currently recruiting for a second data analyst and a system administrator for the business intelligence solution. The Data Analysts and the System Administrator are at the EO grade (€40,760 mid-point of the pay scale) and the Product Manager is at HEO grade (€51,581 mid-point of the pay scale). The Product Manager's time on the project is planned reduce to approx. 50% from Q2 2015. In addition, the Office has also engaged the services of an IT contractor to assist in the development of the interim solution and processes for data collection. This engagement is for a period of 8 weeks.

The manual data collection phase of the project commenced at the start of this year. Approximately 55% of non-pay addressable spend (excluding drugs, capital expenditure etc.) estimated at approximately €6.5 bn in total has been collected so far for 2011-2013. To date an interim solution developed by the OGP which is largely manual has been used. OGP is planning to go to market for an enterprise Business Intelligence solution which will improve efficiency and permit a broader scope of data sources for this initiative.

There is a requirement on all Public Sector bodies to publish contract award notices above EU thresholds on the e-Tenders website and on Official Journal of the European Union. The OGP has reported on data available on e-Tenders for above threshold contracts awarded on many occasions. Circular 10/14 requires the use of eTenders for publication of all tenders above €25,000 for goods and services and €50,000 for works. The Circular also requires entry of the contract award details into eTenders with effect from 1 August 2014. This requirement will expand the award detail information available for reports for tenders published post-1 August and the OGP will collect that information from e-Tenders into the Business Intelligence solution and generate reports once sufficient data is available.

It is anticipated that quarterly reports will be published on procurement, i.e. on frameworks and contracts awarded above €25,000.

Questions Nos. 29 and 30 withdrawn.

Social Welfare Benefits

31. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a person in receipt of jobseeker's allowance at a reduced rate of €170 per week starts working one day per week and receives €93 and is reduced to €108 on jobseeker's payment, if this is correct; the way the calculation is done; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38583/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): According to the records of this Departmental the earnings for the person concerned is recorded as €135.00 per week which, when the means test is applied, results in a weekly payment of €108.80. It is open

to the person concerned to contact their local office to request a review of their claim and to provide updated documentation with regarding their income.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

32. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an appeal against the refusal of a domiciliary care allowance in respect of a person (details supplied); if same will be expedited as the person is under considerable financial pressure; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38585/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received from the person concerned on 11 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 9 May 2014 outlining the decision of the deciding officer to refuse the allowance.

A review of this decision was requested on 28 May 2014 and additional information on this child's condition/care needs was supplied. The application together with the new information supplied was examined by another medical assessor who did not consider that the child met the medical criteria for the allowance. A letter issued on 1 September 2014 outlining the decision of the deciding officer that a revised decision under section 301 of the Social Welfare Consolidation act 2005 was not warranted and giving the applicant the option of appealing the decision. To date, the person concerned has not lodged an appeal against this decision.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

33. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an appeal against the refusal of domiciliary care allowance in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38586/14]

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 registered in that office on 5 September 2014. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the appeal in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral 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 on social welfare entitlements.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Review

34. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a decision on a domiciliary care allowance review in respect of a person (detail supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38596/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received from the person concerned on 9 May 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 19th August 2014 outlining the decision of the deciding officer to refuse the allowance.

A review of this decision was requested on the 19th September 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.

State Pension (Non-Contributory) Appeals

35. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if an appeal for non-contributory pension in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38633/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all the evidence, disallowed the appeal of the person concerned by way of summary decision.

Under Social Welfare legislation, the decision of the Appeals Officer is final and conclusive and may only be reviewed by the Appeals Officer in the light of new evidence or new facts.

I am advised that the person concerned has submitted additional evidence to the Appeals Office and that the appeal decision will be reviewed in light of this evidence. The Appeals Office will be in contact with the person concerned in relation to this review shortly.

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 on social welfare entitlements.

Questions Nos. 36 and 37 withdrawn.

Child Benefit Payments

38. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding child benefit payments when parents separate but equally share parenting, that is when children spend half of their time in the care of each of their parents; if in a situation like this, both parents are considered eligible for 50% of the child benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38702/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Child benefit is a universal monthly payment made to the parents/guardians of children that assists families with the cost associated with raising children. Currently, child benefit is paid to around 604,000 families in respect of some 1.15 million children with an estimated expenditure of around €1.9 billion in 2014.

The needs of the children are the priority consideration in the payment of child benefit. Under Section 220 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act, 2005, child benefit is payable to the person with whom a qualified child normally resides and the child will not be regarded as normally residing with more than one person. Regulations governing normal residence for child

benefit purposes are contained in S.I. 142/2007 (Article 159) and they provide *inter alia* for the following:

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

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

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

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

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

Questions Nos. 39 and 40 withdrawn.

Illness Benefit Appeals

41. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an illness benefit appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38764/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Payment of illness benefit to the person concerned was disallowed by a Deciding Officer following an examination by a Medical Assessor of the Department who expressed the opinion that she was capable of work.

An appeal was registered on 6 October 2014 and the Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that, in accordance with statutory requirements, the Department was asked for the documentation in the case and the Deciding Officer's comments on the grounds of the appeal. In that context, an examination by another Medical Assessor will be carried out. The person concerned will be notified when arrangements for the examination have been completed.

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.

Mortgage Interest Supplement Payments

42. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will restore the mortgage interest supplement payment for struggling home owners to enable them to retain their homes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38804/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The original purpose of the mortgage interest supplement scheme was to provide short-term support to eligible people who are unable to meet their mortgage interest repayments in respect of a house which

is their sole place of residence. The supplement assists with the interest portion of the mortgage repayments only. There are currently approximately 6,700 people in receipt of mortgage interest supplement for which the Government has provided €17.9 million in 2014.

The Government's strategy to assist those in mortgage difficulty is built around the following measures, as recommended in the 2011 Interdepartmental Mortgage Arrears Working Group (Keane Group), in four main distinct areas:

- Lenders providing sustainable and durable resolution options to their borrowers.
- A social housing response (Mortgage to Rent).
- Comprehensive advice to borrowers.
- Personal Insolvency Reform.

In the context of the overall strategy, the continued payment of mortgage interest supplement does little to assist recipients in improving the long term difficulty in addressing their mortgage problem and provides little incentive for the lender to provide sustainable solutions.

The most appropriate way in which customers experiencing mortgage difficulties can be supported is through engagement with their lender under the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process (MARP) which explores the various options available to the person and provides sustainable solutions.

As part of the fiscal adjustment required for Budget 2014, provision was made for the discontinuation of entitlement to mortgage interest supplement for all new applicants from 1 January 2014. Existing customers were not affected by this measure and may retain entitlement to the scheme, up to 1st January 2018. However, it would be expected that during this four year period, existing customers would no longer require this support through sustainable solutions being put in place with their lenders, securing employment or exit strategies sponsored by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, namely the mortgage-to-rent scheme.

Public Sector Staff Data

43. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of contracts of indefinite duration that have been sought and the number that have been granted in the years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014 in the public sector under the remit of her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38845/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department does not maintain records on the number of contracts of indefinite duration that have been sought.

The following table details the number of contracts of indefinite duration that have been awarded in the Department and in the agencies under its remit.

-	Dept of Social Protection	Citizens Information Board	Pensions Ombudsman	Pensions Authority
2007	Nil	8	Nil	Nil
2008	Nil	4	Nil	Nil
2009	10*	1	Nil	Nil

-	Dept of Social Protection	Citizens Information Board	Pensions Ombudsman	Pensions Authority
2010	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
2011	1	1	Nil	Nil
2012	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
2013	1	Nil	Nil	1
2014	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

*In 2009, the CPSU made a claim with the Department of Foreign Affairs on behalf of 10 Temporary Clerical Officers based in the Passport Office, for contracts of indefinite duration (CID). The CIDs were approved by the Department of Finance on the basis that the staff involved were to be employed by the Department of Social Protection who had an urgent requirement for staff at the time.

Insurance Coverage

44. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to householders in some types of housing, such as maisonettes, being denied insurance cover for their homes; if there are any measures under his remit to assist these householders; and if policy changes could assist those affected by this situation. [38669/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Neither I, as Minister for Finance, nor the Central Bank of Ireland, as Regulator, can compel insurers to quote for business. The decision to provide any specific form of insurance cover and the price at which it is offered is a commercial matter based on the assessment an insurer will make of the risks involved.

My officials have consulted with the Central Bank of Ireland and with Insurance Ireland on the matter. The Central Bank has advised that it is not aware of any issues particular to maisonettes at this time. Insurance Ireland, which represents 95% of the market, has advised that maisonette insurance is available within the insurance market here.

Insurance companies, as a matter of course, carry out reviews of the risks against which they are prepared to insure and sometimes make decisions to discontinue certain types of cover which they consider high risk. These types of decisions are made sometimes on the basis of their broad past experience rather than looking at the individual circumstances of householders.

Insurance Ireland operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to obtaining insurance. They have advised that they may be in a position to assist if a proposer has difficulty in obtaining an insurance quote. Their service can be contacted at (01) 676 1914 or by email at iis@insuranceireland.eu.

State Savings Schemes

45. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on correspondence in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38600/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In response to the issue raised, it should be clarified that State Savings is not a 'body', but rather is the brand name used to describe the savings products issued by me, as Minister for Finance, to personal savers through the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA).

The Minister for Finance has never been subject to the regulation of the Central Bank. However, the NTMA, in issuing and administering these products on my behalf, makes every effort to keep customers fully informed of the relevant terms and conditions, as explained to this particular customer.

The NTMA has advised me that it does not accept this customer's contention that it "dis-guised, diminished and obscured key information". The particular product that was the subject of this correspondence is a variable interest rate deposit account. This fact was stated on the relevant brochure, on the basis of which the deposit holder made his investment decision. The NTMA (and its agents) regularly accepts feedback from the holders of State Savings products regarding the services provided, and in this case the NTMA adopted the customer's suggestion to include additional information in the relevant brochures and statements of account but this was in the context of reacting to customer feedback on ways to improve rather than accepting that there was an error in the original brochures.

VAT Rate Application

46. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance if he will retain the reduced VAT rate of 9% in forthcoming budget due to the success of this measure since its introduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38601/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The 9% reduced VAT rate for tourism related services was introduced in July 2011 as part of the Government Jobs Initiative. The measure was designed to boost tourism and create additional jobs in that sector. It is not the practice to comment on what measures may or may not be introduced in advance of the Budget.

Debt Collectors Regulation

47. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if debt collection firms used by various service providers are regulated entities; if there are controls on the number and nature of contact they may have with customers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38605/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank confirmed to me that Debt Collection Firms, that is, firms that seek to collect debt due on behalf of creditors are not subject to authorisation and supervision in their own right by the Central Bank of Ireland. The Central Bank of Ireland does, however, authorise and supervise debt management firms which provide advice to and/or negotiate on behalf of consumers in debt in accordance with provisions set out in Part V of the Central Bank Act, 1997 as amended.

However, where a firm regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland outsources an activity such as debt collection to another firm, the Consumer Protection Code has a specific provision which requires that any such outsourced activity must comply with the requirements of the Code (provision 2.10 of the Code <http://www.centralbank.ie/consumer/cpc/principles/Pages/home1.aspx>). The effect of this provision is that any company operating under an outsourcing arrangement from a regulated firm, must act in accordance with the rules of the Consumer Protection Code. There are similar provisions in the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA).

The Consumer Protection Code provides at paragraph 8.14

"Each calendar month, a regulated entity, and/or any third party acting on its behalf, must

not initiate more than three unsolicited communications, by whatever means, to a personal consumer in respect of arrears...”

Paragraph 22 of the CCMA provides

“A lender must ensure that:

a) the level of communications from the lender, or any third party acting on its behalf, is proportionate and not excessive, taking into account the circumstances of the borrowers, including that unnecessarily frequent communications are not made;

b) communications with borrowers are not aggressive, intimidating or harassing; ...”

Where a debt collection firm does not comply with such requirements, the Central Bank may impose penalties on the regulated firm concerned.

I should also point out that all debt collectors that operate across any or all sectors of the economy, including private individuals and debt collecting firms are subject to the provisions of the Non-Fatal Offences against the Person Act 1997. Under section 11 of this Act, it is an offence to demand payment of a debt in a way that is designed to cause alarm, distress or humiliation. A person found guilty of offences under this Act is subject to large fines and up to 14 years imprisonment.

Financial Services Regulation

48. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will have the Central Bank of Ireland introduce controls such as a mortgage cap of 80% on the value of a property to cool down the residential housing market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38661/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Central Bank of Ireland has recently published a Consultation Paper on macro-prudential policy for residential mortgage lending which sets out proposals to introduce new macro-prudential measures to enhance the resilience of the banking sector and households to housing market developments. The proposed measures outline restrictions on the loan to value (LTV) and loan to income (LTI) ratios lenders can apply when lending for house purchase and will apply to all lending in Ireland by regulated firms. According to the Central Bank, the measures propose to introduce proportionate limits and specific exemptions which take into consideration that there are some cases which could fall outside strict limits. A copy of the Consultation Paper is available on the Central Bank website (at <http://www.centralbank.ie/press-area/press-releases/Pages/CentralBankpublishesnewmacro-prudentialmeasuresformortgagelending.aspx>) and comments on the paper can be made electronically to realestate@centralbank.ie by 8 December 2014.

Pensions Levy

49. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the current policy on ending the pension levy on private pensions in view of previous commitments that the levy would last only a limited number of years and in view of the impact the levy is having on pensioners with low incomes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38755/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The position in this matter is that I announced in my Budget 2014 speech that the 0.6% Pension Fund Levy introduced to fund the

Jobs Initiative in 2011 would be abolished after this year. I did, however, introduce an additional levy on pension fund assets at a rate of 0.15% for 2014 and 2015. I did this to continue to help fund the Jobs Initiative and also to help make provision for potential State liabilities which may emerge from difficulties facing pension funds.

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

Tax Reliefs Application

50. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding graduate entry medicine loan relief. [38760/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The graduate entry programme provides undergraduate medical education of four years duration and has been developed to produce medical graduates with the ability to successfully undertake an internship and thereafter to gain full registration with the Medical Council. The programme is supported by a combination of student fees, State funding and other income.

While in this case the fees could be considered high, in the majority of cases where third level tuition fees are payable they are at much lower levels. In addition, those participating in the programme must already have acquired an undergraduate degree, the fees for which would have been covered by the State in the vast majority of cases.

I would point out that tax relief at the standard rate of 20% is available in respect of qualifying fees paid by an individual for a third level education course, including a postgraduate course.

Qualifying fees mean tuition fees in respect of an approved course at an approved college and includes what is referred to as the “student contribution”. No other fees e.g. administration fees, examination fees, capitation fees, qualify for tax relief. Tuition fees that are, or will be, met directly or indirectly by grant, scholarship, employer contribution or other means are deducted in arriving at the net qualifying fees. A claim for relief may be made in respect of a number of students.

In making a claim for relief for the tax year 2014, the maximum amount of fees that can qualify for the relief is €7,000 per student, but an amount set out in the legislation must be disregarded from each claim (whether in respect of one or more students). Where a claim for relief includes fees paid on behalf of at least one full-time student, the disregard is €2,750. Where a claim for relief includes fees solely paid on behalf of a part-time student or part-time students, the amount disregarded is €1,375. Thus, for example, an individual undertaking a graduate entry medical course on a full-time basis, where tuition fees of €15,000 per student apply, would attract relief of €850 made up as follows:

-	€
Tuition fees	€15,000
Capped at	€7,000
Less	€2,750
	€4,250 @ 20% = €850

It is a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions. However, as with all

tax reliefs, the introduction of tax relief for loans taken out to pursue the graduate entry medical programme will be considered in the context of the forthcoming Budget and Finance Bill and any announcements will be made on Budget Day.

Revenue Commissioners Resources

51. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the opening for the Revenue Commissioners office (details supplied) in County Wexford are limited to 9.30 a.m. to 1 p.m. from Monday to Friday; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38770/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that in 2011 the opening hours of the five public counter locations in Revenue's East and South East region were reduced, following an overall reduction in demand for these services. This reduction in hours included the public office located at Anne St. Wexford. Taking account of the reduced demand for service at the public offices, and also to ensure that resources were available to deliver customer service efficiently across all contact channels, the decision was made to reduce the hours of service delivery to 9.30 am to 1.00 pm daily. It is possible to arrange an appointment outside of the normal public counter opening hours.

There are a range of options available to taxpayers in the East and South East region who wish to contact Revenue. PAYE customers should use the Lo Call number 1890 44 44 25 between the hours of 10.00 am and 4.00 pm daily Monday to Friday inclusive, Telephone services for business taxpayers depend on the Revenue District in which they reside, a special Locall number 1890 200 255 is available for Local Property Tax enquiries and there are separate helplines for Employers and for contacts with the Collector General. There is also a facility to contact Revenue through the secure email system.

Revenue continues to update and improve delivery of service through electronic means. These include Revenue's on line service (ROS) and PAYE Anytime Service which are available on a 24 hour, 7 day basis.

Tax Code

52. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance if in view of the obesity epidemic here, and especially the need to reduce consumption of sugar sweetened drinks, he will consider the introduction of a tax on sugar sweetened drinks in the budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38817/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): It is not my practice to comment on what measures may or may not be introduced in advance of the Budget.

Public Sector Staff Data

53. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Finance the number of temporary contracts in place for the public sector as a whole, including State agencies and other public bodies under the remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38829/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I wish to advise the Deputy that there are currently 5 staff on temporary contracts in my Department. In relation to bodies under the remit of my Department, I have been advised by the Credit Union Restructuring Board

(ReBo) that there are 7 staff members on temporary contracts and in relation to the Revenue Commissioners, as of 30 September 2014 a total of 171 staff are employed on temporary contracts as temporary clerical officers, primarily in relation to the Local Property Tax and Household Charge Arrears.

The following offices have advised that there are no temporary contracts in place: Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau, NTMA and the Central Bank.

Public Sector Staff Data

54. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Finance the number of contracts of indefinite duration that have been sought and the number that have been granted in the years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014 in the public sector under the remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38840/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I wish to advise the Deputy that there have been no contracts of indefinite duration sought or granted in the years 2007 to date in 2014. However I have been advised by the Central Bank that in their recruitment process, a role is either Fixed-Term Contract or Contract of Indefinite Duration at the time of recruitment and as such a person is recruited on this basis. If a person is recruited in a temporary role they can apply for other permanent roles that may arise or if business needs dictate that their role is more permanent in nature, they can be converted to Contract of Indefinite Duration subject to the appropriate sign off. In relation to the Revenue Commissioners, they have advised me that they did not seek any contracts of indefinite duration in respect of the period 1 January 2007 to date. By way of clarification they advised that three temporary clerical officers unsuccessfully claimed contracts of indefinite duration during this period. The following offices have advised that no contracts of indefinite duration were sought or granted in the years 2007 to date in 2014: Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau, NTMA and Rebo.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

55. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on an end to the moratorium on recruitment and promotion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38322/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The restriction on recruitment and promotion in the Public Service has achieved two important objectives: firstly, it has helped to reduce the Exchequer pay bill, which had reached an unsustainable level; secondly, it has provided a real impetus for Public Service Reform and the roll out of new and more efficient ways of delivering public services, underpinned by agreed workplace reforms, unprecedented levels of staff redeployment and additional hours. In this regard, it has been a hugely successful policy instrument.

There are pressures across the system. This is why the Government responded last year and provided additional resources in Health and Education, in particular. In addition, throughout the Moratorium there has been targeted recruitment across many areas of the Public Service where priority staff were required.

As for the future, resource needs over the medium term have been examined as part of the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure, the outcome of which will help inform Budget decisions and measures to be announced next week.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

56. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will report on the progress of Clanmoyle flood alleviation scheme phase two; if funding is in place to complete Clanmoyle flood alleviation scheme phase (detail supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38645/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): A study completed in 2010 by consultants commissioned by Dublin City Council recommended that flooding caused by the River Wad should be addressed in three phases, with a total estimated cost of approximately €20m. The Council agreed with the Office of Public Works (OPW) that the initial focus would be on Phase 1, which would address flooding in the vicinity of Clanmoyle Estate. These works are being funded by the OPW and are being undertaken by OPW direct labour. The works should be completed in the coming weeks, with the exception of some mechanical and electrical works relating to a pump station in the Clanmoyle area, which will run into early 2015.

Dublin City Council has indicated there are further elements of Phase 1 which will be undertaken by the Council shortly, including works in the Howth Road, Collins Avenue East, and Clontarf Road areas, which will take approximately 12 months to complete. The progression of these works is a matter for the Council.

While informal discussions have taken place regarding funding for the remaining phases recommended by the consultants' study, Dublin City Council has not as yet made a formal application for funding in respect of these to the OPW. When an application is made, it will be considered having regard to OPW's overall availability of funding for flood risk management.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

57. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans for flooding alleviation projects to be carried out in Ballylongford, County Kerry, in view of the flooding that has taken place over the past number of winters. [38648/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): It is a matter for Kerry County Council, in the first instance, to investigate and address flooding issues in the County. The Office of Public Works (OPW) has no flood defence assets in Ballylongford and, therefore, has no direct responsibility for maintaining or improving existing flood defences. However, Ballylongford was identified through the national Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment as an area where the flood risk was potentially significant. It is therefore designated as an area for which detailed analysis is being carried out under the Shannon Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Study, which OPW is currently undertaking in partnership with the relevant local authorities including Kerry County Council. The engineering consultancy company Jacobs Engineering has been commissioned to carry out the work on behalf of the OPW.

The analysis under the CFRAM project will enable flood maps to be produced in 2014 and the identification of flood risk management options for this area in 2015. There will be public consultation on the draft flood maps within the next couple of months and this will be advertised locally.

Following the significant flood events earlier this year, Jacobs were on site at Ballylongford collecting data on flood extents, levels and flood mechanism etc. This information will contrib-

ute to calibrating any flood modelling being produced for the town and thus ensuring any future mitigating measures proposed are robust and effective.

On a recent visit to Ballylongford, I met with local residents, Councillors and County Council officials and had the opportunity to see the flood prone areas and hear of the problems at first hand. At that meeting Kerry County Council indicated that it would be making a submission shortly to the OPW for funding under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme to undertake some interim flood protection measures that could be carried out pending the completion of the CFRAM process. Any application received will be assessed under the eligibility criteria of the Scheme, including a requirement that any measures are cost beneficial, and having regard to the overall availability of funding. It is also open to local authorities to carry out flood mitigation and coastal protection works using their own resources.

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Scheme

58. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on the installation of carbon monoxide alarms in appropriate locations in all State owned buildings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38672/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The primary control of the risk of carbon monoxide in fuel burning installations must be the provision of adequate ventilation. This is reflected in the Building Regulations and other relevant standards. Proper maintenance is another factor which reduces this risk. Carbon monoxide alarms are very useful in ensuring the safety of people where these controls fail. The current Building Regulations have a requirement for the installation of carbon monoxide alarms in dwellings in specific circumstances.

Public Service Reform Plan Update

59. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which targets set by his Department across all Government Departments have been met and continue to be met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38732/14]

60. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he continues to be satisfied regarding the progress made over the past three and a half in the areas of reform resulting in the elimination of waste or duplicative spending; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38733/14]

62. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the Departments and bodies under their aegis that are likely to have to make greater efforts to achieve targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38735/14]

63. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he remains satisfied that all Departments and public bodies under their aegis continue to make equal efforts to remain within budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38737/14]

64. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the full extent of savings made by each Department and its subservient bodies over the past three and a half years under the separate headings of reform and reduced expenditure or elimination of waste; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38738/14]

65. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on the scope for minor relaxation of efforts to curtail expenditure in areas that have preformed well in the past three and a half years but where the needs may have changed such as in the public housing programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38739/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 59, 60 and 62 to 65, inclusive, together.

Managing the delivery of public services within Departmental Budgetary allocations is a key responsibility of each Minister and Department, and several measures are in place to help ensure that these budgetary targets continue to be met. My Department is in regular communication with all Departments and Offices to ensure that expenditure is being controlled and we monitor the drawdown of funds from the Exchequer against Departmental published expenditure profiles. Overall net expenditure to end-September, 2014 amounted to €30,982 million. This was broadly on target at just €14 million ahead of profile. The year-on-year reduction in expenditure amounted to €630 million, a decrease of 2.0%.

With regard to the progress made on reform, since this Government took office, sustainable and far reaching Public Service Reform has been a key element of our strategy to meet the challenges that have faced the country in recent years. Public Service Reform will also continue to play a key role in our recovery.

We published our first Public Service Reform Plan in November 2011. A Progress Report on the Reform Plan was published in September 2012 and a second Progress Report was published in January this year (www.reformplan.per.gov.ie). These reports set out the significant progress that has been made to date.

Some examples of this progress include:

- while meeting increased demand for services, we have reduced staff numbers by around 32,000 or 10% since 2008 and the paybill has been reduced from €17.5 billion in 2009 to a forecasted €13.6 billion net by end 2014;

- new working arrangements have been introduced, including longer working hours, new rosters, and standardised arrangements for annual leave and sick leave;

- we are implementing a radical overhaul of our approach to public procurement, with the Office of Government Procurement targeting savings of €500 million over three years;

- Peoplepoint the Civil Service wide Human Resources and Pensions Shared Services Centre has been operational since March last year and now services over 25,000 employees across 19 organisations;

- an Action Plan to deliver efficiencies in the State's property portfolio was published in mid 2013 and is currently being implemented;

- we have issued over 800,000 Public Services Cards, which are currently being used for social welfare payments and the free travel scheme, and will cover a greater range of services over time;

- the Office of Government Chief Information Officer has been established to maximise the potential benefits of digitalisation in delivering services and information;

- the Government services portal - www.gov.ie - includes quick links to more than 400 information and transaction services;

- we have launched a new Open Data portal - www.data.gov.ie - and a consultation process on data sharing;

- a series of public expenditure reforms have been implemented to bring greater structure, scrutiny and openness to budgeting;

- we are making good progress in implementing our programme of political and legislative reform, aimed at enhancing openness, transparency and accountability; and

- we will shortly publish a Civil Service Renewal Plan setting out a new vision and strategy for the Civil Service.

In January this year, I published the Government's second Public Service Reform Plan 2014-2016. The actions set out in the Reform Plan include greater use of shared services and innovative approaches to service delivery; increased use of technology and improved engagement with service users; more efficient and effective public procurement and property management; increased accountability and transparency in public decision making; enhanced leadership and performance management; and a continued focus on building the required capacity and capability to deliver reform and service improvements across the Public Service. Overall, I am satisfied that both the strong progress made to date and our future plans are in line with best practice across Europe and that the progress we are making is well regarded internationally.

In relation to the upcoming Budget, this Government has made some very difficult but necessary decisions over the past 3 years, decisions which have resulted in the restoration of a sustainable and viable economic future for the citizens of this Country. The Comprehensive Review of Expenditure is currently being concluded and will inform Government decisions that will underpin the basis of the multi-annual expenditure ceilings which will be published as part of the Comprehensive Expenditure Report 2015-2017. The exact expenditure measures required to meet these targets will be agreed by Government in the context of Budget 2015 taking into account macroeconomic developments.

Public Service Reform Plan Update

61. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which he is satisfied that reforms and efficiencies throughout the public sector are in line with best practice throughout Europe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38734/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Since this Government took office, sustainable and far reaching Public Service Reform has been a key element of our strategy to meet the challenges that have faced the country in recent years. Public Service Reform will also continue to play a key role in our recovery.

We published our first Public Service Reform Plan in November 2011. A Progress Report on the Reform Plan was published in September 2012 and a second Progress Report was published in January this year (available at www.reformplan.per.gov.ie). These reports set out the significant progress that has been made to date.

Some examples of this progress include:

- while meeting increased demand for services and a growing population, we have reduced staff numbers by around 32,000 or 10% since 2008 and the paybill has been reduced from €17.5 billion in 2009 to a forecasted €13.6 billion net by end 2014;

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- new working arrangements have been introduced, including longer working hours, new rosters, and standardised arrangements for annual leave and sick leave;
- we are implementing a radical overhaul of our approach to public procurement, with the Office of Government Procurement targeting savings of €500 million over three years;
- Peoplepoint the Civil Service wide Human Resources and Pensions Shared Services Centre has been operational since March last year and now services over 25,000 employees across 19 organisations;
- an Action Plan to deliver efficiencies in the State's property portfolio was published in mid 2013 and is currently being implemented;
- we have issued over 800,000 Public Services Cards, which are currently being used for social welfare payments and the free travel scheme, and will cover a greater range of services over time;
- the Office of Government Chief Information Officer has been established to maximise the potential benefits of digitalisation in delivering services and information;
- the Government services portal - www.gov.ie - includes quick links to more than 400 information and transaction services;
- we have launched a new Open Data portal - www.data.gov.ie - and a consultation process on data sharing;
- a series of public expenditure reforms have been implemented to bring greater structure, scrutiny and openness to budgeting;
- we are making good progress in implementing our programme of political and legislative reform, aimed at enhancing openness, transparency and accountability; and
- we will shortly publish a Civil Service Renewal Plan setting out a new vision and strategy for the Civil Service.

In January this year, I published the Government's second Public Service Reform Plan 2014-2016. There are over 230 specific actions set out in the Reform Plan including greater use of shared services and innovative approaches to service delivery; increased use of technology and improved engagement with service users; more efficient and effective public procurement and property management; increased accountability and transparency in public decision making; enhanced leadership and performance management; and a continued focus on building the required capacity and capability to deliver reform and service improvements across the Public Service. The new Reform Plan is also available at www.reformplan.per.gov.ie.

Overall, I am satisfied that we have made very strong progress to date in an environment that has been significantly more challenging than most other EU Member States. Our future plans are in line with, and frequently exceed, best practice across Europe and our progress has been noted and is well regarded internationally. The levels of reform we have delivered could not have happened without the efforts and commitment of our public servants and I commend them for their contribution to date.

Questions Nos. 62 to 65, inclusive, answered with Question No. 59.

Housing Issues

66. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if it is possible to approve a mechanism to fund the purchase of existing and-or construction of new houses by the local authorities to meet the ever increasing housing crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38740/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As part of the Estimates and Budgetary process for 2015, the Government will be considering all options for increasing the supply of social housing, including the funding of the purchase of existing houses and the construction of new houses by local authorities.

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Programme

67. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he may through the aegis of his Department address areas of infrastructure deficiency throughout the county such as road, rail, telecommunications, energy, information technology including broadband with the object of encouraging economic development throughout the regions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38741/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): My Department is currently finalising a review of the public capital programme with a view to setting the Government's investment strategy and capital budget for the five year period ahead.

The key issues for the capital review will be the Government's economic and social priorities including the investments that would best support economic recovery and social progress.

Full details will be available in the capital review to be published on Budget day.

Public Service Reform Plan Update

68. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the objectives for his Department over the next five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38742/14]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The key objectives for my department over the next five years, as I see it, will be:

(a) To manage public expenditure at sustainable levels in a planned, rational and balanced manner in support of Ireland's economic development and social progress; and

(b) To have public administration and Government structures that are transparent, effective, efficient, innovative, accountable and responsive to the citizen.

A Statement of Strategy for my department for the period 2015-2017 will be finalised and published by the end of this year. This will detail in greater detail the strategic goals and actions to be undertaken by my Department in the period.

Tobacco Control Measures

69. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if the retail consultation forum meeting convened by his Department on 11 September 2014 considered the issue of the proposed licensing system in respect of the sale of tobacco products and

its likely impact on the retail trade, particularly in the convenience store and newsagent sector; if his Department has been consulted by the Department of Health in the preparation of a regulatory impact assessment for this measure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38658/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Retail Consultation Forum was established in June of this year to provide a platform for a structured engagement between the Retail sector and relevant Government Departments and agencies. The Forum has met on two occasions to date - firstly on 9 June and more recently on 11 September. The Forum membership includes retail representatives of both convenience stores and newsagents' shops.

The issue of the proposed licensing of tobacco sales, particularly in the context of convenience stores, was raised by members of the Retail Consultation Forum in June and is an issue to be discussed further in the future work of the Forum. In order to facilitate that discussion, my Department is in the process of inviting a representative of the Department of Health to join the Retail Consultation Forum in relation to this matter and other issues relevant to that Department.

I understand that, as part of the Regulatory Impact Analysis and a wider consultation process, the Department of Health will be writing to relevant Government Departments to seek their views on the proposed legislation in relation to the sale of tobacco products and non-medicinal nicotine delivery systems (including e-cigarettes).

Public Sector Staff Data

70. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of temporary contracts in place for the public sector as a whole, including State agencies and other public bodies under the remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38831/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has no public sector workers employed on temporary contracts. There are four statutory posts where the current incumbents would have fixed term contracts with the Department. These are the Chairperson of the Labour Court, the Chief Executive of the Labour Relations Commission, the Director of the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement, and the Controller of Patents in the Patents Office.

In replying, I have excluded those staff whose assignments in the Department are directly linked to my term of office as Minister, or the term of office of the two Ministers of State assigned to the Department.

I have asked all Agencies under the aegis of my Department to advise me of the number of public sector workers employed on temporary or non-permanent contracts, and I will communicate that information to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Public Sector Staff Data

71. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of contracts of indefinite duration that have been sought and the number that have been granted in the years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014 in the public sector

under the remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38843/14]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Recruitment of staff to my Department is conducted through the Public Appointments Service (PAS), including through the redeployment mechanism introduced by Government to manage the reduction of numbers employed in the public sector in recent times.

Aside from the Chief Executive of the Labour Relations Commission (LRC), there are no contracts of indefinite duration for any staff in my Department - the staffing of the LRC being part of my Department's staffing complement. The contract of the Chief Executive of the LRC, whose contract has been extended over the years since his initial appointment in 1991, may, in accordance with Section 28 of the Industrial Relations Act 1990, be terminated by the Minister at any time subject to appropriate notice.

Personal appointments by Ministers (Special Adviser, Personal Assistant, Personal Secretary, Civilian Driver) are co-terminous with the period of office of the relevant Minister and are not considered contracts of indefinite duration in the normal sense.

Finally, I have asked the Agencies under the aegis of my Department to advise me of the number of contracts of indefinite duration as requested by the Deputy, and I will communicate that information to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Agriculture Schemes Payments

72. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive their area-based farm payment and their single farm payment; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38545/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payments under the 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme began issuing, on target, on 24 September. Processing of the application of the person named has recently been finalised, with payment due to issue shortly, directly to the nominated bank account of the person named. In relation to the Single Farm Payment, I can confirm that 50% advance payments will commence on 16 October 2014 as provided for in the relevant EU Regulations.

Agriculture Schemes Payments

73. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding an agri-environment option scheme payment and area aid payments in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38598/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced in AEOS 3 on 1 May 2013. The holding was selected for an on the spot inspection which was carried out on 29 April 2014. Payment in respect of 75% of the payment due for 2013 issued on 30 June 2014 and the balancing payment will issue shortly. Payments under the 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme began issuing, on target, on 24 September. Processing of the application of the person named has recently been finalised, with payment due to issue shortly, directly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Agriculture Schemes Payments

74. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding an application for the area-based payment in respect of a persons (details supplied) in County Mayo; when payment will be expected to be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38599/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payments under the 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme began issuing, on target, on 24 September. Processing of the application of the persons named has recently been finalised, with payment due to issue shortly, directly to the nominated bank account of the applicants.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

75. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Cork will receive the balance of their single farm payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38606/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): A review of the land parcels declared by the person named under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme revealed that a number of the land parcels declared by the person named contained ineligible features. Following an appeal from the person named, a visit by a Department official to verify the position was necessary to progress the matter. The person named was notified of the outcome of the inspection in a letter dated 14 July 2014 and advised of the right of appeal to the independently-chaired LPIS Appeals Committee. The results of the verification visit were processed and the amount due under the Single Payment Scheme due was issued in two separate payments on 25 August and 30 September 2014 respectively.

Fisheries Offences

76. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has received correspondence from the Irish Fish Processors and Exporters Association; his views on the correspondence received; the actions taken by his Department on foot of the correspondence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38626/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): 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.

The permits which allow in-factory weighing had 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 had 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.

The current position is that all pelagic processing premises have applied for weigh permits on foot of an undertaking by each to work to a scheduled programme of correction and amendment to in-factory systems and work practice. Weigh permits under the new requirements, have been issued to all applicants by the SFPA.

Ongoing monitoring of the compliance with the in-factory requirements as specified in being undertaken by SFPA while the routine of landing controls and in-factory assessment and verifications of weights attained is also being monitored.

A weekly teleconference between SFPA and representatives of the catching and processing sectors is in train and will allow for operational matters as may arise to be tabled, discussed and resolved.

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.

Fisheries Protection

77. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a submission received from Inver Traditional Inshore Fishermen's Association on a review of management arrangements for mackerel and herring fishery in Inver Bay and surroundings by means of a ring net; his views on this submission; his plans to implement any of the proposals contained therein; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38627/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I have considered the request from the Inver Traditional Inshore Fishermen's Association for a Herring and Mackerel fishery ring fenced for members of the Inver Traditional Inshore Fishermen's Association. Under management arrangements introduced in 2010 for mackerel and in 2011 for herring in the North West (Area VIaS) smaller vessels have access to these stocks on the following basis. In the North West, an open herring fishery was established of up to 5% of the Area VIa South adjusted quota, to provide modest monthly catch limits, for vessels under 20m length overall. No booking-in is required. Draft ring net fisherman were accommodated under

this allocation.

In relation to Mackerel there are two fisheries for small boats. Vessels under 18m in overall length, using trawls or gill nets, have access to a periodic boat catch limit (e.g. monthly, bi-monthly), subject to available quota. There is also a Hook and line fishery for vessels under 15m in overall length. Vessels using hooks and line to fish for mackerel may not engage in trawling or gill netting in the same trip as they fish using hook and line fishing gear. 400t of mackerel is reserved each year for the hook and line fishery.

Periodic allocations are made available for operators covered by these arrangements. Each month I receive recommendations from industry representatives at the Quota Management Advisory Committee in relation to the monthly amounts available to the small boat herring and mackerel. In some months the North West herring small boat fishing allocation has covered a two monthly period to facilitate smaller boats. The views of the ITIFA and other local groups representing operators should be made known to the Producer Organisations which represent operators at the monthly Quota Management Advisory Committee meetings.

The submission from the ITIFA notes the difficulties posed for members due the requirement to notify the SFPA in advance of landings greater than 250kg. The requirement for the prior notification of landing is recommended of the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority, which is the competent body for fisheries control. Any difficulties which arise in meeting the obligation should, in the first instance, be taken up with the SFPA.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

78. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Cork will receive a disadvantaged areas payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38647/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Eligible applicants for the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme in 2014 must have met (a) a minimum stocking density of 0.3 livestock units per hectare in 2011, or have been granted derogation and (b) 0.15 livestock units per hectare in 2014. The person named is one of a number of applicants under the 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, whose cases were impacted upon by the requirement to have achieved a minimum stocking density of 0.3 livestock units per forage hectare in 2011.

The person named applied for derogation from these requirements, which was unsuccessful. The person named was informed accordingly and was advised of her right to pursue the matter with the Independent Agricultural Appeals Committee. The committee upheld the original decision and advised the person named of the right to pursue the matter with the Office of the Ombudsman.

Public Sector Staff Data

79. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of temporary contracts in place for the public sector as a whole, including State agencies and other public bodies under the remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38822/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The total number of staff in my Department currently employed on temporary contracts is three. The

provision of similar information in respect of State Bodies under the aegis of my Department is a matter for the bodies themselves.

Public Sector Staff Data

80. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of contracts of indefinite duration that have been sought and the number that have been granted in the years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014 in the public sector under the remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38833/14]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The number of staff currently serving in my Department who have been granted contracts of indefinite duration since 2007 is nine. The contracts were granted as follows: three in 2009; five in 2010, and one in 2013.

Departmental Contracts Data

81. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Defence the number of temporary contracts in place for the public sector as a whole, including State agencies and other public bodies under the remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38826/14]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Defence Organisation includes civil servants, military personnel, and civilian employees attached to military installations. My Department has engaged two persons to act as civilian drivers to the Minister of State, and these appointments are to temporary unestablished positions in the Civil Service on a fixed term contract basis.

A total of 13 civilian employees of this Department attached to military installations are currently employed on temporary fixed-term contracts.

In addition, in line with the provisions of the section 2(5) of the Ombudsman (Defence Forces) Act 2004, the Ombudsman for the Defence Forces was appointed by the President on the recommendation of the Government in 2012 to serve as Ombudsman for a fixed period of time.

Departmental Contracts Data

82. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Defence the number of contracts of indefinite duration that have been sought and the number that have been granted in the years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014 in the public sector under the remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38837/14]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): I understand that the question relates to employees who received contracts of indefinite duration subsequent to holding one or more fixed-term contracts of employment. The Defence Organisation includes civil servants, military personnel and civilian employees attached to military installations.

In relation to the civilian employee workforce of this Department, a relatively small number of employees were engaged on fixed-term contracts of employment during the years in question in circumstances where there was a temporary requirement for their services. During this

period, the number of civilian employees on fixed-term contracts of employment who received contracts of indefinite duration is as follows:

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014 (to date)
Nil	Nil	1	Nil	2	Nil	1	Nil

Contracts of indefinite duration were granted where it was determined that there was an operational requirement to retain the employees in question in the Department's employment on a permanent basis.

No contracts of indefinite duration were sought or granted in relation to the civil service or military elements of the Defence Organisation.

Anti-Social Behaviour

83. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the recent discussions she has had recently with An Garda Síochána regarding the problem of anti-social behaviour on Dublin city streets (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38579/14]

84. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views that urgent action is needed to address the problem of anti-social behaviour, including drug-taking and aggressive begging on Dublin city streets (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38580/14]

88. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views that more gardaí are needed to patrol Dublin city centre (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38659/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 83, 84 and 88 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the deployment of Garda personnel and Garda operations in tackling crime and anti-social behaviour in Dublin city centre. From my discussions with the Garda authorities I am assured that Garda management in the Dublin Metropolitan Region keep this deployment under continuing review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities, including with respect to concerns about public order and anti-social behaviour, so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of policing resources.

I do of course appreciate the issues of concern which the Deputy has raised and would draw his attention to the Dublin City Centre Policing Plan which has been operational since June 2013. Garda actions under the Plan include dedicated high visibility patrols in key commercial and public thoroughfares. These patrols are informed by crime trends, demand studies and footfall in the areas in question. I am also aware that An Garda Síochána engages extensively with business and community interests in the city centre area with respect to crime prevention, enforcement and policing concerns.

The Garda approach includes focusing resources on specific areas of the city according to need. As part of this, a number of targeted city centre policing operations are in place.

These operations include Operation Pier, which concentrates on the South Quays and Tem-

ple Bar area. This operation includes the designation of certain areas as “hotspots” for anti-social behaviour and regular uniformed and plain clothes patrols. Other Garda Operations in the city centre include Operation Spire which is focussed on the O’Connell Street and North Inner City areas, and Operation Stilts which is an ongoing overt policing operation targeting anti-social behaviour and drug-related crime in Dublin city centre locations.

I am conscious of the perspectives of business and community interests about the effects of certain types of crime and anti-social behaviour on the environment for business and leisure and on the overall quality of life for residents. Some of the problems faced are linked to disorder associated with abuse of alcohol and An Garda Síochána work closely with a wide range of businesses involved in the entertainment and nighttime economy to address these issues so that people can enjoy themselves without concern for their welfare.

Other challenges have their origin in even more complex social phenomena which go well beyond the capacity of criminal justice agencies to address on their own. Dealing with these matters requires a co-ordinated approach from state agencies involved in social, housing, health and drug treatment services, as well as through partnership with business, community and voluntary groups. An Garda Síochána is already a long term partner in a range of local consultative and representative structures in Dublin and elsewhere. I am considering how we can step up this cooperation with a view to developing collaborative solutions to the range of issues which affect policing and the overall quality of the environment in our urban centres, and I intend to engage further with the Garda authorities in that regard.

Marriage Equality Referendum

85. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason there is a delay in setting the date for the marriage equality referendum due some time in 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38607/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): There is no delay in setting the date for the marriage equality referendum. As the Deputy is aware, the Government decided, in November 2013, that a referendum should be held in the first half of 2015 on the issue of marriage equality. Preparatory work is under way in this regard. The Government will decide and announce a date for the referendum in due course.

Garda Training

86. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when more Garda recruits will begin training; if there is a schedule in place for recruiting and the training of new recruits; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38642/14]

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 seamless recruitment and I am discussing the details of this with my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

In relation to training, in February 2008 the Garda Commissioner established a group to review training and development for Garda and civilian staff in the Garda Síochána. The report of the review group was published in May 2009 and the contents were noted by the Government of the time.

The objective of the Review Group was to make recommendations to improve and reinvigorate Garda training in line with best practice in order to meet the new challenges of a changing society. One of the Key Recommendations identified by the group was that the student/probationer training programme should be radically restructured.

The course for Garda trainees is a high level BA course, which necessitates a certain academic capability. The revised training programme stemming from the recommendations of the Review Group was devised in order to better prepare recruits for the modern policing environment.

The main differences between the new and the previous programme is that the new programme carries a greater emphasis on operational policing and focuses on real life scenarios which in turn prepare students for the policing challenges they will face. The new programme will also instil a lifelong learning philosophy for members of the Garda Síochána, with a suite of mandatory and elective courses made available.

The restructured student/probationer training will be carried out in three phases. Phase I is for 32 weeks at the Garda College, at the end of which successful students will be attested (i.e. become members of the Garda Síochána with full police powers). Phase II is for 65 weeks based in Garda stations, and Phase III consists of seven weeks of exam preparation, exams and assessments (total 104 weeks).

Garda Station Refurbishment

87. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide details of the planned works to be carried out at Newcastle West Garda station in County Limerick following the amalgamation of the Newcastle West and Askeaton districts; when it is likely that these works will be carried out; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38649/14]

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

In that context, I am advised that proposals for refurbishment works at Newcastle West Garda Station are currently being examined. These proposals will be progressed in the context of An Garda Síochána's identified accommodation priorities and the availability of funding within the vote of the Office of Public Works.

Question No. 88 answered with Question No. 83.

Drugs Dealing

89. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if her attention has been drawn to the fact that an area (details supplied) in Dublin 3 is a social housing complex where drugs are sold freely; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38668/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the matter raised and will be in further contact with the Deputy when that report is to hand.

Garda Confidential Recipient

90. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will review the confidential recipient process under which gardaí make internal complaints; her views on bringing it within the remit of the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38696/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I presume the Deputy is referring to the system whereby members of An Garda Síochána can report instances where they believe there may be corruption or malpractice within the Garda Síochána.

The Garda Síochána (Confidential Reporting of Corruption or Malpractice) Regulations 2007 provided for the appointment of an independent Confidential Recipient to whom members of the Force, and civilian support staff, could report, in full confidence, instances where they believe there may be corruption or malpractice within the Force.

The Protected Disclosures Act 2014 came into operation on 15 July 2014. This Act revoked the Garda Síochána (Confidential Reporting of Malpractice and Corruption) Regulations 2007 and provided for the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission to be prescribed as a body to which disclosures may be made by members of the Garda Síochána. On 23 July 2014 GSOC was prescribed under section 7 of the Act as a body to receive protected disclosures.

Members of An Garda Síochána may now communicate their concerns in full confidence to the Garda Commissioner or to the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission as a prescribed body under the Act.

Departmental Bodies Expenditure

91. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide in tabular form the amounts invoiced, allocated or assigned by her Department to other public bodies and agencies, including the National Museum, National Disability Authority, Equality Authority and Office of the Director of Equality Investigations, for information communication and technology services for each year from 2010 to date in 2014; the factors which determine those costs, such as the number of users or storage capacity used or similar; the amounts paid by public bodies and agencies either to her Department or to ICT providers each year for these services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38701/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have included the data relative to the Deputy's request in the table. These data are for agencies which have been part of my Department's ICT Shared Service during the period in question. The amounts shown represent total costs incurred by those agencies for all information and communications technology services in the years specified. These services are provided across a number of contracts and the factors which determine the cost for any agency are based on usage, level and type of ICT environment used and the level of project activity in any reporting period.

In relation to the specific agencies referenced, the Deputy should note that the National Museum is not, nor has it been, under the aegis of my Department while the Office of the Director of Equality Investigations is a former name of the Equality Tribunal (which is included in the Table).

Agency	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Charities Regulation Unit	€0.00	€374.33	€917.10	€957.79	€88,967.18

Agency	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Coroners Service	€3,920.86	€7,478.40	€443.50	€397.41	€212.00
Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal	€290.38	€936.89	€761.68	€1,133.48	€709.07
Data Protection Commissioner	€14,561.64	€5,429.85	€8,834.48	€11,251.28	€8,458.11
Equality Tribunal	€13,040.61	€106,185.59	€76,338.11	€67,718.16	€0.00
Garda Complaints Board	€404.75	€898.23	€493.22	€56.61	€0.00
Garda Inspectorate	€37,034.08	€24,913.73	€9,464.87	€6,664.61	€4,027.13
Independent Review Mechanism Garda Allegations	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€2,634.78
Insolvency Service Ireland	€0.00	€0.00	€301.97	€1,024,510.04	€269,349.67
Inspectorate of Prisons and Places of Detention	€6,217.72	€4,290.82	€2,333.82	€2,723.90	€1,708.88
Irish Film Classification Office	€2,208.99	€638.63	€1,037.84	€1,275.57	€419.75
Equality Authority	€253.52	€105,712.76	€68,544.48	€63,189.15	€38,654.28
National Disability Authority	€14,002.62	€119,567.03	€109,241.67	€99,706.70	€63,663.95
Property Services Regulatory Authority (PSRA)	€18,107.16	€17,670.03	€2,360.68	€40,023.84	€1,924.72
Office for Internet Safety	€903.73	€740.85	€817.98	€366.89	€244.20
Parole Board	€249.00	€549.80	€422.39	€332.01	€209.98
Private Security Authority	€37,283.93	€27,182.46	€16,225.03	€16,616.60	€6,056.56
State Pathology	€41,089.88	€8,218.63	€2,569.13	€2,151.69	€1,065.87

Crime Data

92. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide detailed breakdown of break-ins, burglaries and crime in the Ballycragh, Ballycullen and Firhouse areas of County Dublin; and if the results indicate a need for a more overt Garda presence in these communities. [38708/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Garda Síochána Act 2005 makes provision for the compilation and publication of crime statistics by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose.

I have requested the CSO to provide relevant statistics and information directly to the Deputy.

In relation to the deployment of Garda resources in the areas referred to, the Deputy will appreciate that this is an operational matter for the Garda authorities. In this regard I am assured that local Garda management keeps the deployment of resources under continuing review in the context of crime trends and the policing needs of the community, so as to ensure that optimum use is made of policing resources and the best possible Garda service is provided to the public.

Immigration Status

93. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position

regarding residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38747/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The question of residency status does not arise at this time in the case of the person whose details were supplied. If the person has made an application for asylum or subsidiary protection the Deputy will be aware that it is not the practice to comment on such applications for so long as they remain in the protection process.

Immigration Status

94. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding a residency status in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 22; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38748/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The question of residency status does not arise at this time in the case of the person whose details were supplied. If the person has made an application for asylum or subsidiary protection the Deputy will be aware that it is not the practice to comment on such applications for so long as they remain in the protection process.

Immigration Status

95. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding residency status in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 24; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38749/14]

96. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding residency status in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 24; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38750/14]

97. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the determination of residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38751/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 95 to 97, inclusive, together.

I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the first named person was granted permission to remain in the State as the Spouse of an EU National who was exercising their EU Treaty Rights in this State. This permission to remain was valid until 24th January 2012. This permission was not renewed as the person concerned failed to submit satisfactory evidence of the EU citizen exercising his EU Treaty Rights in the State for a continuous period of five years. The person concerned was notified of this decision by letter dated 9th July 2012. The matter is now being considered by the Removals Section of INIS under Regulation 20 of the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons Regulations) 2006 and 2008.

With regard to the second named person, the person concerned is a EU national. The person concerned is entitled to remain in the State, whilst he is exercising his EU Treaty Rights.

With regard to the third named person, I am advised that the person concerned is not docu-

mented on INIS records.

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.

Immigration Status

98. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding residency in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 24; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38752/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that insufficient information was provided by the Deputy to enable them to identify the person referred to. The reference number provided by the Deputy relates to a different person. If the Deputy wishes to furnish further details, the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service will advise him of the position.

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.

Immigration Status

99. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the determination of residency in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 24; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38753/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the parents of the person concerned were granted permission to remain in the State in 2001 under the arrangements then in place for the non-EEA national parents of Irish born citizen children. The person concerned was granted permission to remain in the State for one year, on a stamp 4 basis from 23 January, 2014.

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.

Departmental Funding

100. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide in tabular form by county a breakdown of community alert scheme funding per annum from 2010

to 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38812/14]

101. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the changes that have occurred in community alert scheme funding in 2014; the planned reductions in staff administering this scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38813/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 100 and 101 together.

The funding provided by my Department to support the operation of the Community Alert Scheme for the years 2010 to 2014 is set out in the table below. This funding is provided to support the national administration of the scheme, including the work of its regional development officers, and it is not allocated on a county basis. As can be seen from the table, there has been no change in the funding provided by my Department between 2013 and 2014.

In relation to the other issues raised by the Deputy, the arrangements for the continuing management of the scheme will be discussed with Muintir na Tíre in the context of considering the question of funding for 2015, and having regard to the views of An Garda Síochána as the partners in the programme.

Community Alert funding provided to Muintir na Tíre by Department of Justice and Equality 2010 - 2014

YEAR	AMOUNT PAID (€)
2010	180,000
2011	160,000
2012	152,000
2013	152,000
2014	152,000

Departmental Contracts

102. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of contracts of indefinite duration that have been sought and the number that have been granted in the years 2007 to 2013, inclusive, and to date in 2014 in the public sector under the remit of her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38844/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): From a procurement perspective, no contracts of indefinite duration have been sought or granted by my Department from 2007 to 2014. My Department operates within EU and National legal procurement guidelines and all contracts are subject to periodic review.

Children in Care

103. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children currently in State care in the north Wexford area; the way this figure compares with the national average; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38688/14]

104. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the average duration children in the north Wexford area spend in State care; the way this duration compares with the national average; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38689/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 103 and 104 together.

I have been advised by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency (the Agency), that the information requested is not currently compiled in the form requested by the Deputy. The Agency has indicated that statistics are currently compiled on the basis of 17 administrative areas across the country and that information can be provided for the Waterford/Wexford area.

In relation to the number of children in care, I can advise that the Agency has indicated that as of 31 May 2014 there were 495 children in care and that this represented 69.1 children in care per 10,000 of the under 18 year old population in the Waterford/Wexford administrative area. The Agency has further advised that national total at 31 May 2014 was 6,517 children in care which represented 56.7 children in care per 10,000 of the under 18 year old population and that the average number of children in care per administrative area was 383 children.

Information on the duration has been requested from the Agency and I will revert to the Deputy when this information is to hand.

Public Sector Staff Data

105. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of temporary contracts in place for the public sector as a whole including State agencies and other public bodies under the remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38824/14]

106. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of contracts of indefinite duration that have been sought and the number that have been granted in the years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014 in the public sector under the remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38835/14]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 105 and 106 together.

There are ten staff members on temporary or other non-permanent contracts in my Department at present. Six of these are Ministerial appointments and each of these six contracts is coterminous with my appointment as Minister. In addition to these, my Department is currently employing three temporary clerical officers for project work as well as one work placement contracted under the Willing, Able and Mentoring Programme.

Since its establishment in June 2011, my Department has not granted any contracts of indefinite duration nor have any such contracts been sought.

My Department does not generally hold information relating to individual employees of the various agencies operating under the Department's remit, including the number of temporary contracts or contracts of indefinite duration sought or in place in the agencies. Accordingly, the information requested by the Deputy is not readily available. Officials of my Department have requested that the specific information requested be supplied directly to you by the agencies involved.

Tobacco Control Measures

107. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been

drawn to issues (details supplied) regarding the Public Health (Standardised Packaging of Tobacco) Bill 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38651/14]

108. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to issues (details supplied) regarding the Public Health (Standardised Packaging of Tobacco) Bill 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38652/14]

109. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to issues (details supplied) regarding the Public Health (Standardised Packaging of Tobacco) Bill 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38653/14]

110. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to issues (details supplied) regarding the Public Health (Standardised Packaging of Tobacco) Bill 2014. [38654/14]

135. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details regarding the Public Health (Standardised Packaging of Tobacco) Bill 2014 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38650/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 107 to 110, inclusive, and 135 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, Government approval was received on 19 November 2013 to proceed with drafting the Public Health (Standardised Packaging of Tobacco) Bill 2013. The legislation has now been passed by the Seanad and Second Stage of the Bill concluded in the Dáil last week.

As the Deputy will also be aware, on 17 June 2014, the Bill was formally notified to the Commission and to Member States under the EU Technical Standards Directive (98/34/EC) and the Tobacco Products Directive (2014/40/EU). On the same date, formal notification was made to the World Trade Organisation under the Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement under the Technical Standards process. The Commission and Member States had until 18 September to comment or provide detailed opinions on the proposed measures. As the Deputy has noted, detailed opinions on the proposed measures have been received from a number of Member States. For this reason, the standstill period has increased by another three months, i.e. until 18 December 2014. The legislative process cannot continue until after this standstill period.

As the detailed opinions issued by the Member States in question cannot be released for publication, I do not propose to discuss their contents at this time. Ireland is now obliged to respond to the Commission in relation to the issues raised in the detailed opinions. These documents are currently being considered by officials in my Department.

Tobacco Control Measures

111. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he has read the recent position paper (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38656/14]

112. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied with the views of the American Chamber of Commerce to the EU that trademarks are universally recognised as rights of property, conferring also the right to use such a property, and the right to registration should not be dependent in any way on the nature of the product, and his views that trademarks should not be subjected to unjustified restrictions on their use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38657/14]

136. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he has read a recent position paper (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38655/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 111, 112 and 136 together.

I am fully aware that there will be a range of interests which will oppose the introduction of the Public Health (Standardised Packaging of Tobacco) Bill. However, as the Deputy will be aware, Government approval was received on 19 November 2013 to proceed with drafting the Public Health (Standardised Packaging of Tobacco) Bill 2013. The legislation has now been passed by the Seanad and Second Stage concluded in the Dáil last week.

Standardised packaging, also known as plain or generic packaging, means that all forms of branding - trademarks, logos, colours and graphics - would be removed from retail tobacco packaging, except for the brand and variant names, which would be presented in a uniform typeface for all brands on the market. All packs would be in a plain neutral colour, except for the mandatory health warnings and the tax stamp. This measure is considered proportionate from a public health perspective.

The Deputy refers to the position of the American Chamber of Commerce as presented to the EU in relation to trademarks as being universally recognised as rights of property conferring the right to use such a property, the right to registration of which should not be dependent in any way on the nature of the product, and should not be subjected to unjustified restrictions on their use.

A trade mark is the means by which a business identifies its goods or services and distinguishes them from the goods and services supplied by other businesses. The main purpose of trade mark law is to protect the rights holders' investment in the reputation of his goods and services and to assist the consumer in differentiating among competing goods and services in the marketplace.

The importance of trademarks cannot be understated and Ireland is recognised as having a robust legal framework in place to support this property right. In particular, trade marks have been protected under a number of European and international laws where well-respected principles were established, including the Paris Convention for the protection of Industrial Property dating from 1883 and, the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property rights Agreement of 1994 (TRIPs). The TRIPs Agreement introduced intellectual property (IP) into the international trading system for the first time and remains the most comprehensive international agreement on intellectual property to date.

However, whether at international or domestic level, trade mark rights are not, of themselves, absolute rights and States are permitted to apply derogations that allow for the suspension of part of the legal obligation which can operate to restrict some rights under certain circumstances such as in the pursuit of broader compelling public policy reasons or for greater public interest considerations. The Irish Constitution likewise recognises that the State may delimit by law the exercise of property rights where required by the common good.

This Government continues to focus on ensuring that Ireland's intellectual property regime, including its trademark regime compares favourably with best international practice and to work to further reinforce Ireland's reputation as a country where strong intellectual property rights play a crucial role.

Finally, I would like to point out to the Deputy that tobacco consumption is today the greatest single cause of preventable illness and premature death in Ireland, killing over 5,200 people

a year; that smokers die on average 10 years sooner than non-smokers; that one in every two children who experiment with cigarettes goes on to become a smoker, and that one in every two of them will die from a tobacco related disease. In this context, the priority is to reduce the consumption of tobacco across the board, to meet our policy target of making Ireland tobacco free (i.e. with a smoking prevalence rate of less than 5%) by 2025.

Services for People with Disabilities

113. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to shortages in therapy services for students in special schools; and her plans to ensure an adequate level of such support services. [38810/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has recognised the need to increase the level of consistency and standardisation in the way services for children with disabilities are delivered. It is currently engaged in a reconfiguration of existing therapy resources to multi-disciplinary geographic based teams for children as part of its National Programme on Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People (0-18 years). This aims to ensure that there is:

- One clear pathway to services for all children with disabilities according to need.
- Resources used to the greatest benefit for all children and families, and
- Health and Education working together to support children to achieve their potential

The HSE is working very closely with stakeholders including those in the education sector in the development of the Programme, to ensure that, from the children's and parents' perspective, the services provided by each sector in so far as possible are integrated. While the Programme supports the principle of providing access to mainstream education where appropriate, it also recognises the important continuing role of special schools.

An additional €4m has been specifically allocated in 2014 to drive implementation of the Programme which equates to approximately 80 therapy posts.

Medical Card Delays

114. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in awarding a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38543/14]

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 Delays

115. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in awarding a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38544/14]

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.

Hospital Appointments Administration

116. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Wexford will receive an appointment for a consultation and surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38571/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Procedures

117. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure more funding is provided to the Health Service Executive to enable surgeons to carry out more surgeries for scoliosis patients; the steps being taken to ensure operations are carried out in the shortest timeframe; if his attention has been drawn to the delays regarding these type of operations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38572/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Eligibility

118. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Minister for Health his plans to recognise fibromyalgia as a long-term illness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38576/14]

141. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Health the reason post-polio syndrome is not listed under the long-term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38690/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 118 and 141 together.

The Long Term Illness (LTI) Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act, 1970 (as amended). Regulations were made in 1971, 1973 and 1975 specifying the conditions covered by the LTI Scheme, which are as follows: Acute Leukaemia; Mental handicap; Cerebral Palsy; Mental Illness (in a person under 16); Cystic Fibrosis; Multiple Sclerosis; Diabetes

Insipidus; Muscular Dystrophies; Diabetes Mellitus; Parkinsonism; Epilepsy; Phenylketonuria; Haemophilia; Spina Bifida; Hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the LTI Scheme.

Under the Drug Payment Scheme, no individual or family pays more than €144 per calendar month towards the cost of approved prescribed medicines. The scheme significantly reduces the cost burden for families and individuals incurring ongoing expenditure on medicines.

Under the provisions of the Health Acts, medical cards are provided to persons who are, in the opinion of the Health Service Executive (HSE), unable without undue hardship to arrange GP services for themselves and their dependants. In the assessment process, the HSE can take into account medical costs incurred by an individual or a family.

Drug Rehabilitation Clinics

119. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken by his Department to address the problem of drug taking on Dublin's streets (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38577/14]

120. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he has had recent discussions with the Department of Justice and Equality regarding the problem of persons taking drugs in the main shopping areas of Dublin city centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38578/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 119 and 120 together.

In line with the National Drugs Strategy, the Health Service Executive (HSE) has developed a national treatment and rehabilitation service that provides drug free and harm reduction approaches for problem substance users.

The HSE provides a variety of drug treatment interventions to reduce drug-related harm and which encourage problem substance users to engage with, and avail of such services. These services include needle exchange provision, together with evidence-based treatment options such as methadone maintenance treatment, counselling and community and residential rehabilitation.

The HSE co-operates with the local community representatives of the North and South Inner City and with local Gardaí to minimise any negative public order issues that may arise in the vicinity of its treatment centres.

The National Drugs Strategy is a high priority in Government and I work closely with my cabinet colleagues, including the Minister for Justice, to ensure its full implementation.

The Oversight Forum on Drugs, which I chair, monitors progress on the delivery of front-line services and addresses operational difficulties and blockages in implementing the Strategy. This forum brings together the key Government departments and agencies involved in the implementation of the Strategy.

As the specific issues raised by the Deputy are service matters they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for a more detailed response.

Medical Card Applications

121. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a case of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick regarding a medical card application. [38587/14]

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

122. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick who has been waiting five months for same. [38588/14]

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.

Mental Health Services Funding

123. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funding allocated and spent on mental health in 2013; the budget and anticipated spend in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38593/14]

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

124. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application under the fair deal scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary who has been approved for funding under the scheme; when the funding will be provided for the applicant; the reason it takes so long between approval and allocation of grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38597/14]

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.

Speech and Language Therapy

125. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Wexford can expect to receive an appointment for speech and language therapy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38602/14]

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 Procedures

126. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the waiting time for breast reconstruction by region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38612/14]

128. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the data collected and used for clinical research and future treatment planning purposes in respect of breast reconstruction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38614/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 126 and 128 together.

The Deputy's questions relate to service delivery matters and accordingly I have asked the HSE to respond directly to him.

Hospital Procedures

127. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if breast reconstruction is considered an integral part of the breast care plan and not just a cosmetic procedure; if not the reason; his plans to introduce a breast reconstruction nurse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38613/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Breast cancer diagnostic and surgical services are carried out in the eight designated cancer centres (plus an outreach service in Letterkenny General Hospital).

Breast cancer patients may have immediate breast reconstruction carried out at the time of breast cancer surgery and for these patients there is no significant waiting time. For other patients, it may be necessary to carry out reconstructive surgery at a later time.

Symptomatic breast disease units in the designated cancer centres are staffed with multidisciplinary teams including breast care nurses. The introduction of a breast reconstruction nurse has not been identified at this time.

Question No. 128 answered with Question No. 126.

Medical Card Applications

129. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a medical card on both medical and financial grounds in respect of a person (details supplied) in County West-

meath. [38616/14]

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 Aids and Appliances Applications

130. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Carlow will be provided a hearing aid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38617/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive Community Audiology service administers and monitors hearing tests for adults who are at risk for hearing loss. Appointments for the audiology service are sent in a strict chronology according to clinical priorities and date of receipt of referral. The HSE has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Health Services

131. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health his views on allocating a senior podiatrist to Letterkenny General Hospital, County Donegal, in the 2015 service plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38629/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

Medical Card Eligibility

132. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the circumstances in which an allowance is given for life assurance in respect of a medical card application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38630/14]

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

133. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the reason only two places were available on the Health Service Executive sponsorship programme last year; his plans to increase these places next year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38631/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

134. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if a policy change has taken place which now means that the provision of home concentrator and portable oxygen cylinders are to be provided directly by nursing homes and that the cost is no longer covered by the medical card of a patient-resident; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38646/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): This matter has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Question No. 135 answered with Question No. 107.

Question No. 136 answered with Question No. 111.

National Drugs Strategy Implementation

137. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to review the national drugs strategy and his views on achievements to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38662/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016 is a cross cutting area of public policy and service delivery. It is based on a co-ordinated approach across many Government Departments and Agencies in conjunction with the Community and Voluntary sectors and I intend that this approach will continue.

The overall objective of the Strategy is to tackle the harm caused to individuals and society by the misuse of drugs through a concerted focus on the five pillars of supply reduction, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and research. Periodic reviews of progress across the pillars of the Strategy are carried out through the Oversight Forum on Drugs which I chair. A progress report is prepared each year and the latest report for 2013 is available on my Department's website. My Department are starting work on developing the Strategy so that it can meet the challenges into the future.

Ministerial Meetings

138. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet a delegation from the drug task forces in advance of budget 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38663/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The allocations to Drug and Alcohol Task

Forces in 2015 will be determined in the context of the Estimates process, taking into account the need to protect frontline service provision as far as possible. In line with the National Drugs Strategy, I plan to arrange a meeting with the chairs and coordinators of the Task Forces in due course.

Health Insurance Cover

139. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce measures to address an issue raised in correspondence by a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38666/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Similar to other non-life insurance contracts, health insurance contracts generally have a duration of twelve months. I understand that current market practice for the health insurers is to apply a cancellation charge equal to the stamp duty levy to customers who cancel policies or opt to change provider mid-contract. An administration fee may also be charged.

It is a matter for the insurance companies as to the extent, if any, they pass this levy on to their customers. Provisions for the payment of the levy are contained in Section 125A of the Stamp Duty Consolidation Act 1999, and are administered by the Revenue Commissioners. The Revenue Commissioners has issued guidelines to insurers which highlight that only one levy is payable in any twelve month period for each insured person.

Disability Support Services

140. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health when the alternative payment to the motorised transport grant and the mobility allowance will be put into place considering that it was promised that the details of the payment would be announced in June 2012. [38670/14]

164. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the supports available to families that are on a social welfare payment and not able to access the disabled drivers scheme as it is suspended for those families; the way he plans to support these families with a family member who requires specialist transport for their disabled family member; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38793/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 140 and 164 together.

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.

The Disabled Drivers and Passengers Tax Concession Scheme is operated by the Revenue Commissioners. The scheme provides a range of tax reliefs linked to the purchase and use of vehicles by disabled drivers and disabled passengers in Ireland.

There is no scheme which would provide finance to a person with a disability to purchase a car/vehicle where the individual cannot afford to purchase a car/vehicle as outlined by the Deputy.

Question No. 141 answered with Question No. 118.

Medicinal Products Prices

142. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is such a discrepancy in the price of drugs here compared to other European countries (details supplied); his plans to give cancer patients access to free medication during the course of their treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38700/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The prices of drugs vary between countries for a number of reasons, including different prices set by manufacturers, different wholesale and pharmacy mark-ups, different dispensing fees and different rates of VAT.

The Government has introduced a series of reforms in recent years to reduce the prices of drugs and medicines which are paid for by the HSE. This has resulted in reductions in the price of thousands of medicines. Price reductions of the order of 30% per item reimbursed have been achieved between 2009 and 2013; the average cost per items reimbursed is now running at 2001/2002 levels.

A major new deal on the cost of originator drugs in the State was concluded with the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA) in October 2012. This agreement provides that prices are referenced to the currency adjusted average price to wholesaler in nine EU member states (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, and UK) and these are the maximum prices paid by the HSE for originator drugs supplied through the community drug schemes. The gross savings arising from this deal will be in excess of €400 million over 3 years. €210 million from the gross savings will be available to fund new drugs.

A new agreement was also reached with the Association of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers in Ireland (APMI), which represents the generic drugs industry, in 2012. Under this Agreement the maximum price the HSE pays for generic products was 50% of the initial price of an originator medicine, this was further reduced to 40% from 1 May 2014. This has resulted in the price differential between off-patent drugs and most generic equivalents increasing from 5% to approximately 20%.

The Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013 introduces a system of generic substitution and reference pricing. Reference pricing involves the setting of a common reimbursement price, or reference price, for a group of interchangeable medicines. This is the maximum price that the HSE will reimburse to pharmacies for all medicines in the group, regardless of the individual medicine's prices. It is estimated that reference pricing will yield €50 million in savings in 2014.

The reference price for Anastrozole is €28 per pack of 28 tablets with effect from 1 May 2014. In setting the reference price the HSE took account of prices across the EU, where there is significant variation in price, and sought to balance value for money versus sustainability of supply in a small market. The reference price represents a 39% reduction and is subject to review on an annual basis.

In the case of drugs and medicines which are reimbursed by the HSE, prices are set in ac-

cordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013 or the terms of the framework agreements between the Department of Health and the HSE and the representative bodies for pharmaceutical manufacturers in Ireland. However, neither the Minister for Health nor the HSE has any power to set the prices of drugs and medicines purchased by private patients. It would nonetheless be disappointing if all pharmacists were not passing on the benefits of lower prices to patients.

The HSE advises the public that if they are being charged prices which exceed the reimbursement price listed on the HSE website (<http://www.pcrs.ie/>), plus a dispensing fee of between €3.50 and €5, then they should discuss the differential with their pharmacist to ensure they get the best possible price for the medicine concerned.

In addition, measures have been taken to increase price transparency among retail pharmacies. In March of this year the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland issued guidelines to pharmacists on procedures and minimum standards of information to be provided to customers, including a requirement to provide an itemised receipt of purchase of medicines.

There are no plans to extend access to free medication to cancer patients specifically under the community drugs schemes. Support for the cost of medication is provided under the Drug Payment Scheme, whereby no individual or family pays more than €144 per calendar month towards the cost of approved prescribed medicines. The scheme significantly reduces the cost burden for families and individuals incurring ongoing expenditure on medicines.

In addition, people who cannot, without undue hardship, arrange for the provision of medical services for themselves and their dependants may be entitled to a medical card. In the assessment process, the Health Service Executive can take into account medical costs incurred by an individual or a family.

Hospital Waiting Lists

143. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a breakdown on the average waiting time for an appointment for the adult vascular outpatient department in the Adelaide and Meath Hospital in Tallaght, Dublin 24. [38709/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Bed Data

144. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health in view of the Prospectus report in 2009, that suggests 579 intensive care unit beds were needed by 2020, if he will confirm that there were 289 ICU beds in 2009; if he will confirm that there are now 233 ICU beds; and his plans to improve this situation that is undermining the health and well-being of critically ill patients. [38710/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The HSE commissioned Prospectus management consultancy in 2008 to undertake an independent review of the existing adult critical care provision and an assessment of the future requirements to the year 2020 thus enabling planning for a future model of critical care based on evidence. This review placed significant emphasis on international best practice and the application of these practices to existing service provision in Ireland.

The major deliverable of the review was a detailed report based on three key components: capacity and data, work practices, admission policies & related clinical issues. The report recommended that the number of critical care beds should increase from 289 to 579 over the period 2010 to 2020. It also recommended a model for the delivery of adult critical care that is underpinned by a network approach, whereby 'hub', 'spoke', and 'local' hospitals work together to provide the patient with safe and high quality critical care, in a timely manner. At the time of the 2008 report adult critical care services were provided in 37 hospitals (52 units) across the country, including in a number of the smaller hospitals where beds were described as critical care beds but in practice treated low volumes of critical care patients. The report has informed the work of the HSE critical care clinical programme which was subsequently established.

On behalf of HSE operations, the critical care programme completes an annual census to collate each hospital provider's critical care bed capacity and medical and nursing staffing establishment. Based on the 2014 national census of critical care beds, there are 233 adult critical care beds in public hospitals. The HSE has advised that while there has been a net reduction in the number of critical care beds nationally, the HSE and the Critical Care Programme are working to ensure more appropriate referral of patients requiring higher levels of critical care to major hub hospitals identified by the HSE as meeting a number of criteria in relation to activity volume and strategic importance for the future. The HSE is focused on delivering improvements in the way that critical care is organised and delivered within the hospital group structure to ensure patients receive the same high quality of care no matter where they are treated. There is now a more co-ordinated approach to the planning and delivery of critical care, within and across hospital groups, with a focus on small hospitals managing routine urgent or planned care locally and more complex critical care managed in the larger hub hospitals where the relevant clinical critical care expertise can be provided.

The further development of critical care facilities is being considered in the context of service planning process for 2015.

Palliative Care Facility

145. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the palliative care unit in Waterford University Hospital; the timeframe for same; the progress to date; when he expects the unit will be operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38713/14]

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.

Hospice Services

146. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a breakdown, in tabular form, of the level of Health Service Executive funding received by each of the hospice groups nationally for each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38714/14]

147. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a breakdown, in tabular form, of the annual running costs for each of the hospice groups nationally for each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38715/14]

148. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a breakdown,

in tabular form, of the level of Health Service Executive funding received by each of the hospice groups expressed as a percentage of the annual running costs for each of the hospice groups nationally for each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38716/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 146 to 148, inclusive, together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Ambulance Service Provision

149. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if he will confirm that the ambulance service provided from Kilbarrack fire station will not be withdrawn; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38743/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Ambulance services in the Dublin area are provided by Dublin Fire Brigade under an agreement between Dublin City Council and the HSE. Distribution of resources within the city is a matter, in the first instance, for Dublin Fire Brigade.

The Deputy may wish to note that an independent review of emergency ambulance services in Dublin is currently under way to determine the best model of ambulance provision for the city, including distribution of services. The review was commissioned by Dublin City Council and the HSE and is being carried out by the UK Association of Ambulance Chief Executives. I am advised that the review is expected to be completed in the New Year.

Dental Services Provision

150. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the public dental health services available to children in post-primary education in County Kildare who are covered by a medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38754/14]

151. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the public dental health services available to children in post-primary education in County Kildare if they are not covered by a medical card or health insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38756/14]

169. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the public dental health services that are available to children in post-primary education in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38807/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 150, 151 and 169 together.

Dental services for children up to 16 years of age and persons of all ages with special needs are provided by the Public Dental Service of the HSE through its dental clinics. All HSE dental clinics prioritise emergency care for children up to 16 years of age, treatment for special needs patients and screening of children aged from 11 to 13 years, including referral for orthodontic services where necessary. Other services, including screening of children 6 to 8 years, are provided but may be deferred in clinics where there is pressure on resources.

The Dental Treatment Service Scheme (DTSS) provides access to dental treatment for medical card holders over the age of 16. All medical card holders are entitled to specific dental treatments e.g., an annual dental examination, two fillings in each calendar year, extractions as necessary. Additional treatments are available to persons with specific medical conditions including persons in receipt of care or services for a disability and persons on a register of disability.

Medicinal Products Licensing

152. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 80 of 30 September 2014, in addition to the measures that he will be undertaking, if he will initiate an immediate awareness campaign among local autism groups, schools, general practitioners, and online, warning people of the dangers of MMS and CD, as there are citizens taking or being given this poison in the belief that it is a cure. [38758/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I have no plans to undertake an awareness campaign.

The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) advises consumers not to take Master Minister Solution (MMS) or CD. The Food Safety Authority and the National Poisons Information Centre of Ireland have also issued a public safety warning regarding the use of MMS.

The HPRA has confirmed that it is actively following up on this issue as a matter of urgency. Consumers experiencing side effects thought to be associated with MMS are advised to consult a health care professional.

Hospital Waiting Lists

153. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding a confidential internal Health Service Executive document; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38766/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The HSE has stated clearly that it has no knowledge of any “confidential internal memo” that allegedly “urged employees to manipulate waiting lists to meet health service targets”.

The policy of the HSE on this matter is clear. All hospital managers are expected to efficiently manage waiting lists in chronological order, except where clinical need dictates that a patient needs to be prioritised. The HSE does not condone the manipulation of waiting lists and will take appropriate disciplinary action if this can be proved.

In late 2013, a number of patients waiting for a first outpatient appointment were outsourced to the private sector for assessment and were then referred back to the public system for surgical procedures. The HSE has advised that this practice has now ceased.

Patients can be removed from waiting lists as part of the HSE waiting lists validation protocol but GPs and consultants concerned are informed if a patient is being removed from the list and if the GP or consultant considers the patient should be reinstated on the list this is done as part of the protocol.

The HSE continues to implement further measures to tackle waiting lists. These include: increasing the throughput of patients in public outpatient clinic, reducing the number of pa-

tients who do not turn up for their appointment, and increasing the number of new patients in the clinic rather than just reviewing previous patients who are often better returned to their GP.

It is important for the Deputy to note that there is no policy to manipulate waiting lists. The only waiting lists that I'm interested in are accurate ones. Accurate waiting lists allows us to plan services. When it comes to negotiating a good budget for health, waiting list figures that make the situation look better than it really is are no benefit to me.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

154. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 646 of 15 July 2014, the number of persons on the placement list for the nursing homes support scheme; the time it is taking for funding to issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38768/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): On the 24th September (latest figures available) there were 2,007 people on the national placement list for funding, with average waiting times of approximately 15 weeks.

The HSE operates a national placement list for the Nursing Homes Support Scheme to enable it to operate within budget. All applicants who are approved for funding are put on the placement list in chronological order by the date of determination of their application, and funding issues to applicants in this chronological order to ensure equity nationally. Funding is released by the HSE on a weekly basis to ensure those on the placement list receive it as soon as possible.

Ambulance Service Response Times

155. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 453 of 4 March 2014 if he will provide the turnaround times at each acute hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38769/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): A response to the Deputy's original question was issued to him by the HSE on 2nd May 2014. I have asked the HSE to provide the Deputy with an update.

Health Services Provision

156. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Health the services and resources available for neonatology care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38772/14]

157. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details on the services and supports available to parents of pre-term babies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38773/14]

158. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the national neonatal transport service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38774/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 156 to 158, inclusive, together.

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

Registration of Nurses

159. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Health his views on the 50% increase in its annual retention fee by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland; the steps he will take to reduce the fee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38775/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): A new Nurses and Midwives Act was passed into legislation in 2011. The Act provides, inter alia, for the protection of the public in its dealings with nurses and midwives and the enhancement of their high standards of professional education and competencies. The Department of Health is responsible for oversight of the governance of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI). The Department has no role in setting or approving registration fees.

The Board is an independent body, answerable to the Oireachtas, with the responsibility to ensure that it has the financial capacity to undertake all its legal obligations. The cost of enacting the additional requirements under the Nurses and Midwives Act 2014 was set out in the Regulatory Impact Analysis that was carried out prior to the enactment of the legislation. These costs include an enhanced regulatory process with supporting systems for continued professional development and certain education and training requirements for the professions.

It was also made clear at the time of the legislation that the Board would continue to be self-funding and needed to plan and cost how it would fulfil its legal obligations. Following detailed negotiations with the Executive and Board members in 2013 it was agreed in October 2013 that an initial once-off sum of €1.6m would be granted by the Department to the Board to cover 2013/2014 costs, but that the Board would have to increase its income in 2015 to undertake its commitments in the legislation. The Board of the NMBI made the decision to increase the annual registration fee at its meeting on 17th September, 2014. A helpline, email address and website information page have been made available by the NMBI to provide clarification for registrants who may have queries on this matter.

Medicinal Products Prices

160. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide for the years 2009 to 2013, the amount spent by the State each year on medicinal drugs; and the total savings generated by reference pricing and generic substitution. [38776/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The cost to the HSE of drugs and medicines supplied under the GMS and community drug schemes, including the High Tech Drugs Scheme, between the years 2009 and 2012 are set out as follows:

2012 - €1.547 billion

2011 - €1.465 billion

2010 - €1.538 billion

2009 - €1.589 billion

Corresponding figures for 2013 have not yet been published but are estimated to be in the region of €1.426 billion.

The Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013 introduced a system of generic substitution and reference pricing. Reference pricing involves the setting of a common reimbursement price, or reference price, for a group of interchangeable products. It means that one reference price is set for each group or list of interchangeable medicines, and this is the price the Health Service Executive (HSE) will reimburse to pharmacists for all medicines in the group, regardless of the individual medicine's prices. Reference pricing is expected to generate €50 million savings in 2014.

Chronic Disease Management Programme

161. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Health his views on developing a national policy on coeliac disease; if he will establish an expert review group to work with his Department and the Health Service Executive to develop such a policy and formulate guidelines for the screening, diagnosis and dietary support for those with coeliac disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38779/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The diagnosis and management of coeliac disease is largely managed by GPs in community services. Screening for coeliac disease is not routinely carried out in Ireland. The simple blood test required is reasonably, but not completely, accurate. This means that routinely, screening the entire population could potentially produce a high number of false-positive results. In effect, people would be diagnosed as having coeliac disease when they did not have it. Thus, screening for coeliac diseases is usually only recommended for people with known risk factors for the condition, such as having a family history of the disease. Case finding by testing family members of patients diagnosed with the disease may be beneficial, particularly if family members manifest gastrointestinal or other symptoms.

The guidelines for coeliac disease diagnosis and management currently in use in Ireland are the UK National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines, available for download at www.nice.org.uk. This is the policy on which care in Ireland is based and it will be kept under review. Ultimately though, the clinical decision for the care of people with coeliac disease is for clinicians.

Health Services Staff Remuneration

162. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the arrangements in place to apply for a back payment of a salary uplift due to the bringing in line of salaries of home help carers in 2005 in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38780/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I have no direct role in this matter. These are matters for the HSE and as such, I have asked them to respond to you directly.

Medicinal Products Supply

163. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the monitoring requirements for the use of Roaccutane; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38792/14]

170. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the guidelines issued for the use of a Roaccutane (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[38815/14]

171. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the guidelines that were in place in 1998 regarding the prescribing of Roaccutane for acne; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38816/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 163, 170 and 171 together.

Roaccutane (containing the active substance, isotretinoin) is authorised in Ireland and the EU for treating severe forms of acne which have been resistant to other standard therapies. 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.

The guidance to support appropriate use and monitoring of Roaccutane is based on assessment of the currently available data, which changes over time, as new information is generated on an on-going basis from a variety of sources, including post marketing experience, further studies, literature reviews etc. The current product information reflects these recommendations.

Roaccutane (isotretinoin) should only be prescribed by or under the supervision of physicians with expertise in the use of systemic retinoids for the treatment of severe acne and a full understanding of the risks of isotretinoin therapy and monitoring requirements. The requirements for specific monitoring of the patient are described in detail in the Summary of Product Characteristics (SPC) in relation to psychiatric disorders, severe skin reactions, allergic reactions, liver enzymes, serum lipids and the pregnancy prevention programme. Monitoring in these circumstances is through ongoing review of the patient by the prescribing doctor, as part of their clinical practice.

I have arranged for copies of the guidelines which were in place in 1998 and the current guidelines to be forwarded to your office.

Question No. 164 answered with Question No. 140.

Hospital Closures

165. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the now closed St. Brigid's Hospital, Ballinasloe, County Galway; the discussions that have taken place with any other public body; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38800/14]

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

Ambulance Service Provision

166. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the ambulance services that have been restored, by county, since partial cover was removed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38801/14]

167. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the ambulance services that have been withdrawn since 2011, by town and county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38802/14]

168. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to improve the ambulance services available to towns, by town and county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38803/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 166 and 168, inclusive, together.

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

Question No. 169 answered with Question No. 150.

Questions Nos. 170 and 171 answered with Question No. 163.

Medicinal Products Licensing

172. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 185 of 3 July 2014, if he will provide an update on the licensing of the drug; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38821/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The first step for a medicine to be placed on the Irish market involves the manufacturer seeking an authorisation from the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) or in the case of certain medicinal products, the European Medicines Agency. A determination on the application for authorisation is based on a rigorous scientific assessment of the application against legal and regulatory requirements.

The HPRA has advised that this medicine was authorised for placing on the Irish market on 5th August last.

Departmental Staff Recruitment

173. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Health the number of temporary contracts in place for the public sector as a whole, including State agencies and other public bodies under the remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38830/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department has staff on secondment or on loan from other agencies within the health group who are not direct employees of the Department. In addition there are also a number of staff on fixed term (pensionable) contracts including advisors, civilian drivers and other staff engaged by Ministers in accordance with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform guidelines for ministerial appointments whose employment contracts are co-terminus with the Ministers holding Office. The Department has no other public sector workers on temporary contracts or other non-permanent contracts of employment.

The information being sought by the Deputy in relation to non-commercial semi-state agencies under the remit of the Department is being collated and will be forwarded to the Deputy on completion. The Health Service Executive has also been requested to investigate and respond directly to the Deputy.

Departmental Staff Recruitment

174. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Health the number of contracts of indefinite duration that have been sought and the number that have been granted in the years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014 in the public sector under the remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38842/14]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In the years specified by the Deputy, one person was appointed on a contract of indefinite duration in the Department of Health in 2011.

The information relating to staff of non-commercial State Agencies under the remit of my Department is being compiled and will be forwarded separately to the Deputy. The HSE has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy in respect of its staff.

Overseas Development Aid Expenditure

175. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding funding for overseas aid; the way 0.7% of Ireland's gross national income will be allocated to this in the coming years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38643/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Sean Sherlock): The Government is strongly committed to Ireland's overseas aid programme, which is at the heart of our foreign policy. Our policy on International Development, "One World, One Future" clearly sets out our vision for a sustainable and just world, together with our goals and areas of focus for the coming years. The policy restates our commitment to achieving the UN target of providing 0.7% of Gross National Product (GNP) for Official Development Assistance (ODA), when economic circumstances permit.

Since coming to office, the Government has successfully managed to stabilise the budget for development assistance. This is a significant achievement, particularly in light of the difficult budgetary circumstances we faced and a clear demonstration of our commitment to the aid programme. In 2011 we provided €657 million to ODA, €629 million in 2012, and €637 million last year. For 2014 we expect to provide in excess of €600 million for ODA. These are substantial allocations of public funds and represent a genuine investment on behalf of the Irish people to assist those less fortunate than ourselves. The estimates process for Budget 2015 is now almost completed. The final allocation to ODA is ultimately a decision for Government, and will be announced by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform on Budget Day next week. As the Deputy can appreciate I am not in a position to announce next year's allocation but, as I have repeatedly stated publicly, and in response to previous Questions, I and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade have been making the strongest case possible for the allocation to the development assistance programme.

I am determined to ensure that Ireland's aid programme continues to be recognised as a world leader, focusing relentlessly on delivering real and sustainable results that provide lasting improvements to the lives of some of the world's poorest people.

Passport Applications

176. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the reason a person (details supplied) is being refused a passport, despite being the holder of an Irish passport previously. [38759/14]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In November 2011

the Passport Service received a complaint from a family member that a passport had issued to the person concerned on the basis of a false passport application i.e. it had been completed by an individual, who did not have authority to act on behalf of the applicant. The Passport Service contacted the individual who had completed the passport application, put this to him, and asked that he provide appropriate evidence that he was duly authorised to act on behalf of the applicant. The passport was returned on foot of the correspondence and to date he has been unable to provide the evidence requested. The Passport Service has confirmed to the family that in order for the passport to re-issue, an application will have to be accompanied by appropriate evidence that it has been completed by an individual who has authority to act on behalf of the applicant. The Passport Service has also advised the family to seek independent legal advice in relation to resolving these concerns.

North-South Ministerial Council

177. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the issues discussed at the North-South Ministerial Council meeting held on 3 October 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38788/14]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): A meeting of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in plenary format was held at Dublin Castle on 3 October 2014. This was the 18th Plenary meeting of the NSMC.

At the meeting, discussions covered a wide range of financial, economic and EU matters including the employment situation in both jurisdictions and measures to encourage job creation. Also discussed were actions to build trade links with developing markets, attraction of foreign direct investment and issues relating to banking, in particular lending to Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, economic and budgetary challenges facing both administrations and measures aimed at rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy. Progress on the disposal of NAMA's Northern Ireland portfolio was welcomed by the Council.

Ministers also welcomed the success of the Giro d'Italia cycling event which secured widespread global media coverage. We also noted the opportunities for tourism and trade through the hosting of all-island events and agreed to continue to cooperate on a joint bid for the 2023 Rugby World Cup.

We noted that the draft Programmes for the new INTERREG V and PEACE IV Programmes for the period 2014-2020 have been submitted to the EU Commission. As several other new European programmes may present opportunities for cooperation to maximise the drawdown of EU funding to the island, we agreed that these should be further examined.

With regard to the St. Andrews Agreement Review, the Council noted that discussions on Sectoral Priorities have now taken place, following the decisions taken at the last NSMC Plenary in November 2013 and the NSMC Institutional meeting in January 2014. These discussions focused on efforts to support economic recovery, job creation, ensuring the best use of public funds and the most effective delivery of services for citizens.

Ministers agreed that it had been useful to review progress and identify opportunities within the existing agreed work programmes and noted that a report on other priorities identified during the Ministerial discussions will be brought to the next NSMC Institutional Meeting.

The Council also reviewed the progress made on the areas of co-operation by the North/South Bodies and in the other areas for co-operation, and noted the current position on a North South Consultative Forum.

We also discussed the North West Gateway Initiative noting the conclusion of the consultation process that had been carried out with regional stakeholders and agreed that further consultation with relevant Government Departments should be undertaken on the issues identified during the consultation process and that there should be a meeting of Ministers in the North West to consider strategic approaches to the development of the region.

The Government is firmly committed to developing North South cooperation in every possible respect and I am looking forward to continuing to work with our Northern colleagues in the North South Ministerial Council.

Public Sector Staff Data

178. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of contracts of indefinite duration sought and the number granted in the years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014 in the public sector under the remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38841/14]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): A number of contracts of indefinite duration were awarded to Temporary Clerical Officers (TCOs) in my Department in the years in question. Five TCOs employed in the Passport Office in Dublin were awarded such contracts with effect from 1 July 2008; three of these officers have since retired. Four TCOs employed in the Passport Office in Dublin were awarded such contracts with effect from 3 November 2008.

Eight locally recruited TCOs employed in the Embassy in London were awarded such contracts with effect from 14 May 2010; two of these officers have since resigned.

Ten former TCOs employed on fixed-term contracts in the Passport Office in Dublin were awarded contracts of indefinite duration in July 2009 and redeployed to the Department of Social Protection.

One former TCO who was awarded a contract of indefinite duration by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine transferred to the Passport Office in Cork on 7 June 2011.

Benchmarking Awards

179. **Deputy Brian Walsh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a commitment that was postponed in 2008 relating to a benchmarking award for teachers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38620/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): In the second report of the Public Service Benchmarking Body (issued in December 2007), the Body evaluated the pay and jobs of 109 grades across the public service and recommended pay increases for 15 grades. Within the education sector, the Body reviewed 25 grades including Principal, Assistant Principal and Teacher in primary and post-primary schools. The Body recommended changes to the allowance payable to Principals of primary schools, which would have resulted in a 5.9% to 31.4% increase in the allowance payable depending on the size of school. The Body also recommended changes to the allowance payable to Principals of small post-primary schools, which would have resulted in a 17.3% to 31.4% increase in the allowance payable depending on the size of school. The Body did not recommend increases for the grades of Assistant Principal or Teacher.

Under the Towards 2016 Review and Transitional Agreement 2008-2009, it was agreed that the increases recommended in the second report of the Public Service Benchmarking Body would be paid as follows:

(a) 5% from 1 September 2008, or where the total increase is less than 5%, the full increase from that date;

(b) The issue of the payment of any balances will be discussed between the parties in the context of any successor to this Transitional Agreement which might be agreed between the Social Partners, or whatever other arrangements may be in place on the expiry of this Transitional Agreement.

The pay terms contained in the Towards 2016 Review and Transitional Agreement 2008-2009 were not implemented due to the State's worsening financial circumstances. I have consulted with the Department of my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and the position is that having regard to this context there are no plans to implement the recommendations set out in the second report of the Public Service Benchmarking Body as they apply to any public servant.

School Staffing

180. **Deputy Brian Walsh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost to the Exchequer that would be involved in reducing the minimum number of pupils required for a staffing allocation of two teachers in a school to 17. [38621/14]

181. **Deputy Brian Walsh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost to the Exchequer that would be involved in reducing the minimum number of pupils required for a staffing allocation of three teachers in a school to 54. [38622/14]

182. **Deputy Brian Walsh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost to the Exchequer that would be involved in reducing the minimum number of pupils required for a staffing allocation of four teachers in a school to 84. [38623/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 180 to 182, inclusive, 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). A significant amount of analysis would be required to provide an indicative estimate for the costings requested by the Deputy. It is not possible in the time available, to undertake such an analysis. This information will be provided to the Deputy as soon as it can be gathered. 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.

Third Level Charges

183. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount

expected to be raised by the increase in the student contribution fee to €3,000 for the 2015-16 college year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38590/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The position is that the student contribution is payable by students who qualify under my Department’s Free Fees Schemes. The Exchequer meets the cost of tuition fees, through my Department’s free fees schemes, in respect of eligible full-time undergraduate students. It is estimated that some 129,200 students qualified for free fees in the 2013/14 academic year at a cost of some €310m. Some 50% of students who qualify for free fees have the student contribution paid on their behalf by the Exchequer under my Department’s Student Grant Scheme.

Student Grant Scheme Expenditure

184. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the expected cost of reducing, in respect of third level student maintenance grants, the non-adjacent rate qualifying distance from 45 km to 25 km; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38591/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): In order to carry out the exercise requested by the Deputy, related to the expected cost of reducing the qualifying distance for the non-adjacent rate of grant from 45km to 25km, we would need to know how many students would come within the ranges put forward by the Deputy. The Deputy will appreciate that this information is not readily available to the Department. As the Deputy will be aware, the reality of our economic situation presents significant challenges that have to be reconciled with limitations on public resources. This is a very stark reality, which, unfortunately, means that changes to any public service, including the student grant scheme, cannot be ruled out. For this reason it is the responsibility of Government to take into consideration all areas of public services when formulating Budget 2015. Ultimately, our budgetary decisions now will play a major part in creating a sustainable economy and in regaining our economic independence. As the Deputy will be aware all proposals made in relation to education expenditure including changes to student grants will be considered in the context of the Budget 2015.

Student Assistance Fund

185. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount available nationally for the student assistance fund for the academic years 2012-13, 2013-14 and 2014-15; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38592/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Student Assistance Fund is a component of the Third Level Access Measure which is managed on behalf of my Department by the Higher Education Authority and comprises two sub-priorities: the Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities. The management of the Third Level Access Measure Fund rests with the Higher Education Authority and the allocation of funding for the sub-priorities in a particular year is a matter for the authority. Funding allocated, by the Higher Education Authority, for the student assistance fund for the academic years 2012/13 was €11m, with €8.35m allocated for 2013/14 and €6.6m for 2014/15.

Student Accommodation

186. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a student accommodation strategy is currently being prepared in view of the enormous challenges facing third level students in accessing suitable accommodation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38594/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I will continue to work with stakeholders to explore ways to increase the availability of student accommodation. Some third-level institutions provide a range of on-campus and off-campus accommodation, and all colleges have an obligation to work with students’ unions and other groups, to provide incoming students with details on accommodation options, and to promote the value and availability of student accommodation in their areas. I am also encouraged by initiatives such as USI’s ‘Homes for Study’, which lists spare rooms, apartments and digs that are available to rent across Ireland.

In the longer term, the Government is committed to addressing the housing shortage through the Construction 2020 strategy. This will not resolve all of our problems immediately, but I am confident that the implementation of Construction 2020 will provide us with a sustainable housing stock in the medium to longer term.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

187. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a course (details supplied) will be recognised by Student Universal Support Ireland as eligible for grant purposes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38604/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The decision on eligibility for new student grant applications for the 2014/15 academic year is a matter for the centralised grant awarding authority, SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland). Where a grant application is made in respect of a course being pursued in an institution in the State, such as Stage Management and Technical Theatre in The Lir (National Academy of Dramatic Arts) Trinity College, it is a matter for SUSI to satisfy itself regarding the status of the institution and as to whether the course and institution meet the terms of the scheme. The Deputy will appreciate that in the absence of all of the relevant details that would be contained in an individual’s application form and supporting documentation, it would not be possible for me to say whether or not a student should qualify for a grant - this is a matter for SUSI to determine. However I would point out that under my Department’s student grant scheme, eligible candidates may receive funding provided they are attending an approved course at an approved institution, an approved course is defined as a full-time undergraduate course of at least two years duration or a full-time postgraduate course of not less than one year duration pursued in an approved institution. If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant, or that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI. Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board. The relevant appeal form is available to download from http://www.studentfinance.ie/downloads/1375344221/2013_SGAB_appeal_form.pdf.

School Accommodation

188. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a senior archi-

tect has visited a school (details supplied) in County Dublin to examine the prefabs there, with a view to a permanent replacement of same; if she will confirm that an inspection has taken place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38611/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I can confirm that the school to which the Deputy refers recently submitted an application to my Department for the replacement of prefabs. A technical site visit is due to be undertaken next week by officials from my Department and the school authorities have been notified of the details.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

189. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a person (details supplied) in County Donegal was refused a special rate of maintenance grant in view of the fact that the sole income coming into the house is jobseeker’s allowance; his views that refusal in this instance will cause hardship to the person; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38624/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): To qualify for the special rate of grant an applicant must meet the following conditions:

a. Reckonable income must not exceed €22,703.

b. On 31 December of the relevant period the reckonable income must include an eligible long-term social welfare payment prescribed under the scheme.

In the case of a student whose parents are divorced, legally separated or it is established to the satisfaction of the awarding authority that they are separated, the reckonable income shall be that of the applicant and the parent with whom the applicant resides.

The income of a parent’s partner who is not a legal guardian is not included in determining reckonable income. Where the reckonable income does not include a long-term social welfare payment, as listed in the Student Grant Scheme, the special rate of grant is not payable.

I have no plans at present to change the criteria in relation to persons whose income is considered in determining reckonable income for student grant purposes.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

190. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views that applied behaviour analysis is a scientifically based system that has proven its worth and in the long term would save the State money; if she will change her Department to reflect these views; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38634/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My Department’s policy is to promote a child-centred approach to education of all children with special educational needs including those with autism.

As each child with autism is unique they should have access to a range of different approaches to meet their individual needs. This facilitates access to individualised education programmes which can be supported by Special Needs Assistants and fully qualified professional teachers who may draw from a range of autism-specific interventions, including Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), Treatment and Education of Autistic Communication Handicapped

Children (TEACCH) and Picture Exchange Communications System (PECS) as well as the appropriate school curriculum with the option, where possible, of full/partial integration and interaction with other pupils.

The use of ABA as part of the range of interventions is particularly useful for addressing behavioural issues. My Department supports the use of ABA and training is provided for teachers in its use. However, the Department does not accept, based on research, advice and best practice, that ABA should be the only approach used. While ABA helps to improve behaviour, other approaches, such as a number of those to which I have referred are just as important in developing children's communication and speech skills.

The Deputy may be aware that the NCSE is currently preparing policy advice on the education of children with autism. Their report which is due in 2015 will identify the nature and extent of educational intervention/s, teaching practices and other supports which should be provided to enable children with autism to achieve educational outcomes appropriate to their needs and abilities and will inform future policy development. The Deputy's question on the worth of ABA can be considered in the context of the policy advice.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

191. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she has received correspondence from a school (details supplied) in County Cork regarding the pupil-teacher ratio; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38635/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department does not have a record of correspondence from the school referred to by the Deputy. If he wishes to provide a copy of correspondence, I will arrange for the issue raised by the school to be addressed. At primary level the staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location. The configuration of classes and the deployment of classroom teachers are done at local school level.

Schools with significantly increasing enrolments are catered for within the staffing arrangements by being allocated teachers on the basis of their current pupil numbers rather than on a previous year basis which is the case for the majority of schools.

The staffing appeals process has been extended to include a new criterion which helps those schools that make a significant contribution to the provision of school places, which assists the response to demographic growth within their area, and as a result are under significant pressure on their class sizes at infants level.

The staffing arrangements for the current school year are set out in Circular 0007/2014 which is available on the website.

The national average class size at primary level is 24.7 pupils. However, with over 21,100 classes in over 3,100 primary schools throughout the country there will always be variations in class sizes at individual school level. My Department's guidance to local school management is that such variations should be kept to the minimum.

Special Educational Needs Data

192. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she received correspondence from a school (details supplied) in County Cork regarding the school

profile questionnaire; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38636/14]

193. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she or her Department have received correspondence from the Irish Primary Principals' Network outlining its concerns regarding the schools profiling questionnaire; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38637/14]

194. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the schools profiling questionnaire; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38638/14]

195. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the advice she and her Department received regarding the schools profiling questionnaire; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38639/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 192 to 195, inclusive, together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is currently considering potential revisions to the system of allocating Resource Teaching and Learning Support to schools. This is on foot of recommendations set out in the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Policy Advice on "Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools (May 2013) and the recommendations of the NCSE Working Group Report "A Proposed New Model for Allocating Teaching Resources for Students with Special Educational Needs".

Following the publication of these reports, my Department advised that it would commence the process of gathering information which would be required to develop the proposed new model, to allow its impact to be assessed, and to assess if, and from when, the model could be implemented.

Part of this process involves the collection of information in relation to the social context of schools.

The working group report recommended that a school's social context should be used because it can contribute strongly to the level of learning needs that students have. The report considered that, on the basis of available research evidence, the use of a school's social context is valid in developing an educational profile, as socioeconomic disadvantage is associated with the incidence of certain types of special educational needs, including low achievement in academic learning and emotional or behavioural disorders.

The report also noted that a school within a disadvantaged social context may have a higher share of students presenting with emotional or behavioural disorders. While some of these needs are likely to be reflected in low test scores, others may not, as students with relatively high levels of educational achievement can have emotional and behavioural disorders.

Accordingly, it was recommended that consideration of a schools social context should form part of any proposed new resource allocation model.

In considering how a social context profile might be developed for schools, the working group noted that the Department currently holds information which underpinned the development of the Developing Equality in Schools (DEIS) schools programme. However, this information dates from 2005, and was not considered by the Working Group to be current enough to provide a social context component for any new SEN Resource Teacher/Learning support allocation model.

The group therefore recommended that a new social context schools survey should be conducted. Pending the availability of a more objective source of information, the working group stated that it was confident that survey reporting by school principals could produce robust up to date data on school context in a similar manner to DEIS and earlier initiatives.

The Department therefore, in conjunction with the NCSE, asked the Educational Research Centre (ERC) to conduct a survey of schools to assist the development of an educational profile.

It was considered that the issuing of a new survey was a preferable option to using existing data from 2005, or data from limited sources that may not capture the full current complexity of a school's make up.

Though recognising that all schools would not be able to have specific detail regarding all of the questions asked in relation to their pupil populations, schools were asked to provide their best possible estimates in relation to the questions being asked in the survey, in order to ensure that as accurate as possible a social context allocation component of any revised allocation model could be developed for each school.

At all stages of the development of the advice and in particular in the work of the working group there was comprehensive consultation with education partners and stakeholders and through this consultation there was awareness and broad support for the proposed approach including the deployment of a survey.

The data which schools were requested to return as part of the survey was non-personal, anonymised data. Schools were not asked to return data in relation to the social circumstances of individual pupils.

Schools were also advised that the ERC had put in place a dedicated phone help line in order to provide assistance and support to schools in completing the questionnaire. I understand that many schools used this help line to gain assistance in completing the questionnaire.

Whereas I understand that the return of this survey has caused extra work and some difficulties for some schools, I am confident that having up to date social context data will be highly beneficial to the Department and the NCSE in developing proposals for a new profiled allocation model for schools.

I can confirm that my Department has received communications from a number of schools and bodies in relation to the survey, including the school and the organisation referred to by the Deputy in his question, and that my Department will respond to those bodies accordingly.

Student Assistance Fund

196. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will ensure that funding for the student assistance fund is increased in the upcoming budget, as its reduction in recent years has had a detrimental effect on students. [38667/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Student Assistance Fund is a component of the Third Level Access Measure which is managed on behalf of my Department by the Higher Education Authority and comprises two sub-priorities: the Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities. The overall value of the measure for the 2013/14 academic year was €16.2m. The management of the Third Level Access Measure Fund rests with the Higher Education Authority and the allocation of funding for the sub-priorities in a particular year is a matter for the authority.

The Student Assistance Fund is administered on a local basis by participating higher education institutions and targets those students most in need. The Fund provides financial assistance to students to contribute to the costs of participating in higher education and it is an important element of the student support framework in place. Typically, funding is provided for rent, childcare, travel and general living expenses.

The HEA approved in July of this year an allocation for the Student Assistance Fund for the 2014/15 academic year of €6.6m. Each participating institution was advised of its individual allocation in advance of the academic year in order to facilitate timely planning and disbursement to students, and each institution has at this stage received 50% of their allocation in line with procedures for the Fund.

As the Deputy will be aware, the reality of our economic situation presents significant challenges that have to be reconciled with limitations on public resources. This is a very stark reality, which, unfortunately, means that changes to any public service, including Third Level Access Measures, cannot be ruled out.

For this reason it is the responsibility of Government to take into consideration all areas of public services when formulating Budget 2015. Ultimately, our budgetary decisions now will play a major part in creating a sustainable economy and in regaining our economic independence. As the Deputy will be aware all proposals made in relation to education expenditure including changes to student assistance fund will be considered in the context of the Budget 2015.

Special Educational Needs Staffing

197. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide an update on the changes to the way special needs assistants are allocated to schools; the way these changes will impact on the overall number of SNAs and resource teachers in schools this year; the reason the changes were deemed necessary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38673/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department clarified the criteria under which SNA support is allocated to schools, to support the care needs of qualifying children, in Circular 0030/2014, which issued to schools on 10th April 2014.

While there has been no change to the way in which Special Need Assistants (SNAs) are allocated by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), the circular provides clarification that schools should plan for the assignment and deployment of SNA supports in respect of children with care needs. The circular also clarifies circumstances when SNA support should be reduced or withdrawn, for example where care needs have diminished or where a child may have left a school. Children who require support of an SNA will continue to avail of such support.

There has also been no reduction to the overall number of SNA or resource teaching posts which may be allocated to schools. The number of SNA posts which may be allocated to schools increased from 10,575 posts to 10,965 posts for 2014.

Once SNAs have been allocated to schools, the deployment of SNAs within schools is then a matter for the individual Principal/Board of Management. SNAs should be deployed by the school in a manner which best meets the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school for whom SNA support has been allocated. It is a matter for schools to allocate support as required, and on the basis of individual need, which allows schools flexibility in how the

SNA support is utilised.

The purpose of this Circular is not to reduce the number of SNA posts in schools, but clarifies and restates the purpose of the SNA scheme which is to provide schools with additional support staff who can assist children with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs. In June 2011, the Department published a Value for Money and Policy Review of the SNA scheme. In May 2013, the NCSE published its Policy Advice on Supporting Children with Special Educational Needs in Schools.

Both reports concluded that the SNA scheme has been highly successful in supporting the care needs of children with special needs in schools, and with assisting to facilitate their integration and inclusion. However, the reports also concluded that the intended purpose of the scheme was not always generally well understood by parents or schools and that the scope and purpose of the scheme should be clarified for schools.

There have been no changes to the way in which Resource Teachers are allocated to schools. The total number of Resource Teaching posts which the NCSE may allocate to schools to support children with special educational needs for the 2014/15 school year is presently set at 6,225 WTE posts.

This is more posts than has ever previously been made available to the NCSE to allocate to schools and shows that there has not been a reduction to the overall number of posts being allocated to schools for resource teaching support. The figure of 6,225 posts for 2014/15 should be compared with 5745 posts for 2013/14, and 5265 posts for the 2012/13 school year.

Student Universal Support Ireland Staffing

198. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to detail the current staffing levels in Student Universal Support Ireland compared to 2012 and 2013; the breakdown and roles of these staff members; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38703/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): City of Dublin Education and Training Board is the designated single awarding authority for student grants in Ireland. SUSI was formally established in early 2012, as a new unit within CDETb with sanction for a staffing complement of 65 full-time equivalents. Subsequently, the additional resources recommended by the review carried out by Accenture were sanctioned in 2013. The additional resources included three additional management posts and some 23 (FTE) additional processing staff increasing the sanctioned full-time equivalent to 91. The staff complement is made up of a mix of permanent and seasonal staff which are variable during the year to match the flows of grant processing work.

I am informed by CDETb that the level of staffing in SUSI, as at 30 September 2012 was 50, as at 30th September 2013 was 137 and as at 30th September 2014 was 125.

The breakdown of staff between the functional areas of SUSI, at 30 September 2014 as reported was as follows: Assessment - 95. Finance and Corporate Services - 16. Communications and Customer Service - 7. ICT - 7.

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme

199. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will re-

view the terms of reference of the Caranua redress scheme to include those victims of clerical sexual abuse who were awarded compensation under the original redress scheme; her views on whether the terms of reference are too restrictive and on whether those who were deemed eligible for redress in the first instance should be automatically included in the Caranua scheme, irrespective of whether they were in a residential institution; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38711/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012 provides that those former residents who received awards from the Residential Institutions Redress Board or equivalent Court awards or settlements are eligible to apply to Caranua. This approach was taken having regard to the maximum funds available of €110 million and a potential pool of some 15,000 applicants.

As the Deputy may be aware, a commitment was given during the passage of the 2012 Act to review the operation of the Fund two years after its establishment in the event of applications not resulting in a significant expenditure of the Fund. Following its establishment in March 2013, Caranua began to accept applications in January 2014. Accordingly it would be my intention to consider the question of a review of the operation of the Fund next year.

Teacher Training Provision

200. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will reinstate the subsidy towards the compulsory Gaeltacht placement required to be completed by all primary teacher students. [38712/14]

201. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out her views on the hardship caused for primary school teaching students for whom the subsidy towards the compulsory Gaeltacht placement has been removed; and if she will reinstate same. [38717/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 200 and 201 together.

I can appreciate that supporting a student through third level education can be challenging. The decision to abolish the Gaeltacht Placement grants, from September 2012, has to be viewed in the context of the prevailing requirement to reduce costs and achieve efficiencies where possible. 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.

To assist with the costs of the Gaeltacht placement, students in receipt of a student grant which includes a 100% fee grant, or who would have qualified for a full fee grant but for the Free Fees Schemes, can apply for funding towards travel and accommodation costs under the field trip element of a fee grant, subject to the normal terms and conditions of the scheme.

Apart from the student grant system, in circumstances of particular need students may apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund.

I am not in a position to reinstate the funding to this area.

National Council for Special Education

202. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will re-

spond to an issue (details supplied) regarding National Council for Special Education proposals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38744/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) published its Report on a Proposed New Model for Allocating Teachers for Students with Special Educational Needs on 18th June 2014.

The NCSE, consulted widely with education partners, representatives of the disability sector, stakeholders and parent representative groups, during the course of the development of this policy advice.

The report recommends that a new allocation model should be developed, based on a schools educational profile, while providing a baseline allocation to every mainstream school to support inclusion.

My Department is currently collecting information which will be required to develop the proposed new model.

Following publication of the working group report, my Department invited education partners, stakeholders, and parent representative groups to make written submissions in relation to the NCSE report. 26 written submissions have been received to date, from interested parties.

My Department also held a number of consultation meetings on 1st and 3rd October last with stakeholders, education partners, and parent representative groups.

Consultation has been a key feature of the development of this policy advice to date and I can confirm that consultation will continue to take place at each stage of the development of proposals for any new model.

School Enrolments

203. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out her views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding the education (admission to schools) Bill 2014. [38762/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Government gave approval in March of this year for drafting the Education (Admissions to Schools) Bill 2014. The General Scheme has since been referred to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to the Government for drafting. Drafting of the Bill is currently underway.

The objective of the Admissions to School Bill is to provide an over-arching framework to ensure that how schools decide on who is enrolled and who is refused a place in schools is more structured, fair and transparent.

A key objective in designing the framework is to create greater confidence for parents that the admission criteria laid down by schools are legitimate, reasonable and fair.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

204. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the measures taken to ensure that class sizes at primary level do not increase; if she will introduce

initiatives to reduce class sizes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38777/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): At primary level the staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location. The configuration of classes and the deployment of classroom teachers are done at local school level.

The national average class size at primary level is 24.7 pupils. However, with over 21,100 classes in over 3,100 primary schools throughout the country there will always be variations in class sizes at individual school level. My Department’s guidance to local school management is that such variations should be kept to the minimum.

Schools with significantly increasing enrolments are catered for within the staffing arrangements by being allocated teachers on the basis of their current pupil numbers rather than on a previous year basis which is the case for the majority of schools.

The staffing appeals process has been extended to include a new criterion which helps those schools that make a significant contribution to the provision of school places, which assists the response to demographic growth within their area, and as a result are under significant pressure on their class sizes at infants level.

Because of increasing demographics my Department requires additional resources to simply maintain existing levels of service. Between this year and last year this has involved an increase of around 2,300 teachers in our primary and post-primary schools. This is a very significant investment at a time of scarce resources. My main priority for any additional resources for the foreseeable future will be to cater for the continuing increase in demographics at all levels in the education system.

School Accommodation

205. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the measures that have been taken to reduce the numbers of prefabricated classrooms in use; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38778/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My Department’s overriding objective is to ensure that every child has access to a physical school place and that our school system is in a position to cope with increasing pupil numbers. To ensure that this is achieved, the delivery of major school projects to meet significant demographic demands nationally will be the main focus for capital investment in schools in the coming years.

However, even despite the enormous financial challenges which have been faced in recent years, two iterations of the Prefab Replacement Scheme were funded by my predecessor. Under the Prefab Replacement Initiative 2012 and 2013 approval was given to 217 schools (209 primary and 8 post-primary) to replace 614 prefab units with permanent accommodation. In excess of €56m has been allocated to these initiatives.

Schools Building Projects Status

206. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the schools that are due to receive new build accommodation in 2015 and 2016, broken down by location and type of accommodation intended; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38781/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Five Year Construction Plan that was announced in March 2012 as part of the Department’s €2 billion capital investment programme, outlines the major school projects that are scheduled to commence construction over the duration of the Plan. These have been prioritised on the basis of meeting significant demographic needs.

In addition, my Department will also consider applications from individual schools for devolved funding to meet an immediate accommodation requirement because of increased enrolments and where an additional teacher is being appointed.

My Department will continue to analyse demographic trends and to monitor enrolments in all areas, to determine the level of additional school provision which may be required into the future and to ensure that this is provided in a timely manner.

The current status of all projects on the school building programme may be viewed on my Department’s website at www.education.ie and this is updated regularly throughout the year.

State Examinations Reviews

207. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to concerns within the special education sector regarding recent changes (details supplied) to the qualification regime; and if she will address these issues. [38808/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As part of the junior cycle reform, there has been a move away from multi-level specification of subjects. English, Irish and Mathematics are the only subjects offered at two levels. All other subjects will be offered at a single common level. This move is consistent with good practice in curriculum specification internationally, and contributes to the development of more inclusive curricula designed for and taken by ALL students, including those with special needs.

The brief for the development of subject specifications stresses the importance of learning outcomes, including those learning outcomes previously associated with Foundation Level, so students with special needs who may previously have taken Foundation Level will be able to choose from the Ordinary Level or Higher Level in these subjects. In addition, the broader range of assessment approaches and methods to be used in these subjects will also facilitate students with special needs in accessing and achieving well in these subjects.

It is important to note that there is a new initiative in the reformed Junior Cycle. There will be assessment of Level 2 Learning Programmes. The Level 2 Learning Programme will target the learning and accreditation needs of certain students with general learning disabilities. These students are small in number and will have Individual Education Plans. They will be accredited for their work. Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is responsible for quality assurance across higher and further education and training and also makes awards at all levels of the National Framework of Qualifications. In order to have access to QQI’s awards, providers of education and training must first agree their overall procedures for quality assurance with QQI, so that QQI can be assured that they meet their rigorous quality standards. The purpose of those standards is to ensure that providers have the capacity to provide quality programmes of education and training to their learners.

Since its establishment, QQI has been rolling out its own policies and criteria across its range of functions and, in the final quarter of 2013, it published the policies required to allow new providers to gain access to its awards. In addition, QQI determined the fees associated with those policies, and those fees were consented to by the then Minister for Education and

Skills and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. In the further education and training sector, those fees amounted to €5,000 for approval of quality assurance procedures, and €2,000 or €1,000 for validation of a programme of education and training, depending on the size of the award. The fees which will apply to providers which currently have access to QQI's awards, and which will be required to re-engage with QQI, are yet to be determined. There is a significant amount of work involved in assessing applications from providers seeking access to QQI's awards and these fees underpin QQI's ability to ensure and monitor compliance with its standards.

School Transport Provision

208. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will continue to provide free transport to children attending units or schools catering for children with special needs; if her attention has been drawn to difficulties arising for some students whereby the nearest such school to them is full and they are required to travel some distance to get a school place; and if she will provide an assurance that her Department will continue to fund transport in such cases. [38809/14]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English): Under the terms of my Department's School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs, children are eligible for transport, where they are attending the nearest recognised school that is or can be resourced to meet their special educational needs. All children with special educational needs who are currently categorised as eligible for free school transport retain this eligibility provided their circumstances have not changed. The National Council for Special Education through its network of Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) acts in an advisory role to my Department on the suitability and availability of placements for children with special educational needs. Where the Department is satisfied that the child is attending his/her nearest school which is resourced to meet their special educational needs, this child is considered eligible for free school transport regardless of the distance from home to school.

School Accommodation

209. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills in view of the increasing demand for places in a special school (details supplied) if she will provide a schedule for the provision of additional classroom space in order to meet this demand. [38811/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is currently finalising a schedule of accommodation for the school in question in the context of the growing demand for additional school places. My Department will be in contact with the school when this process has been completed.

School Staffing

210. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of temporary contracts in place for the public sector as a whole including State agencies and other public bodies under the remit of her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38827/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): For the Deputy's informa-

tion, there are 90 temporary contracts in place in non commercial bodies under the remit of my Department. In relation to teaching and non-teaching staff, schools receive an allocation of posts each year and the majority of positions are filled on a permanent basis. The criteria for the allocation of posts is published annually on the Department website. Where staff are on career breaks, carer's leave, job sharing, extended sick leave, maternity and extended maternity leave the posts are filled by staff on fixed term contracts, until the post holder returns to his/her position. In the post primary sector it may transpire that schools are forced to employ more than one teacher on fixed term contracts to cover the subject combination of a teacher on a particular leave of absence. There are also arrangements in place whereby schools can apply for temporary full and part-time resource posts to cover their NCSE approved allocation if such schools are unable to access resource hours through a network full time permanent resource posts in place. Where a fixed term contract is awarded to a teacher and the allocation continues to support the need for the teacher, after three years and subject to the terms of Department circulars, that person teacher will be offered a contract of indefinite duration in the school.

Special Needs Assistants are employed in schools to assist with the care needs of children. Due to the nature of the work the allocation for SNAs will increase or decrease depending on the numbers of children requiring assistance in any school year. SNAs are employed on the basis that they will continue to work in the school as long as the resource is required. If there is no requirement for an SNA and the post becomes redundant, the SNA may opt to take a redundancy payment or remain on a panel for up to two years while seeking a further post as an SNA. At the end of the 2013/14 school year there were 935 primary teachers and 2,618 post primary teachers on fixed term contracts. The Department does not have a direct role in the recruitment and employment of staff in the education and training board sector and, accordingly, information regarding the number of temporary contracts in place in the sector is not readily available. The recruitment and employment of staff is a matter for each of the sixteen education and training boards and to compile such information would involve an inordinate amount of administrative time. Accordingly the Department is not in a position to provide the information requested for the Education and Training Boards.

School Staffing

211. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of contracts of indefinite duration that have been sought and the number that have been granted in the years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014 in the public sector under the remit of her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38838/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The information requested by the Deputy is being compiled by my Department and will be forwarded directly to him.

Motor Tax Rates

212. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on the inequality in the motor tax rates which means that those who can only tax their car for a short period are heavily penalised vis-à-vis those who can pay the amount for a longer period in a lump sum; if this is not an attack on those of limited means; his plans to address this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38619/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Motor tax is payable on an annual, half-yearly or quarterly basis. The rates of duty

applicable for half yearly and quarterly options are 55.5% and 28.25% of the annual charge respectively. This additional cost element takes account of the extra workload for staff in motor tax offices and the National Vehicle and Driver File unit, and the resultant administrative costs and printing costs that arise, including the issuing of renewal notices. The estimated annual income from the increased charges for half-yearly and quarterly vehicle licences is in the region of €50m. A loss in income from this source would have a negative impact on revenue and would have to be borne elsewhere in the motor tax system, or through the taxation system generally.

I have no plans to adjust the basis for paying motor tax on a half-yearly or quarterly basis currently.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Expenditure

213. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 1990. [38546/14]

214. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 1991. [38547/14]

215. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 1992. [38548/14]

216. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 1993. [38549/14]

217. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 1994. [38550/14]

218. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 1995. [38551/14]

219. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 1996. [38552/14]

220. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 1997. [38553/14]

221. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 1998. [38554/14]

222. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 1999. [38555/14]

223. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 2000. [38556/14]

cal Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 2000. [38556/14]

224. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 2001. [38557/14]

225. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 2002. [38558/14]

226. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 2003. [38559/14]

227. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 2004. [38560/14]

228. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 2005. [38561/14]

229. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 2006. [38562/14]

230. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 2007. [38563/14]

231. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 2008. [38564/14]

232. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 2009. [38565/14]

233. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 2010. [38566/14]

234. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 2011. [38567/14]

235. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 2012. [38568/14]

236. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 2013. [38569/14]

237. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme in 2014. [38570/14]

cal Government the amount his Department spent on the Gweedore sewerage scheme to date in 2014. [38570/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 213 to 237, inclusive, together.

The Gweedore Sewerage Scheme was included in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2010 - 2013 as a scheme to commence construction during the lifetime of the Programme. The amount recouped by my Department to Donegal County Council in respect of the Gweedore Sewerage Scheme is set out in the following table. These costs mainly relate to site investigation, land purchase and contract document preparation.

Year	Recouped by Department to the Donegal County Council Council in respect of Gweedore Sewerage Scheme
1990 - 1992	No funds recouped to Donegal County Council in respect of this scheme
1993	€61,882
1994	No funds recouped to Donegal County Council in respect of this scheme
1995	€62,869
1996 - 2000	No funds recouped to Donegal County Council in respect of this scheme
2001	€397,200
2002	€709,662
2003	€680,664
2004	€120,771
2005 - 2008	No funds recouped to Donegal County Council in respect of this scheme
2009	€221,384
2010	€127,915
2011	No funds recouped to Donegal County Council in respect of this scheme
2012	€265,362
2013	€410,187
Grand Total	€3,057,896

Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water is responsible for the delivery of water services capital infrastructure. Irish Water has published its Capital Investment Plan 2014-2016 and this is available online at <http://www.water.ie/news/proposed-capital-investme/Proposed-Capital-Investment-Plan-2014-2016.pdf>.

The further progression of all water services capital projects including the Gweedore Sewerage Scheme is now a matter for Irish Water to consider. 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 Exemptions

238. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding the application of water charges for third level students living away from home; his plans for an initiative on the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38595/14]

247. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if registered charities operating sheltered accommodation are exempt from water charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38697/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 238 and 247 together.

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 shall 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 Act defines a customer as the occupier of the premises in receipt of water services. As such, third level students who have moved away from home to an alternative primary residence and residents living in sheltered accommodation will be liable for water charges.

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. Last week, the CER issued a determination on the water charges plan. Full details and associated documentation are available on the CER website (www.cer.ie).

In making its determination on the water charges plan, the CER had to 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 2013 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 for child benefit, while customers with specific medical conditions which require increased water consumption will have their charges capped.

In its determination, the CER has decided that all customers will have their total water charges capped at the unmetered “assessed charge” for 9 months. The cap will apply from the start date of the next billing period after installation of the meter or 1 October 2014, whichever is the later.

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.

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 Quality

239. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if Irish Water will publish a medium to long-term plan to improve water quality, capacity and infrastructure around the country; and if a timeframe will be given for such improvements. [38608/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water is responsible for the delivery of water services capital

infrastructure. Irish Water has recently published its Proposed Capital Investment Plan for 2014-2016 and this is available on the Irish Water website, www.water.ie. The plan outlines a number of priorities to be delivered including improving water quality, tackling leakage, improving capacity and investing for economic development.

In addition to this, Section 33 of the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 requires Irish Water to prepare a Water Services Strategic Plan (WSSP). The WSSP is intended to outline the strategic direction for Irish Water over the short, medium and long-term time frames up to 2040. The WSSP will be a strategic framework which will identify and prioritise the key objectives required to ensure the public water system can meet the challenges of the future. This framework will also allow future capital investment plans to be developed by Irish Water and approved by the Commission for Energy Regulation in its role as economic regulator. I issued a direction to Irish Water under Section 33(3) of the Water Services (No.2) Act, 2013 which sets out matters to be taken into account in developing the water services strategic plan and “ensuring a safe and reliable water supply” is among the themes to be addressed in the plan in accordance with the direction.

Development of the draft strategic plan involves public consultation and consultation with statutory consultees including my Department, the County and City Management Association, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Commission for Energy Regulation, local and regional authorities and with environmental authorities. A further round of public consultation on the draft plan will be held before year end with a view to its submission to me, as Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, for approval in early 2015.

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 Supply

240. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding the first fix free policy from Irish Water and their statements that it will not be available before 2015; in view of this, his views that this is encouraging water wastage (details supplied); and if he will take action to ensure that leaks which emerge now are fixed. [38609/14]

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 responsibility for the independent economic regulation of the water sector is assigned to the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) and that the water charges plan prepared by Irish Water is subject to the approval of the CER. The CER announced its decision on the water charges plan on 30 September.

Under the Water Services Act 2007, responsibility for repair and maintenance of the internal water distribution system from the main stopcock to the house and within the house rests with the homeowner. However, the Government has agreed to provide additional funding to Irish Water for their capital investment to include a free first fix scheme. In announcing its decision on the Irish Water water charges plan, the CER determined that customer charges are capped at the relevant unmetered charge for an initial period of nine months after their water meter is installed. This will ensure that those with meters installed, and an identified leak external to the dwelling, will not be penalised pending the carrying out of the first fix.

Irish Water has submitted a draft first fix policy to the CER for approval. It is understood that the CER intend to hold a public consultation in advance of a decision and implementation of this scheme in January 2015.

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 Services Provision

241. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the reason figures have been put in the public domain, that the expected yearly consumption per adult will be 52,000 litres, yet Irish Water is using a figure of 60,000 litres. [38610/14]

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 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 included the proposed approach to the assessed charge. Last week, the CER issued a determination on the water charges plan and details and associated documentation are available on the CER website (www.cer.ie).

Irish Water has carried out a project to understand water consumption patterns in Ireland, and the Water Consumption Research Project (WCRP) is available on the CER website. The figures in the WCRP, based on actual metered data and follow-on surveys with over 3000 houses, confirms that consumption for a household is 66,000 litres per year for the first occupant and an average 21,000 litres increase for each additional occupant. Data on consumption patterns will be provided by Irish Water to the CER on a regular basis.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on 1890 278 278.

Pyrite Issues

242. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will engage with the Irish Insurance Federation and direct it to insure dwellings which have pyrite. [38615/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Irish Insurance Federation, now known as Insurance Ireland, is a representative body for insurance providers operating in the Irish market. As is the case with any private organisation, its operations are matters for its management and board of directors and I have no powers

to direct them to take a particular course of action.

While I have no regulatory function in the area of insurance or insurance-based products, it is my intention to raise this issue with the appropriate statutory bodies and Government Departments involved in the regulation and oversight of insurance and I will be fully supportive of any proposals that may be put forward to bring a satisfactory conclusion to the difficulties being faced by homeowners with pyrite damage even when remediation works have been carried out.

The pyrite remediation scheme, which was published by the Pyrite Resolution Board in February 2014, was developed having regard to the recommendations set out in the Report of the independent Pyrite Panel. The scheme is one of “last resort” and applies to dwellings with significant pyritic damage. The scheme is fundamentally a works scheme aimed at remediating pyrite damaged homes to Irish Standard 398-2:2013 Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material - Part 2: Methodology for remediation works, published by the National Standards Authority of Ireland in January 2013, in order to ensure the restoration of quality to homes that affected homeowners expect and are entitled too.

All works under the scheme will be completed to the required standard by competent builders and overseen by construction professionals in accordance with the requirements of the Board and the Housing Agency. At the end of the works, homeowners will be provided with certification to confirm that their home has been remediated to I.S. 398:2013 - Part 2. Given that the contaminated hardcore will be removed and replaced with compliant material, and all damage remediated, I am confident that any risk to the structural integrity of such remediated homes caused by pyritic heave will be eliminated, thereby removing any impediment towards the future insurance of these homes.

In this context, I would call on all insurance providers to re-consider their policies in these matters and provide the insurance cover that affected homeowners require in order to ensure that their homes are protected against future unforeseen risk.

Island Communities

243. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he has received correspondence from Comhdáil Oileán na hÉireann regarding the alignment process and the offshore islands; his views on their proposal that an island based organisation deliver the SICAP and Leader programmes on all the inhabited offshore islands from 2015 onwards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38625/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I have received, and am considering, the correspondence from Comhdáil Oileán na hÉireann, which advocates for a single island-based body to deliver the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and the new LEADER programme on the offshore islands.

Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) have been established in all local authority areas to oversee and manage a range of local development programmes, including SICAP and LEADER. While each LCDC will plan and manage the delivery of programme activity within its respective local authority area, it would be possible for a single representative organisation to implement programme actions across a number of different LCDC areas where this can be agreed locally within the administrative requirements of the various programmes.

Under the LEADER Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, local development strategy areas have been designated to coincide largely with local authority boundaries. While a

separate strategy is not envisaged, distinct and separate provision will be made for the islands within the respective county-based strategies in accordance with identified priorities and need. Moreover, where it can be agreed locally between local authorities, local development companies and other key local stakeholders, it is envisaged that the existing companies, such as Comhar na n-Oileán, would continue to implement LEADER within their current sub-county areas, albeit under separate county-based local development strategies.

The situation with SICAP is somewhat different as it is subject to a public procurement process, which is currently underway. Similar to LEADER, programme delivery across a number of sub-county areas by a single body is possible, with programme funding allocated on the basis of identified need in those areas. Until such time as the outcome of the procurement process is known and contracts are awarded, however, I am unable to confirm the exact delivery arrangements for any area, including the islands.

Local Government Elections

244. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update regarding the plan to have a directly elected mayor for Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38664/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Local Government Reform Act 2014 provided for a wide-ranging programme of reform to local government structures, functions and governance, including a process for the holding of a plebiscite on the possible introduction of an office of directly elected mayor for a Dublin metropolitan authority. This procedure was based on achievement of political consensus across the four Dublin local authorities (Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council and South Dublin County Council), involving the adoption of a resolution by a majority of each Dublin council for the holding of a plebiscite in relation to proposals set out in the resolution. In the event, that statutory requirement for the holding of a plebiscite was not met.

Subsequently, my predecessor, in a meeting with the Mayors of the four Dublin authorities on 7 July, invited them to consider and revert with proposals that would address not only the concept of a directly elected mayor but also the wider governance of the metropolitan area including cost and functional implications. Any subsequent process arising from this would be contingent on political consensus across the four local authorities.

Furthermore, as the process under the 2014 Act provided only for a possible plebiscite in conjunction with the 2014 local elections, fresh legislation would be required to provide for any further proposal in this matter, which would have to be viewed in the context of priorities generally, including the heavy programme of important legislation arising over the next 18 months or so.

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Scheme

245. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will make funding available to the local authorities to fit carbon monoxide alarms in local authority owned homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38671/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kel-

ly): Under Section 58 of the Housing Act 1966, the management and maintenance of the local authority housing stock is the responsibility of the relevant housing authority. In that context, in their capacity as owners of their social rented properties, decisions in relation to the installation of fittings and equipment, including carbon monoxide alarms, are a matter for individual housing authorities.

Housing Data

246. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of one bedroom properties available for letting by South Dublin County Council; the number of one bedroom properties that have been let by the council over the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38686/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department collates and publishes a wide range of housing and planning statistics that inform the preparation and evaluation of policy. Data on the local authority housing stock are available on my Department's website at: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/StatisticsandRegularPublications/HousingStatistics/FileDownload,15291,en.xls> by clicking "L.A rented units by area 2003 + " under the Social Housing Supports contents. The stock figures are broken down by house type and local authority area; however, the number of bedrooms is not included in the data collected by my Department.

Question No. 247 answered with Question No. 238.

Water Charges Administration

248. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the allowance that will be awarded to persons with health conditions which require water; and the criteria that will be used by Irish Water to award those allowances. [38718/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I refer to the reply to Questions Nos. 527 and 528 of 7 October 2014 which sets out the position in the matter.

Water Charges Administration

249. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of homes to be billed in full for domestic water charges. [38719/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) recently held a public consultation on the water charges plan, submitted to it by Irish Water, which covered a range of issues relating to water charges and included the tariff model which underpins the Plan. Last week, the CER issued a determination on the water charges plan and details and associated documentation are available on the CER website (www.cer.ie). The final Irish Water Tariff Model, as published by the CER, estimates that just under 1.5 million households are connected to the public supply and will be billable by Irish Water.

However, Irish Water is in the process of compiling the relevant data to ensure that customers can be billed accurately based on the tariff structure approved by the CER. Throughout the

last number of weeks, Irish Water has been sending application packs to households, which refer to the effective charging date and the fact that billing for domestic customers in receipt of public water services will start in January 2015. The application process will enable customers to confirm their details for billing and, by providing the relevant PPS numbers, claim the allowances that they are eligible for. Until the application process is complete, it is not possible for Irish Water to state exactly how many households will be billed for domestic water charges.

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

250. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the issues raised concerning the request for personal public service numbers, water default charges and more (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38736/14]

253. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the Irish Water data protection notice has now been approved by the data protection commissioner; and if he will provide an assurance to customers that any personal data provided will be secure. [38790/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 250 and 253 together.

I refer to the reply to Questions Nos. 207, 215, 208, 209, 210 and 211 of 8 October 2014. The position is unchanged.

Departmental Funding

251. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38745/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department provides funding to the community and voluntary sector through a range of community, housing and environmental programmes and initiatives. However, there is no funding available from these programmes and initiatives for the purpose sought.

Litter Pollution Legislation

252. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will allow restaurants and auctioneers in rural areas to continue to use signage to ensure the viability of their family businesses (details supplied); when is it envisaged that these new regulations will have to be observed. [38763/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I understand that the issue concerned relates to an exercise being undertaken by Roscommon County Council under the Litter Pollution Act 1997 (as amended). Under that Act, the pri-

mary management and enforcement response to littering must come from the local authorities. Therefore, it is a matter for each local authority to decide on the most appropriate enforcement actions in their areas, taking account of local circumstances and priorities. Local authorities are independent statutory bodies, with democratically elected councils and their own management system and it is a matter for each local authority to determine the most appropriate course of action to tackle litter pollution within the legislation provided. Neither I, as Minister, nor my Department have any function in relation to the matter.

Question No. 253 answered with Question No. 250.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

254. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the success of the financial contribution scheme for older persons; and the potential of this scheme to be a significant part of any housing strategy. [38791/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The particular financial contribution scheme for older persons concerned was a local authority scheme which facilitated older people to downsize from homes that had become too large for them, thus potentially freeing up these larger homes for use as family units.

In the context of implementation of the Social Housing Strategy, now at an advanced stage of preparation, it will be open to local authorities to explore the potential role of schemes of this kind in meeting housing need, having regard to local circumstances.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

255. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the average waiting time for social housing per local authority; if he will provide a table showing actual numbers on housing waiting lists in each local authority in each year from 2000 to date in 2014, including family size in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38795/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The latest summary of social housing assessments carried out as at 7 May 2013 provides data on the number of households on local authority waiting lists at that date across a range of categories broken down by authority, including the composition of qualified households and the length of time on waiting lists. The 2013 results are available on my Department's website at: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload,34857,en.pdf>.

The 2013 figures are the most up-to-date figures available on waiting list numbers, which are subject to ongoing fluctuation due to households being allocated housing and new households applying for housing support. However, the 2013 results cannot be directly compared to previous results given that this latest summary employed different methodologies and was the first to be carried out under the 2011 Social Housing Assessment Regulations.

The results of the previous assessments carried out in 1999, 2002, 2005, 2008 and 2011 are available on my Department's website at the links below and contain the information sought other than information on waiting list times in 1999 which was not reported at the time. The

2011 Housing Needs Assessment report provides, at Table A1, the number of households on waiting lists by housing authority for each of the seven assessments carried out between 1993 and 2011.

1999 Assessment: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/StatisticsandRegularPublications/HousingStatistics/FileDownload,39160,en.pdf>

2002 Assessment: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/StatisticsandRegularPublications/HousingStatistics/FileDownload,39159,en.pdf>

2005 Assessment: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/StatisticsandRegularPublications/HousingStatistics/FileDownload,2115,en.pdf>

2008 Assessment: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/StatisticsandRegularPublications/HousingStatistics/FileDownload,27868,en.pdf>

2011 Assessment: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload,27864,en.pdf>

Unfinished Housing Developments

256. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount, in tabular form, that has been drawn down from the special resolution fund for unfinished estates by each local authority in each year of its operation; if he will also indicate the amount that has been spent on unfinished estates to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38796/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Budget 2014 contained a special provision, in the form of a targeted €10m Special Resolution Fund (SRF), to assist further in addressing the legacy of unfinished housing developments. The SRF is designed to encourage the resolution of the remaining tranche of unfinished developments identified in the National Housing Development Survey 2013 and, particularly, those developments not likely to be resolved in the normal way through solely developer/owner/funder action because of the presence of specific financial barriers.

On 2 May 2014, allocations from the Special Resolution Fund were announced and 86 developments were approved for funding. The following link contains a list of all developments approved for SRF funding: <http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/News/MainBody,37940,en.htm>.

It is hoped that the SRF will enable very substantial progress to be made in resolving as many of the remaining unfinished developments as possible.

The SRF drawdown to date is set out in the table.

Local Authority	SRF Funding drawn down in 2014 to date €
Carlow County Council	0.00
Cavan County Council	0.00
Clare County Council	184,457.50
Cork City Council	0.00
Cork County Council	0.00
Donegal County Council	425,551.00

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Local Authority	SRF Funding drawn down in 2014 to date €
Dublin City Council	0.00
Fingal County Council	0.00
South Dublin County Council	0.00
D.L.R. County Council	0.00
Galway City Council	125,000.00
Galway County Council	196,345.00
Kerry County Council	26,105.00
Kildare County Council	0.00
Kilkenny County Council	0.00
Laois County Council	183,629.98
Leitrim County Council	0.00
Limerick	86,749.00
Longford County Council	422,036.00
Louth County Council	82,500.00
Mayo County Council	122,863.65
Meath County Council	187,500.00
Monaghan County Council	101,691.00
Offaly County Council	160,240.00
Roscommon County Council	0.00
Sligo County Council	71,250.00
Tipperary County Council	120,828.00
Waterford County Council	0.00
Westmeath County Council	90,757.50
Wexford County Council	163,499.09
Wicklow County Council	21,500.00
Total	2,772,502.72

My Department launched the Public Safety Initiative (PSI) in March 2011, which provided funding to address immediate public safety issues in unfinished housing developments. The types of works that have been approved under the PSI include the fencing off of unsecured and hazardous areas, capping of pipes, installation of street lighting and other works to secure sites. To date, €3.39m has been drawn down under the PSI.

My Department issued a circular to Local Authorities on 14 May 2014 advising that the deadline for drawing down PSI funding is 30 November 2014.

Homelessness Strategy

257. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the guidelines for usage of the pathway accommodation and support system to record homelessness; if risk of homelessness is quantified or measured in any way by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38805/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The 2009 National Implementation Plan for the Homeless Strategy provides for the development and implementation of a single integrated national data information system on the use of homeless services. The usage of the Pathway Accommodation and Support System (PASS) by homeless service providers has been established by housing authorities as a criteria

for the provision of State funding on homelessness. Dublin City Council provides PASS as a national shared service, whereby statutory and non-governmental homelessness service providers throughout the country can avail of the software package without the requirement for costly individual support and licence arrangements and with Dublin City Council providing user support. PASS records the details of homeless services that are funded through housing authorities under Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988 and whereby the individuals using such services are defined as homeless under Section 2 of that Act.

Data on the risk of homelessness is not recorded on PASS. However, within the overall approach to addressing homelessness, particular attention is paid to homelessness prevention, including in relation to specific vulnerable groups at risk of becoming homeless.

Homeless Persons Data

258. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that collection of data for homelessness is not comprehensive as it does not count the number of homeless families sharing accommodation with their families; the interim measures he plans to utilise to gather this data; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38806/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Data on homeless households in emergency accommodation is provided through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS).

Households that are qualified for social housing support are recorded by housing authorities through social housing assessments. When assessing the housing need of an applicant household for social housing support, each housing authority records, among other information, details on the household's current tenure such as whether they are living with parents, relatives/friends or homeless. This information is reflected in the statutory summary of Social Housing Assessments which provides details of the number of households qualified for social housing support and on housing authority waiting lists. The latest summary was carried out at 7 May 2013, in accordance with Section 21 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, and the results are available on my Department's website at <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications-Documents/FileDownload,34857,en.pdf>.

Homeless Persons Data

259. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the numbers of homeless individuals and families recorded on the pathway accommodation and support system in each quarter in each local authority where it has been active since it came into operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38814/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Traditionally it has been difficult to quantify the number of homeless persons on an ongoing basis; this is in part a consequence of the volatility within this cohort of housing need. In February 2013, at the time of publication of the Government's Homelessness Policy Statement, a set of indicators was identified to be used to demonstrate the dynamics of homelessness as it is addressed. These indicators will give a clearer picture of homelessness in Ireland and, in quantifying its ongoing extent, will support the implementation of realistic and practical solutions. The Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS) is now operational nationwide and will assist lead housing authorities in each of the 9 regions to report on these indicators. 2014 will be

the first year for which PASS will produce composite national data on homelessness. Quarterly reports from lead housing authorities are being published on my Department's website as soon as these are available. Lead housing authorities are also providing monthly reports on homelessness which identify the number of people utilising State-funded emergency accommodation on a regional and county basis. These monthly reports also provide details of the breakdown of the individuals and the numbers of families and dependents that are in emergency accommodation. Both the quarterly and monthly reports are available on my Department's website at, <http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/SpecialNeeds/HomelessPeople/>.

Seniors Alert Scheme

260. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide in tabular form a county breakdown of funding provided and the number of persons engaged per annum in 2010 to 2013, inclusive, and to date in 2014, in the senior alert scheme. [38818/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department manages the Seniors Alert Scheme which encourages community support for vulnerable older people in our communities by providing grant assistance towards the purchase and installation of personal monitored alarms to enable older persons, of limited means, to continue to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind. The scheme is administered by local community and voluntary groups with the support of my Department.

The tabular information requested in regard to a county breakdown of funding provided in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014 is available on my Department's website at <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/Community/SeniorsAlert/FileDownload,26536,en.xls>.

The information requested regarding the number of persons engaged per annum in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and to date in 2014, in the senior alert scheme is not available in my Department but the number of Groups involved and the number of beneficiaries are outlined in the tabular statement below and are also available on my Department's website.

Year	Allocation	Groups	Beneficiaries
2010	€3.10m	585	7,817
2011	€2.35m	422	7,910
2012	€2.35m	498	9,142
2013	€2.35m	511	10,597
2014	€2.35m	463 (to 30 September 2014)	4,731 (to 30 September 2014)

Departmental Agencies Staff Data

261. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of temporary contracts in place for the public sector as a whole, including State agencies and other public bodies under the remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38828/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department gathers quarterly data on staff numbers in the local authority sector and in the State agencies under my Department's remit. The most recent quarterly data on the numbers of temporary contract staff collected at the end of June 2014 on a whole time equivalent

basis (WTE), was 1,320.91 WTE (local authority sector) and 19.5 WTE (State agencies). My Department has two officers engaged on temporary contracts and arrangements are currently being finalised in relation to contract appointments in my office and the office of my colleague, Minister of State Coffey, under the normal arrangements for the staffing of such officers.

Departmental Agencies Staff Data

262. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of contracts of indefinite duration that have been sought and the number that have been granted in the years 2007 to 2013, inclusive, and to date in 2014 in the public sector under the remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38839/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department first collected information in relation to the numbers of staff entitled to contracts of indefinite duration in local authorities in 2008. The table sets out the information on a cumulative and a whole time equivalent basis (wte) and includes the most recent data available for 2014. The number of staff who sought contracts of indefinite duration is not collected by my Department.

Local Authority Sector	Total WTE
December 2008	184.3
December 2009	357.48
December 2010	447.2
December 2011	584.51
December 2012	721.33
December 2013	785.26
June 2014	876.58

There is one staff member with a contract of indefinite duration in my Department since September 2012.

The information requested in respect of State agencies is not collected by my Department.

Broadband Service Provision

263. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to address the issue of lack of adequate broadband services in many parts of County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38628/14]

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 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. An initial list of areas has

already been identified and includes 78 areas in County Donegal. I am also aware of extensive rollout of high speed broadband services in County Donegal by at least one commercial operator.

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 last. 31 submissions were received as part of this process and non-commercially sensitive versions of these responses will be published by my Department 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. The 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 detailed intervention strategy will be launched in mid-2015.

EU State Aid clearance will be required for the 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.

Broadband Service Speeds

264. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if his attention has been drawn to the poor standard and quality of broadband in many areas throughout the country; the action he will take to address the situation in pockets of County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38799/14]

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 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. An initial list of areas has already identified and includes 108 areas in County Cork. I am also aware of extensive rollout of high speed broadband services in County Cork by at least one commercial operator.

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 last. 31 submissions were received as part of this process and non-commercially sensitive versions of these responses will be published by my Department over the coming weeks.

I expect to publish the maps for public consultation later this year. These will include de-

tails of the areas requiring State intervention. The 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 detailed intervention strategy will be launched in mid-2015.

EU State Aid clearance will be required for the 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.

Departmental Agencies Staff Data

265. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of temporary contracts in place for the public sector as a whole, including State agencies and other public bodies under the remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38825/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The information the Deputy has sought regarding the agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each Agency. I will request the relevant bodies to reply directly to the Deputy with the information requested in respect of their organisation.

Departmental Agencies Staff Data

266. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of contracts of indefinite duration that have been sought and the number that have been granted in the years 2007 to 2013, inclusive, and to date in 2014 in the public sector under the remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38836/14]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The information sought by the Deputy in relation to the agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each Agency. I will request the relevant bodies to reply directly to the Deputy with the information requested in respect of their organisation.

Northern Ireland Issues

267. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update on discussions he has had with his counterparts in Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom in respect of the heavy goods vehicle road user levy; if he will ensure that Republic of Ireland hauliers who use the A5 are exempt from the Northern Ireland road user charge that was implemented on 1 April 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38767/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The introduction of the U.K. HGV road user levy in April is an unwelcome additional charge on Irish hauliers, particularly for those operating in the Border areas. The Irish Government, with the support of the Northern Ireland authorities, initially lobbied the U.K. Government to exempt all of Northern Ireland from the levy. When this was rejected, the Government sought to have the A5 from Derry to Aughnacloy exempted from the levy, as it is a significant transit route from Donegal to Monaghan and then onto Dublin and Rosslare Port.

The issue was raised both in correspondence and at meetings with the U.K. Minister for Transport and with the Prime Minister. Unfortunately, the U.K. Minister for Transport rejected our proposals for an exemption of the A5, as is his right under EU law. The U.K. authorities have however granted an exemption to approximately 7 km of roads which repeatedly criss-cross the Border.

I have instructed my officials to explore options with their U.K. and Northern Ireland colleagues to mitigate the effect of the levy on Irish hauliers.

Road Projects Expenditure

268. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a breakdown of funding for roads and road services provided to each local authority in each of the past ten years. [38797/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Details of the regional and local road grant payments to local authorities are outlined in the regional and local road grant payment booklets which are available in the Library of the Houses of the Oireachtas. Details of the 2014 regional and local road grant allocations to each county council are also available in the Library of the Houses of the Oireachtas.

With regard to national roads, details of the allocations to each local authority are also available in the Dáil library. However, details of the actual drawdown of funding for these roads is a matter for the National Roads Authority.

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.

Bus Éireann Services

269. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a bus shelter will be provided at a location (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38573/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The functions of the National Transport Authority (NTA) in relation to public transport infrastructure include securing or providing bus stops, bus shelters, bus stations, stands and bus fleets in the State.

Noting this 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.

Tourism Promotion

270. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding spent on overseas advertising by statutory bodies on tourism; the breakdown for the years 2011 to date in 2014; the products, areas or attractions it was promoting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38574/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Tourism Ireland, a cross-border body established under the Good Friday Agreement, is the body responsible for promoting the island of Ireland as a visitor destination in overseas markets. Tourism Ireland is jointly funded by my Department and by the Northern Ireland Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and thus its overall budget for marketing in a given year is the total of the allocations from both sponsor departments. In addition, Fáilte Ireland also has a role in relation to overseas promotion as it relates to niche, product and regional marketing. The amounts allocated to the Tourism Marketing Fund (which is shared between Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland) by my Department over the period 2011-2014 are as follows:

2011: €46,083,000

2012: €39,354,000

2013: €37,245,000

2014: €35,476,000

My Department's role in relation to tourism is concerned primarily with national policy, and decisions in relation to the key messages to be used in the marketing of Ireland as a visitor destination are a day-to-day operational matter for the tourism agencies. Therefore, I am referring the Deputy's question to Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland for further information. Please advise my private office if a reply is not received within ten working days.

Tourism Promotion

271. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views that the anti-social behaviour in Dublin city centre is having a negative impact on the tourism industry here (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38581/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): When compared to the number of tourists entering the country, Ireland is a very safe destination and the rate of crime against tourists is quite low. However, I am naturally concerned if anything impacts negatively on the experience of visitors to our country. Research has shown however, that the vast majority of our overseas visitors are more than happy to subsequently recommend Ireland as a holiday destination. With regard to tackling the specific issues raised by the Deputy, obviously responsibility in this regard does not come under the remit of my Department. In this regard, I understand that the Deputy has submitted similar questions to my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality and that my colleague is responding in relation to Garda actions on the matters in question.

Question No. 272 withdrawn.

National Car Test

273. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the validity of a national car test certificate, NCT, on a car which has been proven to be

off the road for a period of time must be backdated to the anniversary of the last test date, which in some cases could be a substantial length of time, instead of from the date of the test going forward, particularly as the new rules for the voluntary early testing of a car allows the NCT certificate to be valid from the date of the test rather than the anniversary of the previous test; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38692/14]

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 overall responsibility for the delivery and oversight of the National Car Test.

A NCT is due when a vehicle is four years old and every two years thereafter until it reaches 10 years when it becomes subject to annual testing. Periods of non-use of a vehicle or periods of not having to pay motor tax are not relevant in relation to determining NCT test due dates. The test due date is determined by reference to the date of registration and subsequent anniversaries of that date.

NCT certificates are not back dated. As a test certificate reflects the condition of the vehicle at the time the test was carried out, it would not be possible to issue a test certificate with an effective start date other than the date of execution of a successful test. Where a vehicle is presented late for its NCT inspection, the NCT certificate is valid from the date of the successful test to the next test due date. This can result in a certificate of less than 1 or 2 years duration, depending on the age of the vehicle. No provision exists to permit an extension of the period covered by an NCT certificate beyond the next test due date.

Voluntary early testing refers to vehicles presented for test more than 90 days in advance of their test due date. Subsequent test due dates are re-set to anniversaries of the voluntary test date and this would result in subsequent test due dates being brought forward.

National Car Test

274. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason a used car which has recently undergone an MOT in the United Kingdom requires a national car test when it is imported; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38693/14]

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.

Directive 2009/40/EC sets down the minimum requirements with regard to roadworthiness testing in EU Member States. However, there are differences in the test between countries.

In Ireland, passenger cars are required to undergo a roadworthiness test when they are 4 years old and every two years thereafter until they reach 10 years of age when they become subject to annual testing. Where a vehicle is imported and re-registered as an Irish vehicle it becomes subject to the same requirements i.e. if it is four years old or more it must undergo an NCT. The test certificate issued is valid for 1 or 2 years (depending on the age of the car) from the date of registration in Ireland.

In the UK passenger cars must undergo a roadworthiness test when they are three years old and annually thereafter. If an Irish car is imported into the UK it becomes subject to UK

requirements and must undergo an MOT there if it is more than three years old, even if it holds a current NCT certificate.

Public Transport Provision

275. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for public transport in the Dublin area in the short to medium term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38698/14]

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).

The NTA's Integrated Implementation Plan 2013-2018 sets out a programme of investment and development in the GDA for the next five years based on the priorities and funding set out in the capital plan to 2016 and on an indicative allocation for 2017 and 2018. This plan will be updated when a revised capital plan is finalised.

My Department currently provides in the region of €150 million annually to the NTA to support public transport improvements in the GDA. This funds light rail improvements, of which the current priority is the delivery of Luas Cross City, heavy rail enhancements such as the city centre re-signalling project, level crossing removals on the Maynooth line, automatic ticketing machines and other station improvements, purchase of replacement buses and the provision and upgrading of bus stops and bus shelters; development of quality bus corridors, cycling routes, pedestrian crossings, safety improvements; and the continued development and rollout of a range of integration measures such as the *Leap Card*, real time passenger information and journey planner.

Funding is also provided for ongoing research and planning for future requirements. This includes planning for the re-opening of the Phoenix Park Tunnel link, for design of a possible Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Network and a review of existing large projects postponed in recent years.

These reviews include a technical consultancy (*Fingal/North Dublin Transport Study*) to assess the rail transport requirements of the North Dublin/Fingal corridor, extending from Finglas to Malahide and including Dublin Airport and Swords and the updating of the 2010 DART Underground business case. The NTA advise that these will be available early next year. In addition I expect to have a report and business case for the Swords/Airport BRT proposal.

I will then consider the options for addressing key public transport deficits in the GDA having regard to the outcome of the reviews as regards costs and benefits, affordability, and funding options with a view to finalising a position by mid-2015.

The key priority over the coming years is to protect investment made to date and to maintain safety standards. If additional funds are available, which is not certain, there will be many competing projects from all transport modes in all regions. I will prioritise any additional funds for projects for which there is a clear need, which are affordable, have a sound business case and add value to existing infrastructure.

State Bodies

276. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if Kerry

technology park is considered a subsidiary of the Shannon Group. [38705/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Kerry Technology Park is one of the property portfolios owned and managed by Shannon Commercial Enterprises (trading as Shannon Commercial Properties), formally Shannon Development. Shannon Commercial Enterprises is a subsidiary of the newly formed Shannon Group.

National Car Test

277. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will ensure that drivers who fail to display their national car test disc, but who are awaiting a NCT appointment due to a backlog, are not issued penalty points; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38707/14]

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.

While demands for NCTs are heavy in the early part of the year, there is no reason why anybody requesting a test at other times of the year should not receive a booking on time. An NCT may be undertaken up to 90 days in advance of the test due date without affecting the expiry date of the new certificate. This advanced booking is to ensure that owners have sufficient time to have their vehicle tested before their current NCT certificate expires. A public awareness campaign is currently underway to ensure that the public is aware that using a vehicle without a valid NCT is becoming a fixed charge offence with effect from early December and advising them to book early.

NCTS is in a favourable position to deal with the demand. Plans are currently in place to extend testing facilities at Mullingar, Blarney and Portlaoise and longer opening hours, in the form of a third shift, are planned for four NCT Centres in Galway, Killarney, Enniscorthy and Ballina. NCTS has been testing record numbers of vehicles this year with the numbers tested each month being approximately 11-12% higher than in the corresponding months in 2013.

Enforcement is a matter for An Garda Síochána. While An Garda Síochána have previously advised motorists awaiting a NCT test to carry proof of their test appointment with them at all times, the responsibility rests with the driver and vehicle owner to ensure that a vehicle being driven in a public place has a valid NCT certificate and that the disc is displayed.

Irish Airlines Superannuation Scheme

278. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding the Irish airlines superannuation scheme. [38761/14]

283. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the actions he or his Department are taking to ensure that the interests of deferred members of the Irish airlines superannuation scheme are adequately protected in any amended pension scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38819/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to

take Questions Nos. 278 and 283 together.

Resolution of the funding difficulties of the IASS is primarily a matter for the Trustee, the companies participating in the scheme, the scheme's members and the Pensions Authority. The process currently underway involves all of these stakeholders, including the deferred members.

I can assure the Deputy that I fully understand the concerns of the deferred members in relation to the funding of the scheme. However, such matters are governed by the Pensions Acts, which fall under the responsibility of my colleague, Joan Burton T.D., the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection. Pension schemes are closely regulated under Irish and European pension law and the Pensions Authority is the national statutory regulatory authority in Ireland. There are prescribed procedures and limitations in place governing any reductions in pension rights introduced to address funding difficulties in a scheme such as the IASS.

It has been clear for a long time that any solution to the complex problems of the IASS requires significant contributions from both employers and members of the scheme. The Expert Panel established earlier this year was tasked with finding the fairest way to distribute the burden, while addressing a range of other impediments. As a result of that Report, there was an uplift in the monies to be provided by the employers outside of the IASS, a significant proportion of which is intended for the deferred members.

The IASS Trustee and the principal employers have recently issued documents in respect of the proposed changes in pension arrangements. These communications mark the commencement of the formal consultation process which the Trustee is required by the Pensions Act 1990 to undertake in respect of the reductions in benefits that it is proposing. Each member will also shortly receive a personalised illustration of future pension benefits. All members have been invited to send their views on the proposals to the IASS Trustee by 27 October 2014. The target date for implementation of the proposals remains 31 December 2014.

Huge efforts have been put in by all concerned over many years in an attempt to resolve the scheme's funding problems. A set of clear proposals has now been put forward which offer the best chance to resolve the long-standing problems of the scheme and resolve members' uncertainties about their future pension entitlements. I would urge all parties to accept them.

On the basis that the Trustee decides to proceed with changes to the IAS scheme following the consultation process which is underway, I will sign the Ministerial Orders enabling the IAS scheme trustees to amend the scheme.

Road Safety Authority

279. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide in tabular form the total budget for the Road Safety Authority in each year from 2008 to 2013 and to date in 2014; the number of staff employed by the RSA in these years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38783/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The information sought by the Deputy is as follows:

Year	Staff Numbers	Exchequer Allocation
2008	309	€40.422m.
2009	301	€32.641m.
2010	299	€23.825m.

Year	Staff Numbers	Exchequer Allocation
2011	285	€12.039m.
2012	291	€13.662m.
2013	289	€6.223m.
2014	305	€3.370m.

The fall in the Exchequer allocation reflects the RSA's move to being largely self-funding through the activities for which it levies charges.

Road Safety Statistics

280. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide in tabular form the number of fatalities on our roads in each year from 2008 to 2013, inclusive, and to date in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38784/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The number of deaths on our roads is a major concern, particularly in the context of the increase in fatalities seen in 2013, when deaths for the year rose from 162 in 2012 to 190, marking the first increase in fatalities since 2005. We are all aware that the main causes of road crashes are distraction, excessive and inappropriate speed, intoxication and fatigue. We are examining these areas on an on-going basis to identify measures that can be taken to address and bring about future reductions in fatalities and serious injuries.

Targeting road user behaviour through education, engineering and enforcement (known as the 3 'E's) have been the cornerstones of our improved road safety record to date.

The Road Safety Strategy 2013 to 2020, launched last year, identifies 144 Actions to be implemented by key partners that will lead to a significant reduction in fatalities.

The Road Traffic Act 2014, signed into law by the President on 25 February, introduces measures which will further contribute to road safety in the years to come. The Act provides for further Graduated Driver Licensing measures, adjustments to the penalty points system, increasing demerits for the most dangerous offences such as speeding and operating a mobile phone while driving, and new measures to combat intoxicated driving.

There are, of course, a number of other dangers on our roads that still remain to be addressed. Work is already under way on the drafting of the next Road Traffic Bill. One of the key aspects of this Bill will be to further strengthen legislation on intoxicated driving. Other measures proposed include broadening current "alcohol" legislation to deal with all intoxicants, providing for roadside testing for drugs and placing an onus on employers to ensure employees are not under the influence of intoxicants when driving on public roads.

Year	No. of Fatalities on Irish Roads
2008	279
2009	238
2010	213
2011	186
2012	162
2013	190
2014 to 6 October	146

Road Projects Expenditure

281. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide in tabular form the capital expenditure on roads in each year from 2008 to 2013, inclusive, and to date in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38785/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Details of the regional and local road grant payments to local authorities are outlined in the regional and local road grant payment booklets which are available in the Dáil Library. Payments for 2014 are not finalised yet and it will be the end of the year before the final payments are known. Details of the 2014 regional and local road grant allocations to each local authority are also available in the Dáil library.

With regard to national roads, details of the actual drawdown of funding for these roads is a matter for the National Roads Authority. Noting this 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.

Departmental Expenditure

282. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide in tabular form the total capital expenditure of his Department from 2008 to 2013, inclusive, and to date in 2014, broken down by project type, that is roads, rail, public transport and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38786/14]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The information requested by the Deputy is being compiled and will be forwarded as soon as possible.

Question No. 283 answered with Question No. 278.

Commemorative Events

284. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide an update on the 1916 commemorations; the committees involved; the personnel on the committees; the events planned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38584/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I refer the Deputy to my written reply to Parliamentary Question No. 615 of 7 October 2014.

The commemorations to mark the centenary of the Easter Rising will be a major event in a programme in place since 2012, commemorating the events leading to the proclamation of the Irish Republic. These have included the introduction and progress of the third Home Rule Bill in the Westminster parliament, the formation of Volunteer movements, and the outbreak of World War I. Economic and social issues were examined in 2013 on the Centenary of the 1913 Lockout along with the role of suffragettes. This year has seen significant attention to the mobilisation in Ireland and across Europe for the First World War. In the coming year, alongside the continuing experience of World War I, this commemorative programme will address the cultural revival in Ireland, which reflected the strengthening sense of national identity and determination to achieve autonomous government.

As part of the 2016 commemorations, arrangements have been made for a number of signifi-

cant capital projects. These include the renovation of Kilmainham Courthouse to enhance the visitor experience at Kilmainham Gaol, the development of a permanent exhibition space and interpretative centre at the GPO and the development of visitor facilities at Teach an Phiarsaigh, Ros Muc. The development of a Tenement Museum is moving ahead and I was also pleased to have been present last week at the announcement of the renovation works to take place at Richmond Barracks. Additionally, a permanent visitor facility is being built at Cathal Brugha Barracks for the Military Service Pensions Archive. Following on the inaugural online release of records in January last, the Minister for Defence last week released the second collection of files from this collection.

An inclusive and detailed programme of events for the commemoration of the 1916 Rising is being developed with a view to having a draft of that programme available shortly. This will be subject to consultation with stakeholders before finalisation.

Preparation of the plans for 2016 has taken account of the views of the Oireachtas All-Party Consultation Group on Commemorations and the Expert Advisory Group on Commemorations. The membership of these groups is set out below.

The Oireachtas All-Party Group on Commemorations is chaired by me, as Minister, with Minister of State Aodhán Ó Riordáin, T.D., as Vice-Chair. Membership includes Mr. Michael Conaghan, T.D., and Ms Anne Ferris, T.D (Labour Party); Senators Mary White and Mark Daly (Fianna Fáil); Mr. Aengus O Snodaigh, T.D., and Senator Kathryn Reilly (Sinn Féin); Ms Catherine Murphy, T.D., and Ms Maureen O’Sullivan, T.D., (Independent); and Dr. Maurice Manning and Dr. Martin Mansergh (Expert Advisory Group on Commemorations). Additional nominations from Fine Gael will be made shortly, in line with the agreed composition of the Group.

The Expert Advisory Group on Commemorations is chaired by Dr Maurice Manning (Chancellor of the National University of Ireland), supported by Vice-Chairman, Dr. Martin Mansergh. Membership includes Professor Mary Daly, Dr. Eamon Phoenix, Dr. Leeann Lane, Ms Sinéad McCoole, Professor Eunan O’Halpin, Professor Diarmuid Ferriter, Mr. Francis Devine and Dr. Mary Harris.

National Parks and Wildlife Service

285. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if members of the National Parks and Wildlife Service conducted a nighttime visit to Inis Bó Finne Island on certain dates (details supplied) to record corncrake data; if personnel from the National Parks and Wildlife Service entered private land during the course of this trip; if this visit was sanctioned by the National Parks and Wildlife Service; if she will provide a list of further scheduled visits to Inis Bó Finne by the National Parks and Wildlife Service for the purposes of corncrake survey recordings; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38632/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Staff of my Department visited Inis Bó Finne on 3 occasions during June 2014, and accessed lands on the island on those visits. The corncrake is an endangered species in Ireland and listed on Annex 1 of the EU Birds Directive. Monitoring of this species is required under that Directive. All survey work was carried out in accordance with the provisions of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011, which provide powers to authorised staff of my Department to enter onto land to carry out their functions.

No further surveys are scheduled in relation to Corncrake on Inishbofin in 2014 but survey

work will continue to be necessary in future years.

Waterways Ireland Feasibility Study

286. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the date on which the Waterways Ireland feasibility study on the Longford branch of the Royal Canal will be published. [38674/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I have been informed by Waterways Ireland that the feasibility study on the Longford Branch of the Royal Canal will be available on the Waterways Ireland website by the end of October 2014.

Departmental Budgets

287. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will ensure minimum cuts are made to her Department's 2015 budget; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38699/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The overall spending allocations for my Department for 2015 will be announced in the forthcoming Budget and, accordingly, it would not be appropriate for me to comment at this time on the issue raised by the Deputy. I can assure him, however, that I will continue to maintain, to the greatest extent possible, my Department's core functions and the range of services provided to the public in what remains a challenging economic environment, despite the significant progress that is clearly being achieved. Against that background, my Department will, within the resources available in 2015, continue to place emphasis on:

- developing a programme, including a number of flagship capital projects, aimed at providing a significant and enduring acknowledgement of the 1916 Rising;
- targeting investment in priority areas in the arts, culture and heritage sectors that will assist, inter alia, in supporting cultural tourism as one of the most important elements of Ireland's tourism product;
- supporting jobs in the film & TV sector and in the Gaeltacht;
- complying with relevant EU Directives, including investment in solutions for those affected by the cessation of turf cutting in raised bog Special Areas of Conservation; and
- supporting the built heritage and the strategic development of our national parks, as well as the development of our waterways in the context of the implementation of the Good Friday and St. Andrews Agreements.

EU Directives

288. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if daily fines are applied if the country does not comply with EU regulations to conserve the hen harrier in special conservation areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38765/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Under the provisions of the 1979 EU Birds Directive, Ireland is required to designate Special Protec-

tion Areas (SPAs) for endangered birds, including the Hen Harrier. In 2007, Ireland was found by the Court of Justice of the European Union to have failed to meet its obligations in this regard. Six sites containing suitable breeding and foraging habitat for the Hen Harrier have now been designated as SPAs. Consented activities within these SPAs - such as wind-farm development and afforestation, for example - can only be undertaken in keeping with the provisions of Article 6 of the EU Habitats Directive, which require ecological assessment of the impact of such development by the consent authority involved. Where an adverse impact cannot be ruled out, the authority is prevented from granting consent, except in exceptional circumstances.

A failure by Ireland to adhere to these requirements could result in further infringement action and the imposition of fines, including daily fines, by the Court of Justice. My officials are currently working with their counterparts in three other Government Departments to draw up a threat response plan for the Hen Harrier, which will explore how best Ireland can meet its conservation obligations for this species, while bringing more clarity and certainty to land-owners about forestry, agriculture and wind-farm development within these SPAs.

Public Sector Staff Data

289. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of temporary contracts in place for the public sector as a whole, including State agencies and other public bodies under the remit of her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38823/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As at 30th September 2014 there were 50 staff employed in my Department on fixed term contracts. This figure includes 33 seasonal employees of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. On the same date a total of 58 staff were employed on the basis of fixed term contracts in the bodies funded from my Department's Vote Group. This figure includes 23 seasonal employees in Waterways Ireland.

Public Sector Staff Data

290. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of contracts of indefinite duration that have been sought and the number that have been granted in the years from 2007 to 2013, inclusive, and to date in 2014 in the public sector under the remit of her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38834/14]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department was established on 2 June 2011. The number of contracts of indefinite duration sought and granted in bodies funded from my Department's Vote Group over the period since that date is set out in the table below.

Year	Number sought	Number granted
2011 (June – December)	7	7
2012	26	26
2013	2	1
2014 (to 30 September)	0	0
Total	35	35