

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 7, inclusive, answered orally.

Commissions of Investigation

8. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she is including the historical case of persons (details supplied) in the terms of reference for the commission of investigation into the Guerin report. [1369/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy is referring to the draft Order proposing the establishment of a Commission of Investigation which I published on 19 December 2014, and which includes the terms of reference for the Commission. This Commission of Investigation arises on foot of the recommendations of Mr Seán Guerin, SC, in his report of 6 May 2014 to An Taoiseach, based on his examination of how allegations made by Sergeant Maurice McCabe concerning certain cases connected to the Cavan/Monaghan Garda Division were handled. All of the matters recommended by Mr Guerin SC for inclusion in a Commission of Investigation are included in the terms of reference.

The case referred to by the Deputy is amongst the complaints being considered under the mechanism established for the independent review of certain allegations of Garda misconduct, or inadequacies in the investigation of certain allegations, which have been made to me as Minister for Justice and Equality, or the Taoiseach, with a view to determining to what extent and in what manner further action may be required in each case. A panel consisting of two Senior and five Junior Counsel was established for the purpose, all selected on the basis of their experience of the criminal justice system. The review of each complaint will consist of an examination of the papers in the complaint by a counsel from the panel. Following the review of each complaint a recommendation will be made as to whether any further action is desirable and could practicably be taken.

I would assure the Deputy that where further investigation is recommended by the review then that will occur. However I would also make the point again that in many cases, counsel may recommend that no further action can reasonably be taken. This might be, for example, because a case has already been through due process even though the complainant remains unhappy with the outcome. The crucial point, however, is that every case will have been reviewed by independent counsel, who will have made an objective recommendation.

Where counsel do recommend further investigations, I will be very strongly guided by that advice. Clearly, there are a number of possible options for further investigations, in particular

by way of referral to GSOC, but any recommendation for referral of a case to a commission of investigation will be very carefully considered, including whether this could be achieved by way of amending the terms of reference of an existing commission or the establishment of a separate commission.

Immigration Controls

9. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will report on changes to be made in the Garda National Immigration Bureau to end long queues outside their office on Burgh Quay in Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1406/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I first of all wish to assure the Deputy that there are currently no queues and all applicants for services at the public offices on Burgh Quay are dealt with on the same day.

I have already provided the Deputy with a comprehensive response to a similar question on 11th December last. The public offices in Burgh Quay service two separate functions – one dealing with non-EEA nationals seeking to register and renew their permission to be in the State, a function which is carried out by the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) and a separate function dealing with applicants for re-entry visas to allow for short trips outside the State, usually for holidays. This latter function is carried out by staff of Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) and it is in connection with this function, rather than the registration function, that the issue with queuing arose before Christmas.

As I informed the Deputy on that occasion, neither I, as Minister, nor my officials wish for any applicants for services provided by my Department to feel that they have to queue outside office hours for long periods, particularly in the cold weather conditions which prevailed at that time. In this particular case, there is absolutely no need to do so because, unlike the registration functions, it is not a requirement of the re-entry visa applicants to turn up in person. Applications may be made by registered post and many thousands of applications are processed annually in this way.

That being said, there was, during December last, an unprecedented level of demand for re-entry visas – well above volumes of previous years. Given this sudden increase in demand, decisive action was taken with significant additional resources re-deployed to the re-entry visa office with the result that by the end of the first week in December, all the postal applications on hand had been dealt with and all persons who came to the public office were dealt with on the same day. That continued to be the case right through December and is so to date.

To avoid a recurrence of such unexpected demand and queues developing, I have asked my officials to bring forward their proposals for the introduction of an on-line appointment service for the re-entry visa process. Design of the system is underway and is now expected to be in place by the end of the first quarter of this year.

This is part of the wider reform programme for the more effective and efficient delivery of immigration services which is underway. This includes the transfer of registration functions from the GNIB to INIS. This presents opportunities to streamline both registration and visa re-entry services and INIS will be extending its on-line services to the registration area as part of this process.

In relation to the current registration process operated by the GNIB in Burgh Quay, this function is working normally with all callers being dealt with on the day so there is no requirement to queue for this service.

Obviously, it would be ideal if all immigration related business could be done through the postal system (as can currently be done in the case of re-entry visas) or through on-line services. However, in common with the operation of immigration functions in other States, immigrants seeking to register are required to present in person at the offices of the Minister. This is necessary for establishment of identity and as an anti-fraud measure. Accordingly, we must devise systems that meet the needs of our customers while at the same time maintaining appropriate checks and balances within the system. I believe the reform programme underway will achieve both of these aims.

Question No. 10 answered orally.

Garda Operations

11. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the way she plans to address the increasing scourge of burglaries in both urban and rural areas; the latest statistics on this issue; the way she plans to ensure crime statistics are reported in an accurate manner; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1402/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Tackling burglary is a joint priority for both myself and the Garda Commissioner, and I assure the Deputy that I am in ongoing contact with the Commissioner with a view to ensuring that there is an effective policing response in place, and that Garda operations take account of evolving trends and patterns in burglary offences.

An Garda Síochána pursue a range of strategies to tackle this type of crime, including in particular the coordinated national strategy targeting burglary, Operation Fiacla. This was introduced in early 2012 and has had considerable success. As of the end of December 2014, 11,688 persons have been arrested, and charges have been brought against 6,711 persons under Operation Fiacla.

I am further advised that specific burglary related operations have been implemented in each Garda Region, in support of Operation Fiacla, to target suspect offenders, disrupt their activities and secure their attendance before the courts.

Operation Acer commenced in the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) in March 2012. Operation Acer is an intelligence driven operation; and includes analysis-led checkpoints and patrols to target specific areas and case-manage targeted offenders. *Operation Acer* led to a reduction in burglaries in Dublin by 5% in 2013.

However it is accepted that there has been an increase in recorded incidents of burglary in Dublin in recent months. This increase is worrying but I am advised that Gardai are responding to this increase, with a new operational response having been put in place as part of *Operation Acer*. This includes particular focus on identifying and targeting criminal groups who have played a large part in the recent increase.

A further and related operation, Operation Creeper, assists in the surveillance of Acer targets by monitoring their movements. As a result of the recent burglary increase in Dublin, this Operation has been tasked solely with targeting burglary suspects and several Acer targets have been arrested as a result.

Similar regional operations complement Operation Fiacla throughout the country and a key focus is the targeting of the highly mobile criminal gangs involved in burglary. These groups are being identified and disrupted on a continuous basis by specialist Garda units.

All of these Garda initiatives operate alongside ongoing community policing measures, including ongoing liaison with businesses and households in providing crime prevention advice and assistance to victims of burglary.

My Department and I are continuing to engage closely with the Garda authorities about these measures and their impact, and I am determined that those who invade and disrupt the lives of the public in this way are dealt with robustly.

In addition to the Garda response, I have commenced a broader review of the Criminal Justice system's response to the problem of burglaries. This will include a particular focus on inter-agency measures in relation to offender management.

Insofar as the question of crime statistics are concerned, as the Deputy will be aware, responsibility for the publication of such data rests with the Central Statistics Office as the national statistics agency. Following the publication of the recent Garda Inspectorate Report on Crime Investigation, the CSO is carrying out a detailed analysis of certain issues raised by the Inspectorate and while this process is underway the CSO has not been in a position to publish more recent definitive figures.

Sexual Offences Data

12. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on commissioning an independent report of the statistics here regarding prostitution and trafficking; the impact of the proposed legislation to criminalise the buyer on sex-trafficking along with a comparison of all other models that is not just Sweden; and if she will provide the methods and resources An Garda Síochána will be expected to use in investigation and detection of the proposed offence. [1413/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): On 27 November, I published the General Scheme of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 2014, which amongst other proposals, creates two new offences of purchasing, in the context of prostitution, sexual services. My primary concern, in introducing these provisions, is to vindicate the human rights of those trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Over 80% of women trafficked are the victims of sexual exploitation.

These proposals were developed following an extensive consultation process, initiated by my Department in 2012, including a Discussion Document which presented an objective analysis of the approaches adopted in other jurisdictions to address prostitution. I would draw attention to a March 2014 Council of Europe Report entitled "Prostitution, trafficking and modern slavery in Europe". That Report reviews the approaches adopted in a number of countries and concludes that member states should consider "criminalising the purchase of sexual services, based on the Swedish model, as the most effective tool for preventing and combating trafficking in human beings". There is no suggestion that this approach adopted by a number of countries is in conflict with international human rights requirements. Indeed in February 2014, the European Parliament adopted a resolution advocating this approach. The Joint Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality has also recommended criminalising the purchase of sexual services by means of prostitution.

Independent statistics on crime, including prostitution and related offences, are collated and published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO). In addition to the material collated by the CSO, the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit of my Department has, since January 2009, operated a data collection strategy in relation to human trafficking. The purpose of the strategy is to gain a

more informed view of the nature and extent of trafficking in human beings in Ireland in terms of what was being encountered by both governmental and non-governmental organisations. The data is published by the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit in its Annual Report. Because of the hidden nature of these activities, there are limitations with relation to the statistics. However this applies to all jurisdictions and I am not aware of any other approach that would provide more accurate and objective statistics.

The purpose of the new offences is to send a clear message that the purchase of sexual services in the context of prostitution is unlawful and the evidence suggests that making an act unlawful does in itself influence behaviour. There will of course be some prosecutions and of course as with any covert activity, this can present challenges. The Deputy however will appreciate that this is an operational policing matter and one which will properly be dealt with by the Garda authorities, in accordance with the provisions of the legislation. The trafficking of persons and the organisation of prostitution is a feature of organised criminality and the Garda Síochána is already strongly committed to the disruption of the organised crime networks behind this activity.

Garda Inspectorate Reports

13. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide in detail action taken by her on the findings of the Garda Inspectorate report chapter relating to the Guerin report and the Secretary General vacancy in her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1416/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will no doubt recall, I requested the Garda Inspectorate to consider the issues identified in the report by Seán Guerin SC relating to Garda practices and procedures which come within the Inspectorate's remit. The Inspectorate included this work in its report on Crime Investigation which was published on 11 November 2014. That report deals with the issues identified by Mr Guerin in an addendum, and groups them into themes which are covered in the main body of the Inspectorate's report. In respect of each theme, the addendum indicates the issues identified in the report by Mr Guerin, and relates them to the relevant findings and recommendations of the Inspectorate.

The Garda Inspectorate notes in its report that it was not within its remit to duplicate Mr. Guerin's work but rather it set out to review the process issues raised in his report which are relevant to Garda practices and procedures. This was in the context of the Inspectorate's statutory remit to ensure that the resources available to An Garda Síochána are used so as to achieve and maintain the highest levels of efficiency and effectiveness in its operation and administration.

The Inspectorate did not include any additional recommendations as a result of its consideration of the matters highlighted in the Guerin Report and concluded that the majority of the issues raised in the report in connection with crime investigation were consistent with the Inspectorate's findings as part of their overall examination of Garda practices and procedures.

As such the issues identified therefore fall to be addressed as part of the overall process to carry forward the recommendations contained in the Inspectorate Report.

In this regard, as the Deputy will be aware, when I published the Inspectorate report I welcomed it as forming an important component in the overall justice reform programme underway. Implementation of this programme, including the reforms recommended by the Inspectorate is being overseen by the Cabinet Committee on Justice Reform, chaired by An Taoiseach.

There will also of course be a central role for the new Police Authority and Garda Commissioner in implementing the identified reforms. An Garda Síochána has already taken important steps to follow through on the Inspectorate's recommendations with the establishment of an Implementation Steering Group to immediately focus on the implementation of the short, medium and long-term recommendations in the Report, and I am engaging with the new Commissioner on this process. In particular, the Garda Policing Plan is being revised to take into account changes being made as a result of the recommendations contained in the report.

In addition, in advance of the establishment of the Policing Authority, I intend to hold discussions with Josephine Feehily, the Chairman-designate, on the establishment of an effective implementation framework to oversee delivery of reforms in An Garda Síochána.

I should add that the question of the appointment of a Secretary General is not an issue addressed in either the Guerin report or the Garda Inspectorate Report.

Commissions of Investigation

14. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide the cases included in the Commission of Investigation and the procedure to add cases into the investigation into the Guerin report. [1368/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy is referring to the Commission of Investigation being established on foot of the recommendations of Mr Seán Guerin, SC, in his report of 6 May 2014 on how allegations made by Sergeant Maurice McCabe concerning certain cases connected to the Cavan/Monaghan Garda Division were handled. I published the draft Order proposing the establishment of this Commission of Investigation on 19 December 2014. The draft Order includes the terms of reference for the Commission. All of the matters recommended by Mr Guerin SC for inclusion in a Commission of Investigation are included in the terms of reference.

In terms of the possibility of adding cases to the remit of this commission of investigation, I presume that the Deputy may have in mind some of the allegations of Garda misconduct which are being reviewed by an independent panel of counsel. This panel consists of two Senior and five Junior Counsel, all selected on the basis of their experience of the criminal justice system, and the purpose of the review is effectively to triage the allegations with a view to determining to what extent and in what manner further action may be required in each case. The review of each complaint will consist of an examination of the papers in the matter by a counsel from the panel. Following the review of each allegation a recommendation will be made as to whether any further action is desirable and could practicably be taken.

I would assure the Deputy that where further investigation is recommended by the review then that will occur. However I would also make the point again that in many cases, counsel may recommend that no further action can reasonably be taken. This might be, for example, because a case has already been through due process, such as an investigation by GSOC or a court hearing, even though the complainant remains unhappy with the outcome. The crucial point, however, is that every case will have been reviewed by independent counsel, who will have made an objective recommendation.

Where counsel do recommend further investigations, I will be very strongly guided by that advice. Clearly, there are a number of possible options for further investigations, in particular by way of referral to GSOC, but any recommendation for referral of a case to a commission of investigation will be very carefully considered, including whether this could be achieved by

way of amending the terms of reference of an existing commission or the establishment of a separate commission.

Criminal Justice Inspectorate

15. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on the recommendation from the Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality for the establishment of a Criminal Justice Inspectorate similar to that in place in Northern Ireland. [1328/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am of course familiar with the recommendations of the Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality concerning the establishment of a Criminal Justice Inspectorate similar to the Criminal Justice Inspection in Northern Ireland. The Committee's recommendation was made in the context of its review of the operation of the Garda Síochána Act 2005. The Deputy will be aware of the comprehensive programme of Justice reform which is underway and the Government is grateful that it has had the benefit of the Committee's consideration of a wide range of matters relevant to the reform programme.

The Deputy will also be aware of the progress already made under the reform programme including the appointment of the new Garda Commissioner following the first ever open competition for the post, as well as the publication of proposals for important new legislation relating to the establishment of an independent Police Authority and also to strengthen of the powers of the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission.

Independent inspection is a valuable component in a properly functioning criminal justice system and it is for this reason that we already have well established inspection bodies in place in the form of the Garda Inspectorate and the Inspector of Prisons. A proposal to establish an overarching inspection body is certainly worthy of further consideration but clearly it would need to take account of a wide range of factors, not the least of which would be the impact and interaction with these existing inspection models. It would also be useful to study the experience derived from the operation of the Criminal Justice Inspection body in Northern Ireland, and to take into account of course its origin in the review of criminal justice arrangements which followed the Good Friday Agreement.

Such an examination would be a substantial exercise requiring extensive consultation and analysis and as such I would not be in a position to commit to any particular process in advance of making further progress on the immediate issues which have been identified as part of the justice sector reform programme. Nevertheless I regard it as a helpful proposal which clearly deserves detailed consideration and I would be happy to discuss it further with the Committee at a suitable opportunity.

Garda Strength

16. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if her attention has been drawn to the severe reduction in number of Gardaí for the Dublin Central Area, 65 in Store Street and 300 overall; her plans to address this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1320/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): One of my priorities is to maintain and enhance the capacity of An Garda Síochána to protect the public, and in

particular to prevent and detect crime. It is true that Garda strength has been affected by retirements, and that is why I was very pleased to be able to secure approval for the resumption of Garda recruitment. As the Deputy will be aware, 100 new recruits entered training at the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014, the first intake of Garda recruits since 2009. This was followed by an intake of a further 100 new recruits in December. A further intake of 100 is due to enter training at the end of this month. This will bring to 300 the number of recruits in the Garda College since last September and is a measure of this Government's commitment to the Garda Síochána. The first intake of recruits will attest as members of the Garda Síochána in May of this year and will be assigned to Garda Stations by the Garda Commissioner.

It is of course a key objective of the Garda Commissioner to allocate all of the resources at her disposal in a manner which maximises their impact on the protection of the public and on the prevention and detection of crime. In that context, Garda management keep under continuing review developments in relation to security assessments, crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of resources.

As part of this strategy, Garda management recognise the importance of responding to new and emerging crime trends and related issues. A recent example of a proactive Garda response is the coordinated approach being taken in the Dublin City centre area in which Gardaí are acting in close cooperation with Dublin City Council, the Homeless Executive and the HSE to address a range of issues, including the anti-social behaviour in the City Centre area. I fully support the steps being taken by An Garda Síochána in cooperation with other stakeholders, and I am confident that policing measures such as these, in Dublin and across the country, will make a significant contribution to public safety.

Proposed Legislation

17. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the impact the new proposed international protection bill, which will introduce a single application process for seeking asylum will have on the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1404/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The principal objective of the proposed International Protection Bill will be the introduction of a single procedure for the examination of applications for international protection in Ireland. This arises from the commitment in the Statement of Government Priorities 2014-2016 to legislate to reduce the length of time an asylum applicant spends in the direct provision system through the establishment of a single applications procedure. In order to achieve the early implementation of a more streamlined procedure I am, therefore, proposing that the Government fast-track specific legislation in the asylum area. I am committed to ensuring that this legislation be brought forward as a matter of urgency and I intend to publish the General Scheme of the International Protection Bill, once approved by Government, in the next few weeks. This fast-tracked legislation will deal with the key issues of qualification for international protection, examination and assessment of applications for international protection, the rights and entitlements of persons determined to be eligible for international protection and effective remedy against refusal of international protection. The Bill will be in compliance with the United Nations Refugee Convention and related EU Directives.

My objective is to reform the current multi-layered and sequential system which remains very susceptible to judicial review and can result in applicants being accommodated in the State's system of direct provision for indeterminate periods of time. The introduction of the single procedure, together with other reforms in the proposed Bill, will enhance our capacity to

efficiently grant international protection to those who are entitled to it. At the same time, it will identify, at a much earlier stage, persons who have no entitlement to stay in the State and who can safely return to their country of origin.

This approach does not lose sight of the other necessary elements of legislative reform in this area. Work on an Immigration and Residence Bill will also continue by reference to such further matters as the visa regime, entry into the State, residence, removal from the State while also dealing with specific challenges such as those of human trafficking and marriages of convenience. In this way any development of the respective Bills will give mutual support to the ongoing roll-out of reform of our immigration regime while also allowing the Government to be responsive to the present and very pressing need for a single procedure for the examination of applications for international protection in this jurisdiction.

Garda Accommodation

18. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if her attention has been drawn to the urgent need to provide new accommodation for Bailieborough Garda District Headquarters, County Cavan; if this project is likely to proceed to construction in 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1398/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is based on requirements which are established by An Garda Síochána. The programme is advanced in close co-operation with the Office of Public Works, which has responsibility for capital expenditure in this area.

In that regard, I am informed by the OPW that the acquisition of a site for development of a new District Headquarters in Bailieborough has been identified by An Garda Síochána as a priority for 2015.

I am further informed by the OPW that a review of State owned sites in the area was conducted to identify any suitable sites for the development of a new Garda Station in Bailieborough. No suitable State owned site was identified. The OPW will shortly place a notice in local and national media seeking offers of suitable sites.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the provision of a new Garda District Headquarters at the location referred to by the Deputy will continue to be pursued in the context of An Garda Síochána's identified accommodation priorities and in the light of available resources within the Vote of the Office of Public Works.

Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission Staff

19. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the appointment procedure for the incoming chairperson of the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission; if there has been further correspondence or meetings between her Department and the GSOC following the publication of the findings in the Cooke Report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1401/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Mr Simon O'Brien, the Chairperson of the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, has recently indicated that he intends to resign his position, with effect from 30 January 2015, to take up a position in the UK. Mr O'Brien has made an important contribution to his role as the Chair of GSOC as well as his

previous role as Deputy to the Chief Inspector in the Garda Inspectorate, and I wish him all the best in his new career.

With regard to the vacancy arising on foot of Mr O'Brien's resignation, the appointment of members of the Ombudsman Commission is governed by section 65 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005. This stipulates that the Commission consists of 3 members, all of whom are to be appointed by the President on the nomination of the Government, following the passage of resolutions by both Houses of the Oireachtas recommending the appointments. The 2005 Act requires that the Government must be satisfied that persons nominated have the appropriate experience, qualifications, training or expertise for appointment having regard to the functions of the Commission.

The Government will now, in accordance with the 2005 Act, consider the question of a nomination for the position of Chairperson of GSOC.

My Department is in regular contact with GSOC, both by way of correspondence and meetings, and this has continued to be the case subsequent to the publication of the report by Judge Cooke. I personally met with the members of GSOC, most recently on 27 November 2014.

Commissions of Investigation

20. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress that has been made in establishing a cross-Border commission of investigation into alleged sexual abuse within the provisional movement in Ireland and Northern Ireland; the engagement she had with her Northern counterpart on this issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1403/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): It is worth recalling that the Deputy's Question arises in the context of recent allegations of the rape and sexual abuse of a young woman in Northern Ireland, and her subsequent mistreatment at the hands of members of Sinn Féin and the Provisional IRA. I have met with the woman in question and I should say I admire her bravery in telling her story publicly. It is a pity that those who have questions to answer in relation to her mistreatment could not find it in themselves to be as forthright and forthcoming.

I have discussed this matter with the Northern Ireland Justice Minister, David Ford, on a number of occasions, most recently when we attended the Plenary Meeting of the North South Ministerial Council in Armagh in December last. This provided us with an opportunity to discuss further the issues arising in respect of the allegations of sexual abuse committed by republican paramilitaries that have come to light in recent months.

The Deputy will appreciate that An Garda Síochána is investigating information in this regard which it received towards the end of last year and these investigations are ongoing. Inevitably, these will take some time to complete. There are also specific, independent review and inquiry processes underway in Northern Ireland by the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Office of the Police Ombudsman. It is essential to allow the relevant authorities – the child protection and the police services and others – North and South to carry out their ongoing work in this regard unimpeded. It is important also to continue to encourage people with any relevant information to come forward to the authorities.

Given the strong public concern about potentially 'hidden' child abusers in our communities, and given also the concerns of victims of abuse, I will continue to address with Minister Ford the need and potential for an additional inquiry or inquiries. We will consider any issues which emerge from the current and ongoing reviews and inquiries, and we will keep in close

contact to review progress with these. I will meet with Minister Ford again in the near future and we will have an opportunity to review these issues. We have tasked officials in the two Justice Departments to examine, in tandem with the various investigations that are under way, legal and practical issues that might arise relevant to the issue of the establishment of forms of inquiry, and they will report on this to me and Minister Ford.

Of course, it is in the nature of it, that the establishment of an inquiry or parallel inquiry processes inevitably raises complex legal and other practical issues, and these complexities will have to be examined closely in order to ensure that where any such processes are put in place they would not simply become bogged down or derailed by legal complexity.

I would add that there is a range of support services for victims of sexual abuse available in both jurisdictions. Minister Ford and I will keep this under review and we will continue to work closely together in the context of the forthcoming implementation of the EU Victims' Directive.

Garda Inspectorate Reports

21. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will confirm that the Criminal Justice Working Group recommended by the Garda Inspectorate in their report *The Fixed Charge Processing System- A 21st Century Strategy* has now been established; if the group has been established, the progress of its work in implementing the Garda Inspectorate's recommendations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1325/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Criminal Justice Fixed Charge Processing System (FCPS) Working Group was established in March 2014 to take forward the Garda Inspectorate's recommendations on the operation of the FCPS. The Group is jointly chaired by my Department and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. An Garda Síochána, the Courts Service, Road Safety Authority, Revenue Commissioners, Director of Public Prosecutions, the Department of the Environment Community and Local Government, and the Office of the Attorney General all participate in the work of the Group.

I, along with my colleague the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, received the Group's first progress report last July. The report sets out substantial progress with respect to the implementation of the Inspectorate's immediate and short term recommendations directed to An Garda Síochána including the introduction of a new Fixed Charge Processing System Manual which came into effect in June 2014. The report also details the work commenced, mainly via a number of specialised subgroups, to consider and advance the Inspectorate's medium and long term recommendations. A further progress report is expected from the Group within the next few months.

Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission Staff

22. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on the recommendation from the Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality that there would be one Ombudsman for An Garda Síochána rather than a three person GSOC led by a Chairperson. [1327/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will, of course, appreciate the comprehensive programme of justice reform the Government is undertaking and the substantial progress already achieved and I am grateful for the Committee's input on a wide range of relevant matters. The Committee's recommendation was made following its

review of the operation of the Garda Síochána Act 2005.

The recommendation made by the Committee in relation to the composition of GSOC is being examined in the context of the programme.

Proposed Legislation

23. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to publish the Criminal Justice (Sexual Offences) Bill; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1272/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): On 27 November 2014, I published the General Scheme of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill. The General Scheme includes wide ranging provisions to enhance the protection of children and vulnerable persons from sexual abuse and exploitation. When enacted, the Bill will facilitate full compliance with the criminal law provisions of a number of EU, UN and Council of Europe legal instruments. The Bill will also implement the recommendations of a number of Oireachtas committees, reform the law on incest and update the Sex Offenders Act 2001. In addition, the Bill will provide for new offences of purchasing, in the context of prostitution, sexual services.

As the Deputy will appreciate, this is a complex piece of legislation which addresses a number of sensitive issues. The Bill is priority legislation and is currently being drafted, with a view to publication later this year.

Garda Investigations

24. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views regarding the recent report of the Ward Union blatantly ignoring legislation outlawing the hunting of stags at Clonmahon House in County Meath as confirmed by video evidence and a complaint to Trim Garda station; the measures she will take to ensure that the law is upheld and that her Department is not being undermined by the hunters claiming they accidentally come across stags. [48274/14]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the matter referred to by the Deputy is currently under investigation by Gardaí at Trim Garda Station and any breaches of legislation which may come to light will be properly pursued. As the matter remains under investigation the Deputy will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to make any further comment on the specific issues raised.

Military Aircraft Landings

25. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views that it is acceptable that the Gardaí have not conducted any searches of US military or troop-carrying aircraft at Shannon airport, in view of the fact that the UN Committee Against Torture specifically stated that in order to comply with our international legal responsibilities regarding torture and suspected renditions, that relying on diplomatic assurances was insufficient; and the action she will take in this regard. [1414/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am aware of reports going back some time that Irish airports, particularly Shannon, have been used for the unlawful

inter-state transfer of detainees ('extraordinary rendition') by the US authorities.

I would point out, for the sake of clarity, that the Garda Síochána has no role in relation to the inspection of foreign State or military aircraft which, in accordance with international law, enjoy sovereign immunity.

Notwithstanding that, the Government has repeatedly made it clear that extraordinary rendition is an illegal practice which Ireland will not accept. The US authorities have provided clear and unambiguous diplomatic assurances, at the highest level, that Irish airports have not been and would not be used for the purpose of extraordinary rendition. The Government is fully entitled to rely on these assurances.

There is no question of the State having been complicit in the practice of extraordinary renditions.

The recent report of the US Senate related to torture and renditions does not, I am pleased to note, mention Ireland in this regard.

Statutory powers of search and entry are bestowed upon the Garda Síochána under various legislative provisions and when authorised by a judge. However, these powers are exercised in circumstances where a member of the Garda Síochána reasonably suspects that an offence has occurred. These powers can only be used, therefore, where a Garda has a reasonable suspicion supported by some evidence. The mere assertion of wrongdoing by a member of the general public is clearly insufficient in this regard. The Garda Síochána has investigated a range of complaints of alleged unlawful activity at Shannon Airport and, where appropriate, files have been submitted to the Director of Public Prosecutions. In all these cases, no further action was found to be warranted, owing to a lack of any evidence of unlawful activity.

Any person with credible information that Irish airports have been used for any alleged unlawful purpose should report their concerns to the Garda Síochána.

Garda Investigations

26. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons who have been investigated for breaching the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013. [1396/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have asked the Garda authorities to supply any available information in relation to the Deputy's query and I will contact the Deputy directly when I receive this report.

Garda Station Closures

27. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide an assessment of the way the closure and sale of Garda stations in County Tipperary have impacted the local communities they previously served; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1277/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have requested the information sought from the Garda authorities and I will revert to Deputy in due course as soon as the information is to hand.

Garda Misconduct Allegations

28. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will address the patent conflict of interest within the independent panel of counsel that has been asked to investigate the circumstances leading to the death of a person (details supplied) who was killed by a hit and run driver at Carrickmacross, County Monaghan on 2 August 2011; if she will instigate a commission of investigation into the person's death as the issues raised by the person's family go beyond allegations of Garda malpractice and indeed encompass much of the criminal justice system in this State. [1321/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Appropriate steps have been taken to ensure that nothing arises which might in any way detract from the integrity of the mechanism for the independent review by a panel of counsel of complaints of Garda misconduct to which the Deputy refers, including issues of conflict of interest. Arrangements have been put in place to ensure that if there is any conflict, or potential conflict, the conflicted counsel not only will not be involved in the particular complaint, but also will not be aware of which counsel is reviewing it. This is normal professional conduct and there are sufficient counsel on the Panel to ensure the practicality of this. Whatever steps are necessary will be taken to ensure there is no conflict of interest. This has been explained to the family of the person to whom the Deputy refers, to their solicitor and to this House in reply to a number of Parliamentary Questions raising the matter.

It would not be appropriate to comment upon the potential outcome of individual complaints being reviewed by this mechanism before I have received and considered counsel's recommendation therein.

International Agreements

29. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to ratify and implement the Istanbul convention; the further steps that must be taken to fully implement the Convention; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1399/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department has been working to establish precisely the actions which would need to be taken in order to ratify and implement the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence - the Istanbul convention. Clarification of some issues with a small number of government departments and agencies is still required. Once the actions necessary to implement the convention are fully established a plan will be put in place to complete those actions in order to ratify the Convention.

I intend to seek the approval of Government for Ireland to sign the Istanbul Convention early this year. This is a matter of priority for me.

Legal Aid Service Expenditure

30. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide the most recent available data on the annual cost to the State of free legal aid; her views that defendants with multiple convictions are taking advantage of this system; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1281/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The total expenditure on

Criminal Legal Aid for 2014 came to €49.9 million. Total expenditure on Criminal Legal Aid for the years 2009 to 2013 was as follows:

Year	Total Expenditure
2009	€60.3 million
2010	€56.5 million
2011	€56.1 million
2012	€50.5 million
2013	€50.9 million

In seeking to reduce the expenditure on the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme, the rates of fees paid to the legal practitioners were reduced by 8% in March 2009 and by a further 8% in April, 2010. There was also a reduction of 10% in July 2011 in the fees payable in the District Court. Fees payable in the Circuit and higher courts were also decreased by 10% in October 2011 following the reduction in the fees payable by the Director of Public Prosecutions to prosecution practitioners. A reduction of 50% was also applied to payments in respect of adjourned sentence hearings and travel and subsistence payments from 2011. As the Deputy will see from the figures above, following these and other measures introduced in the course of 2011, a 10% reduction in expenditure was recorded in 2012 compared with 2011. This was the first substantial reduction ever recorded under this Scheme. Expenditure on the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme is monitored on an ongoing basis with a view to identifying any areas where further efficiencies may be achieved.

The Criminal Justice (Legal Aid) Act 1962 provides that free legal aid may be granted in certain circumstances for the defence of persons of insufficient means in criminal proceedings. Under the 1962 Act, the courts, through the judiciary, are responsible for the granting of legal aid. An applicant must establish to the satisfaction of the court that their means are insufficient to enable them to pay for legal representation themselves. The court must also be satisfied that, by reason of the “gravity of the charge” or “exceptional circumstances”, it is essential in the interests of justice that the applicant should have legal aid. An applicant’s previous convictions are not a criterion for access to legal aid under the Act. I have no function in these matters which are determined by the judiciary.

These provisions must have regard to the right to a fair trial, including the provision of legal aid where appropriate, which is a constitutional right upheld by the courts in a number of judgments. The Supreme Court ruling in the case of *State (Healy) v Donoghue [1976] I.R. 325* effectively determined that the right to criminal legal aid is, in circumstances which are quite wide in practice, a constitutional right. Article 6(3)(c) of the European Convention on Human Rights states that “*Everyone charged with a criminal offence has [the right] to defend himself in person or through legal assistance of his own choosing or, if he has not sufficient means to pay for legal assistance, to be given it free when the interests of justice so require*”. As the Deputy will be aware, an accused person is entitled to a presumption of innocence and legal representation and any obstacles to obtaining necessary legal aid which were found to be unreasonable could give a defendant an avenue for appeal or prohibition of the prosecution. The overriding concern is to ensure that no risk arises in relation to the prosecution of persons charged with criminal offences before the courts.

I can inform the Deputy that a new Criminal Legal Aid Bill is currently being drafted to update and strengthen the system of granting legal aid including transferring responsibility for the administration of the Scheme to the Legal Aid Board. Legislative provisions under consideration include provisions to, inter alia, regulate better the taking of statements of means,

increase the sanction for false declarations, enable the Board to verify the means of applicants and to provide for prosecution of cases of abuse.

Garda Reports

31. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the publication of the report following the audit by the Garda professional standards units which was completed in 2014. [1278/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can inform the Deputy that I expect to receive a report from the Garda Commissioner in the near future with respect to the audit referred to and, as I have previously indicated, I intend to put its findings into the public domain.

Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission Investigations

32. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the waiting times for processing complaints received by GSOC. [1279/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy is aware, the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission is a statutory independent body which is independent in the exercise of its functions and I have no function in relation to the processing of individual complaints which are referred to it for investigation.

I am however advised by the Ombudsman Commission that, conscious of the need to provide efficient and effective service for its various stakeholders, they have invested considerable time and energy to decreasing the duration of investigations arising from complaints. While every effort is made to ensure that all cases are concluded within a satisfactory timeframe, inevitably some cases take longer than others to investigate.

The Deputy may already be aware that an additional €1 million in funding has been made available in 2015 to the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission to resource the organisation's activities this year. Arrangements have been put in place for a recruitment campaign for additional staff. The issues of efficiency and resources are kept under continuing review by the Commission.

Garda Inspectorate Reports

33. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the criminal justice service group recommended by the Garda Inspectorate in its report on crime investigation from October 2014 has now been established; the progress of its work in implementing the Garda Inspectorate's recommendation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1326/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, when I published the Inspectorate report I welcomed it as forming an important component in the overall justice reform programme underway. Implementation of this programme, including the reforms recommended by the Inspectorate is being overseen by the Cabinet Committee on Justice Reform, chaired by An Taoiseach.

There will also of course be a central role for the new Police Authority and Garda Commissioner in implementing the identified reforms. An Garda Síochána has already taken important steps to follow through on the Inspectorate's recommendations with the establishment of an Implementation Steering Group to immediately focus on the implementation of the short, medium and long-term recommendations in the Report, and I am engaging with the new Commissioner on this process. In particular, the Garda Policing Plan is being revised to take into account changes being made as a result of the recommendations contained in the report.

In addition, in advance of the establishment of the Policing Authority, I intend to hold discussions with Josephine Feehily, the Chairman-designate, on the establishment of an effective implementation framework to oversee delivery of reforms in An Garda Síochána and will explore with the Chairman-designate, the Commissioner, and the other relevant agencies, how the specific recommendation cited by the Deputy can best be taken forward.

Crime Investigation

34. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to publish the review of the file on the death of Fr. Niall Molloy in Clara, County Offaly, in July 1985; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1273/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, Mr. Dominic McGinn, Senior Counsel, was appointed to carry out an independent examination of the report of the Serious Crime Review Team relating to the Garda investigation into the death of Fr. Niall Molloy. Mr McGinn has provided a report to my Department which is being considered in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General, including in relation to the question of its publication. This consultation is ongoing.

Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission

35. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality in view of the controversies surrounding the relationship between GSOC and the Gardaí, and the fact that the outgoing Chairman of GSOC was directly overseeing a number of important cases with very serious implications for senior Gardaí, if she will confirm that these issues are unconnected with their decision to resign and that she has met them and discussed this matter. [1364/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I was informed by Mr Simon O'Brien, Chairman of the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC), that he intends to resign his position with effect from 30 January, 2015. Mr O'Brien has clearly indicated that his resignation arises as a result of his success in securing the position of Chief Executive of the Pensions Ombudsman Service in the UK, and he is due to take up that position on 2 February 2015.

Mr O'Brien made an important contribution to his role as Chairperson of GSOC as well as his previous role as Deputy to the Chief Inspector in the Garda Inspectorate, and I wish him all the best in his endeavours in his new career. My Department has been assured by GSOC that no ongoing investigations will be adversely affected by his resignation. I am not privy to the reasons why Gardaí might decide to resign, or to retire (for example, as the Deputy is aware, members are eligible to leave An Garda Síochána on full pension if they have 30 years service and have reached the age of 50 years, and many avail of that opportunity).

With regard to the vacancy arising on foot of Mr O'Brien's resignation, the appointment of

members of Ombudsman Commission is governed by s.65 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005. This stipulates that the Commission consists of 3 members, all of whom are to be appointed by the President on the nomination of the Government following resolutions by both Houses recommending the appointment. The Act requires that the Government must be satisfied that persons nominated have the appropriate experience, qualifications, training or expertise for appointment having regard to the functions of the Commission.

The Government will now, in accordance with the 2005 Act, consider the question of a nomination for the position of Chairperson of GSOC.

Garda Stations

36. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the proposals to provide new accommodation for Bailieborough Garda District Headquarters, County Cavan; the stage of this particular project; when the project is expected to proceed to the next stage; when construction is likely to commence; the estimated cost of this building project; if financial provision is made in her Department's Estimate for 2015 to enable construction to commence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1390/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have set out the position with regard to the acquisition of a site for development of a new District Headquarters in Bailieborough in my answer to the Deputy's question of today's date (No. 18).

I am further advised that while the long term solution to the accommodation needs at Bailieborough are being progressed, Garda management is actively engaged with the OPW to improve, in the more immediate term, the working conditions at the existing station at Bailieborough and awaits proposals from the OPW in order to develop the matter further.

Crime Prevention

37. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide an update on her Department's efforts and the Garda Síochána's efforts to combat the theft of scrap and precious metal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1276/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, An Garda Síochána has in place a Metal Theft Crime Prevention and Reduction Plan, which was developed in close cooperation with the stakeholders who participated in a metal theft forum established by An Garda Síochána. The forum includes stakeholders particularly affected by this type of crime, including the Irish Farmers' Association, the Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers association, the Electricity Supply Board, telecoms, transport companies, brewing concerns and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

The metal theft plan is designed to provide for an effective and multi-agency response to the incidence of metal theft. In line with the framework set out in the plan, An Garda Síochána is implementing a range of initiatives to tackle those involved in this form of criminality. This includes relevant actions under Operation Fiacla which is targeting in particular mobile gangs involved in burglary and other property crime, including metal theft. Operation Fiacla adopts a focused, targeted and coordinated approach to investigating mobile and organised criminal groups throughout the jurisdiction. It is primarily an intelligence led operation with local, regional and national units all playing a key role. The operation has had many successes in terms of disrupting those involved in this type of criminality and, as of 31 December 2014, has led to

the arrest of 11,688 persons with charges being brought against 6,711 persons.

With regard to the theft and sale of precious metals, and concerns in relation to ‘cash for gold’ outlets, I have been informed by the Garda authorities that An Garda Síochána investigates all reports where persons suspected of being involved in burglaries may be using cash for gold outlets to liquidate stolen property. Where relevant issues are highlighted, investigations are conducted to target any criminality.

I can also inform the Deputy that I am committed to examining the best approach to regulation in the area of cash for gold business providers, having regard to the potentially significant impact on legitimate businesses. It is important to recognise that any legislation in this area would have a potentially significant impact on a broad range of businesses. There are a large number of legitimate businesses such as jewellers, antique dealers etc., as well as ‘cash for gold’ outlets that would be impacted upon. As the regulatory and resource burden of any proposed measure will have to be carefully examined to ensure that it is proportionate to the matter being addressed I have asked officials in my Department to carry out a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) which will facilitate a process of consultation with groups likely to be affected. The current position is that my Department is finalising a RIA which will comprise a detailed and systematic appraisal of the potential impacts of any proposed regulation in order to assess whether the regulation is likely to achieve the desired objectives and the potential costs that will arise. It is my intention to publish this RIA for consultation in the near future.

Citizenship Applications

38. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will report on changes made by her Department in relation to the granting of citizenship to children born here whose non-EEA-Swiss parents do not meet residency requirements, as highlighted by an Ombudsman’s investigative report in 2014; her views on the Ombudsman’s remit to be extended to include naturalisation and immigration sections of her Department; and her further views on a change to the law to grant citizenship to all persons born here. [1405/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, entitlement to Irish citizenship is governed by the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. Where sections 6A and 6B of that Act apply, a child born in the island of Ireland on or after 1 January 2005 has an entitlement to Irish citizenship if, at the time of the birth of the child, one of his or her parents had, during the period of 4 years immediately preceding the person’s birth, been resident in the island of Ireland for a period of not less than 3 years or periods the aggregate of which is not less than 3 years.

Periods of unlawful residence, periods of residence which were for the sole purpose of having an application for refugee status determined or periods of residence where permission was granted for the purposes of study are excluded from the determination of periods of reckonable residence.

Entitlement of a child born in the State to Irish citizenship is determined by making an application for an Irish passport on behalf of the child to the Passport Office. However, entitlement to Irish citizenship under Section 6(3) is determined by the Citizenship Division of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, as is the entitlement to Irish citizenship of children born in Northern Ireland to certain foreign nationals. Children of Non-EEA/Swiss parents who do not meet the residency requirements, do not have an entitlement to Irish citizenship. However, in this case, the parent or guardian or person who is in loco parentis to the child may lodge an application for naturalisation on behalf of the child if and when the conditions for naturalisation

are satisfied, including a requirement to have a total of 5 years residence in the State. This ensures that, even where a child born in the State did not have an entitlement to Irish citizenship, there is a path to obtaining Irish citizenship through naturalisation.

In addition, a certificate of nationality can be issued to a person as evidence that they were, as of the date of issue, an Irish citizen. The cases in question were referred to the Citizenship Division for consideration in respect of children born in the State. I can inform the Deputy that a formal liaison arrangement between the Department of Justice and Equality and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which was agreed last year and has been put in place, provides a mechanism for dealing with exceptional cases as well as ongoing consultation in relation to citizenship and passport matters in general.

As indicated in the Ombudsman's Report, my Department is working with the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation to evaluate the potential for streamlining the system dealing with the employment and immigration status of non-EEA workers where currently two entirely separate application processes are required. This evaluation is ongoing.

The question of extending the remit of the Ombudsman is in the first instance a matter for the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and that remit was significantly extended under the Ombudsman (Amendment) Act 2012. However, after careful consideration of all the issues involved, it was determined that the administration of the law relating to immigration or naturalisation, should not be within the scope of the Ombudsman. Part of the consideration was the fact that there are already a significant number of appeal processes built into the system including Judicial Reviews. That said, the matter will be kept under review. I should also add that the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) has administrative arrangements in place with the Ombudsman's Office to assist and provide information and help resolve any matters brought to its attention.

The present provisions governing Jus Soli entitlement to Irish citizenship were enacted following the Twenty-Seventh Amendment of the Constitution inserting Article 9.2, which provides that a person born in the island of Ireland, which includes its islands and seas, who does not have, at the time of the birth of that person, at least one parent who is an Irish citizen or entitled to be an Irish citizen is not entitled to Irish citizenship or nationality, unless provided for by law. The change proposed by the Deputy would render Article 9.2 of the constitution moot and I have no plans to amend the legislation in this way.

Departmental Investigations

39. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding the result of interviews with 14 meter readers throughout Ireland by officials from the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Social Protection; the reason members of the Association of Meter Readers have received no update or result of these interviews; the reason, despite numerous requests and a High Court ruling, it has taken more than three years to respond to individual meter readers or to the Association of Meter Readers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1900/15]

41. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding the result of interviews with 14 meter readers throughout Ireland by officials from her Department and the Revenue Commissioners; the reason members of the Association of Meter Readers have received no update or result of these interviews; the reason that despite numerous requests and a High Court ruling, it has taken more than three years to respond to individual meter readers or to the Association of Meter Readers; and if she will make a state-

ment on the matter. [1899/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 39 and 41 together.

These cases are the subject of ongoing investigation in the Department. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the likely outcome of these investigations at this stage.

Social Insurance

40. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on the sustainability of the social insurance fund; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1953/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Social insurance contributions (PRSI) are paid into the Social Insurance Fund (SIF) which finances a broad range of benefits. The social insurance system is mandatory and insures nearly all workers and the self-employed for a range of contingencies such as old age, ill health, maternity and unemployment. The range of contingencies covered is dependent on the Class of PRSI paid.

Social insurance spending has traditionally been funded on a tripartite basis – with contributions coming from the Exchequer, employers and employees. Legally, the Exchequer is the residual financier of the Social Insurance Fund (SIF) and Exchequer contributions were the norm for over 40 years. The Revised Estimates for 2014 provided for a subvention of €690 million from voted expenditure to fund the deficit on the SIF with the Revised Estimates provision in 2015 being €180 million, a reduction of over half a billion euro.

One of my key priorities as Minister for Social Protection is to put the Social Insurance Fund on a sustainable footing. A core principle of sustainable social protection systems in advanced economies is that citizens receive benefits in proportion to their contributions.

The structural PRSI measures implemented in recent Budgets will have a positive and long-term impact on the funding of the SIF. These measures include increases in rates of contribution, the abolition of ceilings for charging PRSI, the abolition of relief from PRSI previously applied to employee pension contributions, the abolition of the PRSI-free allowance as well as the broadening of the base on which PRSI is charged through the abolition of exemptions. These revenue raising measures were accompanied by expenditure reducing measures including stricter contribution conditions for entitlement, reductions in duration of entitlement, removal of entitlement to concurrent social insurance payments, increases in pension age as well as major reductions in entitlements under the treatment benefits and redundancy payments schemes. As I have already indicated the 2015 Revised Estimate provides for the Exchequer Subvention to fall to €180 million in 2015.

The sustainability of the Social Insurance Fund is driven by:

- i. Social Insurance Fund Income from PRSI receipts;
- ii. Expenditure on SIF schemes – the main variables being demographic pressures relating to pensions and the Live Register.

Social Insurance Fund income peaked at over €8.1 billion in 2008. It fell to €6.7 billion by 2010. The 2015 Budget Estimate forecast that it will be €8.2 billion this year, exceeding the pre-crash value for the first time.

Arising from demographic pressures, expenditure on pensions is increasing by €200 million each year. The Live Register rose from an average of 162,000 in 2007 to over 440,000 in 2010 and 2011. It has since fallen each year and is expected to average below 390,000 in 2014.

The Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund as at 31 December, 2010, highlighted the growing deficit in the Fund and the prospect that it will, in the absence of measures to address the deficit, accelerate further in the future, driven primarily by pension costs. It is estimated that almost €1 billion additional provision will be required over the next 5 years to fund increases in the numbers of recipients of the State pension (contributory) scheme.

Based on macro-economic forecasts provided by the Department of Finance, it is expected that Social Insurance Fund income will continue to rise over the period 2016 to 2018 by an amount greater than the requirement for additional pension expenditure.

Question No. 41 answered with Question No. 39.

Questions Nos. 42 and 43 withdrawn.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Eligibility

44. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if basic supplementary welfare payment may be made in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2039/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An emergency needs payment issued to the person concerned on the 13th January 2015.

Mortgage Interest Relief Application

45. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding mortgage support in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2041/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The purpose of Mortgage Interest Supplement is to provide short term income 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.

The Mortgage Interest Supplement of the person referred to was reviewed in December 2014 and it was found that the interest payment amount had decreased and therefore the Mortgage Interest Supplement was reduced accordingly.

Rent Supplement Scheme Payments

46. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if increase in rent allowance will be provided for in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2042/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department has not, to date, received an application for Rent Supplement from the client concerned. The client

should forward an application to be assessed for entitlement to the Mid-Leinster Rent Unit, PO Box 11758, Dublin 24.

Rent Supplement Scheme Payments

47. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the circumstances whereby a person (details supplied) in County Kildare, on instructions from her Department to encourage the landlord to reduce the rent charged, has now been told to vacate the property along with their child, aged seven; if any consideration can be given by way of offering a solution in this case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2045/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The client concerned is in receipt of their full entitlement to Rent Supplement based on their monthly rent, weekly income and family composition. There is no record of the Department having any contact with this client regarding their on-going entitlement to Rent Supplement.

Question No. 48 withdrawn.

Bereavement Grant Eligibility

49. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if bereavement grant or exceptional needs payment is payable in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2067/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The purpose of Mortgage Interest Supplement is to provide short term income 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.

The Mortgage Interest Supplement of the person referred to was reviewed in December 2014 and it was found that the interest payment amount had decreased and therefore the Mortgage Interest Supplement was reduced accordingly.

Rental Accommodation Scheme Applications

50. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if rent support can be continued in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare while awaiting decision from the local authority in respect of RAS housing; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2068/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): As is standard practice, the Department will continue to pay Rent Supplement for a further 13 weeks where a RAS application is pending. The client's Rent Supplement will continue to issue at current rate until 31st March 2015.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

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

her attention has been drawn to the severe hardship suffered by a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; if in such circumstances priority might be given to their housing situation and payment of any arrears that might be owing to them; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2069/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Following the previous response to the Deputy regarding her case the person concerned contacted the nominated Intreo Centre on 22nd December 2014 to make an application for one parent family payment. On examination of her circumstances it was established that she did not meet the eligibility criteria for this scheme under current legislation, and was advised that it would be more appropriate for her to apply for a jobseeker's allowance transition payment. This scheme is specifically designed to meet the needs of persons re-engaging with the work force who have previously been in receipt of one parent family payment.

An initial appointment was arranged for the person concerned for 12th January 2015 which she attended. However, as she did not have the required documentation on her possession to proceed with her claim a further appointment has been arranged for 29th January 2015. In the meantime the person concerned is continuing to receive supplementary welfare allowance in respect of herself and her child from the Department while this matter is being progressed.

Question No. 52 withdrawn.

Mortgage Interest Supplement Scheme Applications

53. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a review will be carried out into the circumstances whereby a person (details supplied) in County Kildare was originally refused mortgage support on the basis that their house would inevitably be repossessed by the lenders where in fact the opposite is the case, the lack of any support clearly indicated to be a major factor in the manner in which the lending agency deals with the situation; if dietary allowance restored by the decision of the appeals officer, and subsequently discontinued after one month, will be again restored while the review takes place in order to alleviate hardship; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2076/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): As previously outlined in reply to the Deputy's earlier PQ No. 47257-14 on 9 November 2014, the claim for mortgage interest supplement in respect of the person concerned was disallowed on 23 December 2011 and this decision was upheld by the Social Welfare Appeals Office in an appeal decision issued on 27 July 2012. There is no recourse to a further review of this claim.

No new claim was made by the person concerned prior to the closure of the mortgage interest supplement scheme on 1 January 2014. As the scheme is now closed to new claims, this Department is not in a position to accept a further application for mortgage interest supplement.

As outlined in reply to the Deputy's earlier PQs, No's 44094-14 and 47062-14, diet supplement was suspended in September 2014 pending receipt of requested documentation, specifically bank statements. This documentation is still outstanding. Once this information is provided to the Department the claim will be re-examined.

Jobseeker's Allowance Applications

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

when jobseeker's allowance will be payable in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2079/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned has been deemed to meet the habitual residency condition for jobseekers allowance following a review of the original decision on the 09/01/2015. However information concerning a property contained in the paperwork provided in support of the jobseekers application, necessitates a means review to be carried out before an entitlement can be established. The file of the person concerned was sent to the Social Welfare Inspector to conduct a means review on 13/01/2015. The person concerned will be notified of the outcome of the review once completed.

Question No. 55 withdrawn.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

56. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the correct level of jobseeker's allowance payable in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2088/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): According to the information available to this Department, the correct level of jobseeker's allowance payable, in the case of the person concerned is as follows:

Personal Rate:	€188.00
Increase for Qualified Adult:	€124.80
Sub Total:	€312.80
Less means from spousal earnings:	€269.00
Weekly rate payable:	€ 43.80

It is open to the person concerned to request a review of his means at his local office in Ballyfermot if his circumstances have changed.

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

57. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding the provision of rent support in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2090/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): As outlined to the Deputy in reply to Parliamentary Question No. 52 of 11th December 2014, a request for remaining outstanding documentation was issued by the Department on 3rd December 2014 and 10th December 2014, and has not been received to date. On receipt of this information the client's entitlement to Rent Supplement can be assessed.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

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

travel allowance is payable in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2092/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department has no record of a recent application for a travel allowance from the person concerned. The person concerned can make such an application at the office of her local Community Welfare Service and her entitlement to same will be assessed.

Departmental Staff Recruitment

59. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the reason short-term employment contracts based in her Department are being offered to persons who are engaged in short-term contracts in other Departments, and consequently cannot accept those positions even though they may only have two or three weeks left on their existing contract; the reason this is marked as a rejection of an offer against them; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2104/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Public Appointments Service (PAS) have responsibility for all temporary clerical officer recruitment for this Department. PAS maintain the panel of temporary clerical officers (TCOs) and assignments are then made as temporary vacancies arise.

Competitions for TCOs are conducted by PAS on an annual basis and when candidates come up for consideration they may be in employment as a TCO on foot of a previous year's competition. PAS assign successful candidates to Departments in strict order of merit.

When an assignment is made to the Department, the Department then makes an offer of appointment to the successful candidate. If a candidate is already employed from a previous competition, it is matter for him/her to decide either to accept the offer or to decline the offer and remain on their current contract. This is in accordance with the PAS process which the Department is obliged to comply with.

Departmental Staff Data

60. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of employees of her Department, who were engaged on short-term contracts, that opted to take extra payment in lieu of holiday entitlement accrued at the expiration of their contracts in each of the past three years; the proportion of all employees hired on short-term contracts over this period who opted to do so; if her attention has been drawn to any specific policy within her Department which may serve to encourage persons not to take holiday time accrued; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2105/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Temporary staff are recruited by this Department to cover absences of permanent staff on maternity leave, long term sick leave, other statutory leave and also to provide cover for some staff availing of the shorter working year scheme. They are also recruited from time to time to alleviate work pressure in certain areas.

Temporary contracts are offered for a fixed purpose and the term can vary according to the purpose of the contract.

Annual leave is accrued based on the length of individual temporary contracts and staff can

apply to take their annual leave entitlement. If they retain any annual leave at the termination of their contract, the Department will issue payment in lieu of any untaken annual leave.

No records are maintained which would identify the number of temporary clerical officers who were paid for any untaken annual leave.

There is no policy in place to encourage persons not to take holiday time accrued.

IBRC Mortgage Loan Book

61. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Finance if individual mortgage holders with IBRC or Irish Nationwide Building Society will be entitled to pay in full the balance of their mortgages either to the IBRC or the purchasers of the mortgage loan book; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1908/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Special Liquidators confirm that all debts owing to Irish Bank Resolution Corporation Limited (in Special Liquidation) whilst under their remit, remain due and payable in accordance with their terms.

I am advised that remaining mortgage holders with IBRC are permitted to buy-out their mortgage at par value and that there are no legislative barriers for such borrowers to do so.

In relation to loan assets purchased by third party purchasers, the Special Liquidators are unable to comment on the intentions and/or the subsequent actions of these third party purchasers once the loan assets have been sold.

However, whether the mortgage provider is IBRC or a third party purchaser, the mortgage holder is legally entitled to buy-out their mortgage at par, unless it specifically states otherwise in their mortgage contract. I would encourage borrowers to engage with either IBRC or their new mortgage provider on this matter should they wish to repay the full debt outstanding on their mortgage.

Bank Charges

62. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the banks' charging of a €10 penalty when there is insufficient funds available in a current account to complete direct debit transaction; his further views that the imposition of such arbitrary and punitive penalties are especially unfair on the part of the bailed out banks in view of the cost of the bank bailout to Irish citizens and business alike, almost certainly contributed to the lack of funds in the first place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1937/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): While all credit institutions in Ireland are independent commercial entities and I have no statutory role in relation to the charges applied by credit institutions, section 149 of the Consumer Credit Act 1995 requires that credit institutions, prescribed credit institutions and bureaux de change must make a submission to the Central Bank if they wish to introduce any new customer charges or increase any existing customer charges in respect of certain services. Section 149 does not cover interest rates rather it applies to fees and commissions only. The Central Bank may direct the institution not to impose the new or increased charge or it may approve the charge, or approve it at a lower level than requested by the institution. Once approved, the bank is entitled to impose the charge.

My Department published a report on the review of the regulation of bank fees and charges

in December 2013. This contains a detailed description of the process by which the Central Bank makes decisions on whether or not to approve proposed charges. It is available on my Department's website at www.finance.gov.ie. The following are the key findings of the review of the regulation of bank fees and charges undertaken by my Department:

- net fee and commission income divided by average assets in Irish banks was well below the average of their peers,
- net fees and commissions are lower in the Irish banks than in their European peers relative to net interest income,
- fee and commission income have become a more important source of income to the banks in recent years and banks have been able to increase fee and commission income since 2009 despite the restrictions imposed by section 149,
- Section 149 does appear to exert a restraining effect on the development of innovative products by the existing banks in Ireland but this may not be to the detriment of consumers,
- Section 149 may lead to inefficiency in pricing of financial products by the banks in Ireland, and
- Low customer mobility may mean that banks can increase prices without fearing a loss of customers.

The review also found that competition in the Irish banking sector has reduced significantly since the onset of the economic crisis and that this reduction is not related to Section 149. The review considered a number of possible changes to the existing regime but concluded that it would not be appropriate to repeal Section 149 at this point in time. The lack of competition in the banking sector means that the removal of section 149 would give unfettered price setting power to the incumbent banks. The Central Bank Supervision and Enforcement Act 2013 did introduce changes to Section 149 to attract new entrants to the Irish banking sector. There is some evidence of improvement in the banking sector with a number of institutions introducing new products and adapting their business model.

I would advise consumers who wish to compare current account offerings to look at the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission website at <http://compare.consumerhelp.ie/CurrentAccount>.

Fuel Laundering

63. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on ways of putting diesel launderers out of business; if he will review the current green diesel system, which provides enormous business potential for launderers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1979/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that they are aware of the threat posed by diesel laundering and have implemented a comprehensive strategy to tackle the problem. This strategy includes the following elements:

- The licensing regime for auto fuel traders was strengthened with effect from September 2011 to limit the ability of criminals to get laundered fuel onto the market;
- A new licensing regime was introduced for marked fuel traders in October 2012, which is designed to limit the ability of criminals to source marked fuel for laundering;

- New requirements in relation to fuel traders' records of stock movements and fuel deliveries were introduced to ensure data are available to assist in supply chain analysis;

- Following a significant investment in the required IT systems, a new supply chain reporting regime was introduced from January 2013, which requires all fuel traders to make monthly electronic returns to Revenue of their fuel transactions. Revenue is using this data to identify suspicious or anomalous transactions and patterns of distribution for investigation;

- Following a joint process with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs in the United Kingdom, a new, more effective fuel marker was identified and will be implemented in the two jurisdictions from the end of March next; and

- Intensified targeting, in co-operation with other law enforcement agencies on both sides of the border, of enforcement action against suspected fuel laundering operations.

In addition, I introduced a 'reckless trading' provision in Finance (No. 2) Act 2013 that makes a supplier who is reckless in supplying rebated fuel for a use connected with excise fraud liable for the duty evaded. This provision has strengthened Revenue's hand in dealing with those traders supplying fuel recklessly to dubious customers. In Finance Act 2014, I introduced provisions to strengthen further Revenue's ability to refuse or revoke a mineral oil trader's licence where the trader does not comply with excise law, does not maintain adequate stock management systems and records, or provides false or misleading information. Revenue's strategy has already yielded significant results. Since mid-2011, 137 filling stations were closed for breaches of licensing conditions, over three million litres of fuel have been seized and 31 oil laundries were detected and closed down. Industry sources indicate a much-reduced incidence of laundered fuel on the market and road diesel consumption and tax revenues are up 13% compared with a couple of years ago. Obviously, other economic factors have contributed to this growth but reduced fraud is an important factor. It has been suggested on a number of occasions that the current system of marking lower taxed fuels should be replaced by one based on repayments to the users. However, a change of this nature would impact on a wide range of users, would be costly to implement and would, itself, be at risk from fraud. Marked gas oil has a wide variety of uses, including the propulsion of trains, in agricultural, construction and industrial machinery, for commercial sea-navigation (including fishing) and commercial and home heating purposes. A change to a rebate system would involve the establishment of an expensive and wide-ranging repayments system and would place a new administrative burden on oil traders, on the large number of users and the Revenue Commissioners. It would also impose significant cash-flow costs on those currently using marked gas oil. Repayment schemes are vulnerable to abuse and the introduction of a wide-ranging repayment scheme would not offer greater security against fraud than the current arrangements. Fuel in respect of which a repayment of duty was made could be easily diverted to on-road use.

For these reasons, and in light of the progress made by Revenue in tackling the problem, I am satisfied that the strategy being implemented by Revenue is the best course of action. I am also confident that the introduction of the new marker here and in the United Kingdom from the end of March will reinforce the measures already implemented.

Banks Recapitalisation

64. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance his plans for 2015 to recover public moneys diverted to the banking system in recent years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1985/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware the Irish banking system is now in a much stronger position than it has been in recent years. Profits are recovering, balance sheets have been restructured and we have started the process of returning cash to the taxpayer following the huge investments that were made over the 2009-11 period.

The preliminary independent valuation of our shareholdings by the NTMA shows that as at 31 December 2014 our equity and preference shares in AIB were valued at €11.7 billion and our 14 per cent equity interest in Bank of Ireland was valued at €1.4 billion. The State also holds €1.6 billion of convertible contingent notes in AIB and another €400 million of convertible contingent notes in PTSB (we have not independently valued our 99.2% equity interest in PTSB), which brings the total current value of the state's banking investments to more than €15 billion. This compares with €13.1 billion at end 2013.

Much of the banking-related work in the Department of Finance this year will focus on AIB. Given the scale of the State's investment – some €20.8 billion – and the range of options available to recoup value from the bank, officials within my department are working with AIB on reconfiguring its capital structure. Goldman Sachs International has been appointed to provide financial advice in this regard.

The focus will be on ensuring that the best decisions are made regarding potential capital restructuring options and sequencing in order to maximise the return of cash to the State from our AIB investments over time. While this is just the start of the process, it is an essential first step on the road to recovering value for the taxpayer. All options remain on the table and it is too early to specify what steps will be taken next or to put a timeline on decisions.

Tax Yield

65. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if the level of revenue generated from oil, diesel and petrol in 2014 was lower than anticipated arising from the reduction in fuel prices towards the end of 2014, the predicted impact on revenue for 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1991/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that there was no fall in Excise receipts in 2014 due to lower fuel prices. It should be noted that Excise is a fixed rate regardless of price. I am also informed that the details on payments of VAT are not recorded in such a manner as would provide a basis for compiling the information sought by the Deputy.

The following table is a summary of provisional Excise receipts for 2014 and the original forecast for 2014. Overall the receipts are up €113m.

-	2014	2014	-	-
-	Forecast	Provisional	Change	%
Excise - Light Oils (mainly petrol)	780.7	801.1	20.4	2.6%
Excise - Other Oils (mainly auto-diesel)	1,127.4	1,223.8	96.4	8.6%
Carbon Tax (Oils)	319.2	315.3	-3.8	-1.2%

-	2014	2014	-	-
Total	2,227.3	2,340.3	13.0	5.1%

Economic Growth

66. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance the level of overall positive impact on economic growth predicted from the fall in oil, diesel and petrol costs; the measures that can be taken to maximise the positive impact of such declines; if it is expected that the lower prices will last throughout 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1992/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The price of Brent crude oil has fallen considerably since June 2014. For the most part, this is a positive development and is likely to have a favourable impact on real economic activity in Ireland.

As Ireland is a net energy importer, falls in oil prices have a positive impact in the short term. Lower energy prices reduce firms' input costs, thereby improving their profitability and competitiveness. At the household level, lower energy prices are likely to lead to an increase in real disposable incomes, which can be used to reduce indebtedness or increase consumption on other goods and services.

A reasonable rule of thumb - everything else being equal - is that each sustained €10 per barrel reduction in the price of oil boosts the level of real GDP by between 0.1 and 0.2 percentage points.

It is also important to point out that the decline in oil prices will also reduce inflation. At the level of the euro area, the latest figures show that inflation moved into negative territory in December for the first time since 2009. Falling oil prices will further weigh on inflation in the short-term. If expectations of falling prices were to become entrenched, the negative impact on the euro area economy could potentially be severe.

For the purposes of compiling my Department's macroeconomic forecasts, my officials make the purely technical assumption that Brent crude oil prices will move in line with futures prices. The latest forecasts, which were published for Budget 2015, included the assumption that the price of Brent crude oil in 2015 would be \$103 per barrel. Prices have fallen by close to 50 per cent since these macroeconomic projections were finalised in late September 2014. My Department will update its oil price assumptions in the next round of forecasting in April 2015. In the meantime, my Department will continue to monitor oil price developments closely.

Banks Recapitalisation

67. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on comments by the Minister of State at his Department regarding a possible pro bono fee arrangement with the firm appointed to provide advice regarding capital restructuring and other related matters in relation to State investment in AIB; the fee structure that will be in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2024/15]

72. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the terms on which a company (details supplied) has been appointed by his Department in respect of the possible sale of AIB; if a contract has been awarded; if a competitive tendering procedure took place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2121/15]

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

72 together.

As the Deputy is aware, within the past few days, I have awarded a contract to Goldman Sachs International to provide financial advice to the Department of Finance in relation to capital restructuring actions (and other related matters) with respect to the State's investments in AIB.

I can confirm for the Deputy that the duration of the contract is not fixed but is expected to run up to the summer of 2015. I can also confirm that Goldman Sachs International has been engaged on a pro bono basis. This is a good outcome for the State and we understand is not unusual internationally given firms desire to be associated with such high visibility government work. In fact a number of the tenderers offered their services on a pro bono basis.

The award follows the establishment by the Department last year of three separate panels of financial advisers. These panels were put in place to principally facilitate the provision of timely advice in relation to our banking investments though the panels are available for the wider Department to use in other areas if deemed necessary.

The award of the current contract followed a competitive tendering process with each of the eleven firms on Panel 1 (which covers capital markets, strategic, M&A and restructuring advice) being invited to submit a tender. Prior to the year end, each of the firms accepted the invitation and the tendering process included face-to-face presentations by each of the firms to a panel of Department of Finance officials. Arising from these presentations, each of the firms was scored across a number of standard criteria with Goldman Sachs International being adjudged to have achieved the highest aggregated score. Accordingly, they were awarded the contract.

As I have indicated previously, no decision has been taken in relation to the State exiting any of its investments in AIB. What we intend to do during the first half of 2015 is make the bank's balance sheet fit for purpose and put together a roadmap that will see the bank start to return cash to the State. Upon completion of this work we will take stock of our options with respect to the future ownership of the bank.

Details of the firms included on Panel 1 can be found on the Department's website and I attach the following link for the benefit of the Deputy.

<http://www.finance.gov.ie/sites/default/files/Advisory%20Panels%20on%20Financial%20Matters.pdf>

Credit Unions Restructuring

68. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of applications for credit union restructuring that are before the restructuring board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2025/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Credit Union Restructuring Board (ReBo) has given approval to 12 restructuring proposals, involving 30 credit unions. Of these, 8 credit union mergers involving 20 credit unions have been completed to date. The remaining 4 proposals involving 10 credit unions are awaiting Central Bank approval and are due to complete shortly.

In line with the Commission on Credit Unions recommendation, restructuring is being carried out on a voluntary, incentivised and timebound basis. While ReBo has approved all current restructuring proposals, it is now actively engaging with a further 118 credit unions in the

development of appropriate restructuring solutions. ReBo expects that many of these 118 credit unions will be involved in restructuring solutions in due course.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

69. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount that has been paid to a company (details supplied) for professional services on the banking crisis since 2008, including any amounts, shown separately, paid by his Department, the Central Bank of Ireland, the National Treasury Management Agency and the National Pension Reserve Fund, or by the covered institutions themselves. [2026/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have received the following information in relation to amounts paid to the company in question.

Department of Finance

There is no record of any payments to the company in question during the period.

Central Bank

The Central Bank has not paid for professional services from the firm mentioned, in the period 2008 to present.

National Treasury Management Agency and National Pensions Reserve Fund

In March 2010, the Minister for Finance delegated certain banking system functions to the NTMA. The delegation was revoked, with effect from 5 August 2011, and the NTMA Banking Unit has since then been seconded to the Department of Finance's Shareholding Management Unit. At the direction of the Minister, certain costs of the Banking Unit (including costs incurred subsequent to the Banking Unit's secondment to the Department of Finance in 2011) continue to be met by the NTMA. Consultancy costs related to services provided by the firm in question incurred by the Banking Unit and met by the NTMA amounted to €7.717 million (ex VAT) as detailed as follows.

Year	Service Provided	Amount €'m (ex VAT)
2010 - 2011	Advice in relation to Anglo Irish Bank	0.362
2011 - 2013	Advice on (i) liability management exercises and capital raising transactions in relation to Allied Irish Banks, Bank of Ireland, EBS Building Society, Irish Life and Permanent Group Holdings; and (ii) the sale of Irish Life.	7.355
	Total Amount Paid	7.717

Covered institutions

The covered institutions would engage professional services on a range of issues and any amounts paid would be commercially sensitive.

Knowledge Development Box

70. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the consultations underway by his Department and the Central Bank of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2027/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): There is currently one public consultation open by my Department - the Knowledge Development Box Consultation Paper.

In line with the commitment contained in the Road Map for Ireland's Tax Competitiveness, which was published as part of Budget 2015, my Department launched a public consultation on the introduction of a new corporation tax incentive the Knowledge Development Box - on 14 January 2014. Interested parties are invited to submit their views on how the Knowledge Development Box should be designed to ensure that it meets the key objective of being the most competitive in class, within the agreed international parameters for fair tax competition in this area. The consultation will run for 12 weeks from 14 January 2015 until 8 April 2015.

Further details on this public consultation can be viewed in the consultation document which is available in the "Publications" section on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.finance.gov.ie/publications>. The website also includes details of prior public consultations which have been closed for submissions.

In relation to the Central Bank, I have been informed by the Central Bank that the following is a list of public consultations currently active (accepting submissions):

- Review of the Code of Conduct for Business Lending to Small and Medium Enterprises
- Consultation on the Supervision of Non-financial Counterparties under EMIR
- Consultation on National Specific Templates for Insurers and Reinsurers under Solvency II
- Consultation on Regulations for Credit Unions on commencement of the remaining sections of the 2012 Act

I have been further informed by the Central Bank of the following public consultations which have been closed for submissions but the outcomes have not yet been published.

Macro-prudential policy for residential mortgage lending

Consultation on Fund Management Company Effectiveness-Delegate Oversight.

A list of active and closed Central Bank consultations can be found in the "Consultation Papers" section of the Central Bank website at the following link: <http://www.centralbank.ie/regulation/poldocs/consultation-papers/Pages/default.aspx>

Mortgage Interest Relief Application

71. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the relevant percentage of mortgage interest relief is not applied to the interest included in a full redemption of an outstanding mortgage on a primary home which was in receipt of it while instalments were being paid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2052/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that mortgage interest relief is available through the Tax Relief at Source (TRS) system as provided for by

Section 244 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. The relief is available at varying rates and ceilings in respect of interest paid on a loan used for the purchase, repair, development or improvement of a sole or main residence. The relief is available on qualifying home loans, taken out on or after 1 January 2004 and on or before 31 December 2012, up to and including the tax year 2017.

Persons purchasing their first qualifying residence are eligible for the higher ‘ceiling’ (known as the first time buyer ceiling) in the first seven tax years of entitlement when the maximum amounts of interest paid for which tax relief can be claimed are €20,000 for married/widowed persons and €10,000 for single persons. For tax years eight and onwards (up to 2017), the ‘ceilings’ are €6,000 for married/widowed persons and €3,000 for single persons (known as the non-first time buyer ceiling).

In circumstances where a mortgage is redeemed, the amount of allowable interest relief is restricted to the maximum of the applicable ‘ceiling’ for the particular tax year. There is no provision in the legislation to allow the relief on interest paid that is in excess of the ‘ceiling’ threshold even where the amount is part of a redemption agreement.

Question No. 72 answered with Question No. 67.

Public Procurement Contracts

73. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide in tabular form a list of all contracts for public works awarded in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014; the form of contract for public works awarded; the name of the company to which the contract was awarded; if the company is registered inside or outside the State; the value of the contract; and the Department or agency responsible for the contract. [1936/15]

74. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide in tabular form the company names of subcontractors employed by a principal contractor awarded a contract for public works in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014: if the company is registered inside or outside the State; the value of contracted work; and the Department or agency responsible for the contract. [1938/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 73 and 74 together.

At the outset I would like to state that public works contracts are between the main contractor and the contracting authority. Contracts between main contractors and subcontractors are a matter for those parties concerned and details are not available.

Under EU Directives on public procurement public works, supplies and service contracts above certain thresholds must be advertised on the Official Journal of the EU (OJEU) and awarded on the basis of objective and non-restrictive criteria. For works contracts the current threshold is €5.186 million. The Directives require contract award notices for contracts above these threshold to be published in the OJEU within 48 days of the award of the contract.

In relation to contracts valued below the EU thresholds, the general requirement is that works contracts above €50,000, be advertised on the national public procurement website www.etenders.gov.ie or, below this value, awarded on the basis of a competitive process of direct invitation to an adequate number of suitable suppliers.

Guidelines in Circular 20/14 issued by my Department also require public bodies from 1

August 2014 to publish all contract award notices over €25,000.

It is the responsibility of individual contracting authorities to publish award notices following the signing of a contract. This process is facilitated through the national eProcurement portal *www.etenders.gov.ie*. The Office of Government Procurement is unable to provide the information requested by the Deputy, which has been input by contracting authorities onto the eTenders system, in the time available, however, the information that is available, is being collated and will be issued directly to the Deputy.

Semi-State Bodies Remuneration

75. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to revise the maximum performance related award payable to chief executives of semi-State companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1951/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In 2013 the Government reviewed the position on the payment of performance related reward schemes or bonuses for Chief Executive Officers in Commercial State Companies and agreed to continue with the policy which it introduced in 2011 of requesting the State Companies concerned not to award such bonus payments in light of the serious state of the public finances. Furthermore the Government agreed to continue with the practice of excluding the payment of bonus provisions in the employment contracts of newly appointed CEOs to such State Companies as well as in respect of contract renewals for incumbent CEOs.

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

Semi-State Bodies Remuneration

76. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide in tabular form the performance related awards made to chief executives of semi-State companies in 2013 and 2014 under the aegis of his Department. [1952/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In response to the Deputy's question I can confirm that no performance-related awards were given to any Semi-State companies under my remit in 2013 and 2014.

Courts Service

77. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has received representations from the office of the Chief Justice requesting approval for a larger budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1954/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I assume the Deputy is referring to funding for the Courts Service, which in the first instance, is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality. The Chief Justice has informed me that she is giving consideration to potential funding models for the service. Any proposals that arise

will be subject to the normal estimates process between my Department and the Department of Justice.

Flood Prevention Measures

78. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will liaise with Kerry County Council to agree a way forward to address a major flood risk problem (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1982/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): Responsibility for identifying appropriate measures to address flood risk at Incherea, Glenbeigh rests with Kerry County Council in the first instance.

While it is open to the Council to utilise its own resources, or to avail of funding that might be available from other sources to deal with the issue, subject to the Office of Public Works' (OPW) overall availability of funding for flood risk management, the OPW would consider an application for funding from Kerry County Council for any measures that are developed that are economically justifiable and environmentally acceptable.

National Monuments

79. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will facilitate access to a site (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1984/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The opening and closing dates of Skellig Michael for visitors in 2015 will be 15th May and 30th September. Previous attempts to remain open later in the season have inevitably led to a curtailment at short notice due to adverse weather conditions. Accordingly it is not proposed to extend the season into October in 2015.

As is normal, the effective operational date for the Monument is approximately two to three weeks in advance of the public opening and the Office of Public Works staff will therefore be travelling to the island from approximately late April / early May, weather permitting. This is so that the site can be prepared to receive visitors and significant Health and Safety preparations for the season carried out. The site will be fully assessed after the winter, any hazards cleared from public areas and any necessary repairs carried out.

Given the need for these essential preparatory works in advance of opening the island to the public, and having regard to dependence on weather, I regret that it is not possible to open the island earlier.

Capital Programme

80. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when details of the next capital investment plan will be announced; the level of preparation that has so far been completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1994/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): My Department commenced a review of the public capital programme in April of last year in parallel with

the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure. The purpose of the review is to assess all areas of public capital investment and to refresh the existing investment strategy and multi-annual envelopes to ensure that they are in line with emerging Government priorities and that our limited resources are focused on the areas that can best support continued, sustainable and equitable growth.

As with the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure, all Departments (and their Agencies) with capital budgets were asked to make submissions to my Department in order to feed into the review process. Specifically, they were asked to outline their capital investment plans for the five year period ahead. My Department also consulted external stakeholders such as the ESRI, the CIF and the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland, for their views on what the State's main infrastructure priorities for the period ahead should be. Alongside these consultations, officials within my Department conducted analysis on particular areas and aspects of capital expenditure. It is my intention that the submissions and papers which informed the capital review will be made available on my Department's website once the report on the review is published.

Government has made its decision on the capital allocations for the next three years and these were set out in Budget 2015. The report of the capital review is being finalised and I intend to publish it in the coming weeks. The report will include the three year ceilings announced on Budget Day along with new ceilings for the period 2018 to 2020.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

81. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a serious problem exists within the processes of the Public Appointments Service whereby persons who are working short-term contracts with one Department are being offered contracts with different Departments before the completion of their current contract, that, as a consequence of not being in a position to accept such offers, the PAS record this as a rejection of an offer, which carries a number of consequences for the person concerned; the reason it is possible for this error to repeatedly occur; if he will commit to compensate in some fashion those who have been forced into this situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2103/15]

82. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason a person (details supplied) was offered a 12 week contract of employment with the Department of Social Protection even though they were at the time engaged on a 15 week contract with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and had three weeks remaining; the reason, even though they were obviously not in a position to accept the Department of Social Protection's offer, this was recorded as a rejection within the PAS system; the consequences this has had for their future employment opportunities; if he will review this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2110/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 81 and 82 together.

Recruitment to the Civil Service and a range of other public bodies is handled under the Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) Act 2004 which established a central recruitment agency, the Public Appointments Service (PAS), for this purpose. The PAS operates under licence from the Commission for Public Service Appointments and is independent in its operations.

While the Deputy does not stipulate a particular competition, PAS has confirmed that the

individual for whom details were supplied was a candidate for the Temporary Clerical Officer (TCO) campaign which is run annually to meet gaps arising on foot of term-time leave, maternity leave and other short-term staff needs.

In 2014, the TCO campaign attracted 13,200 applications. Given the scale of interest in the competition and urgency of temporary assignments, PAS does not have scope to delay if a candidate cannot take up duty promptly. The Information Booklet for the competition is clear in terms of the obligation on candidates to be available to take up duty when required and to see out the contract.

The needs of departments/offices seeking TCO cover are immediate and typically short-term and as such the system must be responsive. Given the size and complexity of the TCO competition with multiple regional panels and a fast moving process, it would not be feasible for PAS to keep track of candidates who are not available when required but may subsequently become available.

In the specific case raised by the Deputy, the candidate had applied for both the TCO-2013 campaign and the TCO-2014 campaign. He was successfully placed on the panel for Dublin on both occasions. He was assigned from the TCO-2013 panel in February 2014, which was quite late in the currency of that panel. As he performed better in the TCO-2014 competition and was placed higher on the panel for Dublin he was offered a position from the TCO-2014 panel in April 2014. The juxtaposition of a late offer from TCO-2013 and an early offer from TCO-2014 led to an overlap. However, it should be noted that the 2013 and 2014 TCO recruitment campaigns were entirely separate competitions. Candidates are entitled to apply for any number of concurrent PAS campaigns for permanent or temporary positions, but must ultimately make a decision on which offer to take if offers coincide.

EU Directives

83. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation his plans to increase regulation of the auditing profession in view of the financial crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2022/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton) (Deputy Richard Bruton): In the wake of the international financial crisis the European Commission brought forward an extensive set of proposals for an Audit Regulation and a Directive in December 2011, inter alia, to provide for a strengthened and more coordinated approach to the supervision of auditors in the EU and to enhance the independence of auditors. Following intensive negotiations at Council Working Party level, the Audit Directive (2014/56/EU), amending Directive 2006/43/EC on statutory audits of annual accounts and consolidated accounts, and the Audit Regulation (EU) No. 537/2014 on specific requirements regarding the statutory audit of public-interest entities, were adopted on 16 April, 2014.

The Audit Regulation introduces stricter requirements on the statutory audits of public-interest entities, such as listed companies, credit institutions, and insurance undertakings.

My Department is currently in the process of transposing the Audit measures into national law. In that connection, a public consultation was undertaken by my Department towards the end of last year which will help to inform the process of transposing these Audit measures into Irish law.

The Audit measures are required to be given effect by 17 June 2016.

Construction Contracts Act Implementation

84. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if advertisements have been placed for the panel of adjudicators as required under the Construction Contracts Act; when the appointments will be made to include the chairperson; and when drafting of the code of practice for the conduct of adjudications will be complete. [1921/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton) (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government approved the delegation of responsibility for implementation of the Construction Contracts Act, 2013 to my colleague, the Minister of State for Business and Employment, Deputy Gerald Nash, in November. Work is continuing on the preparations for the full implementation of the Act in the Spring. This will include the selection of a panel of adjudicators through an open competitive process to be run by the Public Appointments Service, which will commence at the earliest opportunity and will be advertised accordingly. While matters are progressing, it is not yet possible to definitively state when the appointments envisaged under the Act will be made.

The drafting of a code of practice for the conduct of adjudications, which will be binding on all adjudicators operating under the Act not just those appointed to cases by the Chair of the adjudication panel, is at an advanced stage and will be finalised after consultations have concluded with the construction industry stakeholders.

IDA Site Visits

85. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of Industrial Development Agency sponsored visits to County Kerry by potential investors in 2014; a monthly breakdown of visits; his views on a positive outcome from any of these visits; if he envisages an increased level of visitation activity in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1967/15]

86. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will prioritise County Kerry for special attention from the Industrial Development Agency in 2015, in view of the lack of success in recent years in attracting foreign direct investment for Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1968/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 85 and 86 together.

I am informed by IDA Ireland that there were 3 IDA Ireland sponsored site visits by potential investors to County Kerry in 2014, one by the end of the first half of the year and two further visits in the second half of the year. Due to client confidentiality and commercial sensitivity, IDA Ireland does not comment on upcoming visits by clients.

At the end of 2014 there were 12 IDA Ireland supported companies in Kerry employing 1,874 people. IDA Ireland has strong relationships with all these companies and works closely with them to ensure their long term sustainability and to encourage their growth, development and continuing re-investment in their sites. The primary opportunity for regional locations is in respect of the existing client base and potential further investment opportunities from same. Approximately 70% of all FDI investments won by IDA Ireland is from the existing client base. IDA Ireland works closely with third level educational institutions in the region so that the skill-sets necessary to attract high value added employment to the Region are being developed. When marketing Kerry for new inward investment IDA Ireland focuses on the ICT (incl. soft-

ware), International Financial Services and Globally Traded Business sectors.

2014 marks the end of IDA Ireland's 5 year Strategy "Horizon 2020". The Agency is currently finalising its new Strategy for the coming 5 years. I look forward to launching the new strategy, detailing goals and the broad direction IDA Ireland will take to accomplish them over the next five years.

I have been working with my Department on the development of a framework for the formulation of Regional Enterprise Strategies that will enable us to identify the sustainable competitive strengths of each region and to better integrate the efforts of the enterprise development agencies and other regional stakeholders in supporting enterprise growth and jobs in areas of potential. A key element of this process is the Regional Enterprise Forum, which I chaired in Athlone on 19th December last. I hope to publish the framework strategy shortly. The Regional strategy will be rolled out firstly in the Midlands before being rolled out in other regions and will include specific actions and targets on the part of my Department, the enterprise development agencies and other public bodies to promote enterprise growth and job creation in the region.

Regional Aid

87. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if any company has availed of Kerry's improved investment aid status since 1 July 2014; if so, if he will provide details regarding the amount of investment involved and the number of jobs created as a result; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1969/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Regional Aid Guidelines enable the State to grant State Aid, at enhanced rates, to businesses in order to support new investment and new employment in productive projects in Ireland's most disadvantaged regions. This helps the convergence of these regions with the more advantaged regions of the Union. Regional Aid is also provided under Schemes for tourism grants, marine tourism, urban and rural renewal and other tax-based development schemes. All such aid come from the Exchequer, i.e. there is no EU or other external funding. The 2014-2020 Regional Aid Guidelines entered into force on 1 July 2014. Areas accounting for 51.28% of Ireland's population are now eligible for assistance under the Regional Aid Guidelines. This represents a substantial increase from the 25% originally proposed by the Commission, and an increase from the 50% under the 2007-2013 Map. This means that the full range of Regional Aid assistance options are now available in Kerry.

The Guidelines specify the grant aid rates for Regional Aid projects. The Deputy is correct in acknowledging an improvement in the aid rate applicable for eligible projects in Kerry. This specifically relates to the aid rate for large companies, which has increased from 0% to 10% for the period 2014-2020. The Regional aid rates for Kerry and other areas designated under the 2014-2020 Regional Aid Guidelines are a maximum of 30% for small and micro enterprises, 20% for medium-sized enterprises and 10% for large enterprises.

Since 1 July 2014, Enterprise Ireland has not to date, approved Regional Aid to any large company in Kerry. However the Agency is working proactively with large clients as well as SME clients in Kerry to identify suitable growth projects for investment. In the six months since 1 July 2014, Enterprise Ireland approved more than €5.7 million to companies in Kerry for start-up, research and development, and expansion projects. All projects are subject to assessment in terms of commercial, technical and market due diligence and should represent value for money in terms of the State's investment.

During 2014, there were no public investment announcements of IDA Ireland projects for County Kerry. However, it should be noted that not all companies agree to announce their investments and as a result, this does not truly reflect the level of investments won or the performance of FDI in a county in a particular year. In this respect, IDA Ireland clients had a very positive employment performance in County Kerry with a net increase of 236 jobs in 2014, compared with 2013.

Kerry Local Enterprise Office continues to work with its micro enterprise client base in Kerry.

Jobs Data

88. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the jobs lost and created in IDA supported employment for each of the years 2008 to 2014. [1996/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): In the 7 year period from 2008 to 2014, the total numbers employed in IDA Ireland client companies rose by almost 15,000, from 159,556 in 2008 to 174,488 in 2014, the highest level in the history of IDA Ireland. Details of the number of jobs created and lost in each of those years is set out in the following tabular statement. This strong job-creation performance took place against a particularly challenging European economic environment and changing corporate taxation landscape. FDI is a key stimulator and driver of the Irish economy through its contribution to Exchequer finances. The high calibre jobs created in IDA Ireland client companies and the indirect employment spin offs they generate in the Irish economy are making a vital contribution to this Government's ambition to have 100,000 people in work by 2016.

2014 marks the end of IDA Ireland's 5-year strategy "Horizon 2020" and I am glad to be able to inform the Deputy that the Agency exceeded the jobs and investment targets it set itself under that strategy. The Agency is currently finalising its new strategy for the coming five years. I look forward in the next few weeks to launching the new strategy, detailing the goals and broad direction IDA Ireland will take to accomplish them over the next five years.

Table showing total number of jobs in IDA Ireland client companies together with the number of new Jobs created and lost in each year from 2008 to 2014.

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total Jobs	159,556	144,612	146,628	152,223	159,191	167,357	174,488
New Jobs Created (Gross Gains)	10,943	6,265	14,308	14,432	15,215	15,104	15,012
Gross Losses	-14,263	-21,209	-12,292	-8,837	-8,247	-6,938	-7,881

Work Permit Applications

89. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if favourable consideration might be given to the issue of a work permit to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare whose current residency status is Stamp 2 but who is in a position to provide vital back-up care to a family in unique and compelling circumstances; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [2077/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): There is no record in my Department of a current permit application made by the person named by the Deputy or of a previous application made to this Department by that person. The Employment Permits (Amendment) Act 2014 generally provides that employment permits may not be granted to non-EEA nationals to work as carers, as this occupation is included on the list of “Ineligible Categories of Employment for Employment Permits”. However, an exception may be made for an application for employment as a carer in a private home, where the person who requires the care has a severe medical condition and the prospective carer is a trained medical professional (a medical practitioner or a nurse as listed in Part A of Schedule 2 in the Employment Permit Regulations), or where it can be demonstrated that the applicant has a long history of caring for the person requiring the care.

An applicant submitting an employment permit application for the position of a carer in these exceptional circumstances will be required to include additional documentation with the application. This additional information may, depending on the circumstances, include the following:

- copies of qualifications confirming that the foreign national is a trained medical professional (a medical practitioner or a nurse);
- a letter from a registered medical practitioner specialising in the area of illness of the person for whom he/she will be caring, confirming that that person has a severe medical condition;
- a copy of a P60, payslips, a notarised letter or an affidavit establishing that the foreign national has a long history of caring for the person concerned; and
- a letter from a registered medical practitioner specialising in the area of illness of the person for whom he/she will be caring confirming that that person has special care needs.

Where the above criteria are met, an employment permits may be granted, subject to all other applicable criteria (such as salary) also being met.

Work Permit Applications

90. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if further reconsideration will be given to application for work permit in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 1; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2081/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): There is no record in my Department of a current work permit application in respect of the person named by the Deputy. A work permit application in respect of this person was refused by my Department on 11th April 2014 for a number of reasons. It appeared from the information received that the position on offer was one of the occupations ineligible for an employment permit and that insufficient efforts were made to recruit an Irish or EEA/Swiss National for this position by advertising with DSP Employment Services/EURES and also in national or local newspapers or on a job website (other than DSP). In addition, the level of remuneration offered in respect of the position for which a permit was sought was less than the minimum remuneration of €30,000 per annum required. It was open to the applicant in this case to request that this decision be reviewed in accordance with Section 13 the Employment Permits Act, 2006, within twenty-one days from the date of the refusal letter that issued in respect of this application. However, no such request for a review was received from the applicant.

An application for a General Employment permit will be considered where an applicant secures a job offer that meets the necessary criteria for that permit. These criteria include the requirement that the prospective employer demonstrate, by way of a Labour Market Needs Test, that it has not been possible to find an EEA national to fill the post, and an undertaking to pay the appropriate salary to the non-EEA national.

Single Payment Scheme Administration

91. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if penalties for over-claiming on a land parcel for single farm payment purposes for 2013 and 2014 will be waived in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry in view of exceptional health circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1880/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In view of the circumstances of the case, I have arranged for an official of my Department to make direct contact with the person named with a view to establishing how the matter can be progressed.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Applications

92. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive the disadvantaged area scheme and single payment scheme payments; the reason for the delay in payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1891/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under 2014 Single Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 2 May 2014. Processing of the application has recently been finalised and payment will shortly issue, directly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Aquaculture Licence Eligibility

93. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to set down the position regarding the licensing of bays for aquaculture around the coast; the number of bays that have already been licensed; the names of those bays; when the remaining bays will be licensed; the number of aquaculture licenses that are pending in his Department; the number of same that have been granted; his plans to develop the major potential of aquaculture around the coast here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1907/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Applications for licences in respect of aquaculture developments are assessed in accordance with the provisions of the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 1997 and the Foreshore Act 1933. The European Court of Justice declared in case C418/04 that, by failing to take all the measures necessary to comply with Article 6(3) of Directive 92/43 (Habitats Directive) in respect of the authorisation of aquaculture programmes, Ireland had failed to fulfil its obligations under that Directive.

In the negotiations to address the judgment a process was agreed with the European Commission which would lead to full compliance by Ireland with the relevant EU Directives.

My Department has been working closely with the Marine Institute, Bord Iascaigh Mhara, and the National Parks and Wildlife Service to achieve full compliance with the relevant Di-

rectives through a multi-annual work programme. A key factor of this Work Programme is the identification of prioritised bays based on the number of aquaculture sites, the ready availability of scientific data and other factors.

Over 200 licences have been issued in the past three years in relation to bays, including Inner Bantry Bay, Roaringwater Bay, Killary Harbour and Castlemaine Harbour. There are in the region of 600 applications awaiting determination. The average timeframe for processing each particular application varies depending on location, species, scale and intensity of production, statutory status of sites, potential visual impact etc. Other factors include consideration of any submissions or observations raised during the public consultation period. It is anticipated that significant progress will be made in licensing bays in 2015. The list of bays is kept under continuous review by my Department so as to facilitate the use of scientific and other resources on a flexible basis across the full range of bays.

The development of the industry and the creation of long term employment from aquaculture can only take place if there is full compliance with the range of EU Directives which impact on this area and national legislation on environmental protection.

There is great potential for all types of aquaculture around our coast as set out in 'Food Harvest 2020 – A Vision for Irish Agri-food and Fisheries' and the steps outlined above, together with the work being done by Bord Iascaigh Mhara and the Marine Institute, will result in the sustainable development of this important industry.

Fish Quotas

94. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total recorded catch for boar fish in 2014; the EU quota allocation to Ireland for boar fish for 2014; and the specific reports or other communications that have been made available to his Department by the Marine Institute regarding the sustainability of this species. [1912/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The figures requested by the Deputy are as follows:

- Total provisional recorded boarfish catch 2014 (by Irish vessels) - 34,621 tonnes; and
- Ireland's Boarfish Quota 2014 - 88,115 tonnes.

The Marine Institute (MI) publishes an annual review of fish stocks of relevance to Ireland along with management advice for the year ahead. This information is contained in 'The Stock Book' which is available on the Marine Institutes website at www.marine.ie.

With regard to boarfish and the management advice for 2015, the Marine Institute advised that it considered that the long term management plan developed by the Pelagic Advisory Council (a body made up of all relevant EU stakeholders and funded by the EU Commission) should be followed. The difficulty is that this plan has not yet been fully evaluated by ICES (International Council for the Exploration of the Seas) and therefore cannot be adopted by the EU. It is ICES advice that underpins the annual total allowable catch (TAC) proposals from the Commission for all stocks.

The MI have advised me that there remain some difficulties in the methodology used to assess the state of the boarfish biomass but that it is hoped that new surveys this year will provide the data that will allow ICES to complete its evaluation of the proposed management plan.

For the moment, boarfish is classed as a 'data limited stock' and therefore the Commission proposed a precautionary approach to the TAC for 2015, reducing Ireland's quota to 36,830 tonnes. I accepted the advice of the Marine Institute and ICES and that of the Pelagic Advisory Council and supported this precautionary quota reduction at the annual December Fisheries Council.

Fisheries Protection

95. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to detail the number of reports or communications his Department has received from any source relating to alleged unlawful landings of quota controlled demersal stocks of commercial fish for each of the years 2010 to 2014 inclusive; and the action taken in respect of each allegation. [1913/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): 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. From time to time I receive allegations or such allegations are sent to the Department in relation to illegal fishing activity. In every instance, these allegations are sent to either the SFPA and/or An Garda Síochána, as appropriate, for investigation. In 2014 I received letters relating to allegations of illegal fishing from three persons. I arranged to have all three letters referred to an Garda Síochána and to the Chair of the SFPA and asked that an Garda Síochána examine all matters set down in the letters as appropriate and asked that the SFPA work, as appropriate, in conjunction with an Garda Síochána in this examination.

As Minister, I do not have a role in operational matters in relation to sea fisheries control under the Sea Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act, 2006. In the event that policy issues arise in respect of this examination or any other such instance, I expect to receive a report in accordance with Section 43.1(e) of the Sea Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act, 2006 and in relation to any corporate governance issues that may arise.

Fisheries Protection

96. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if any discussions or communications, formal or informal, have taken place between his Department, the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority, the Marine Institute or Bord Iascaigh Mhara in respect of allegations of unlawful landings of quota controlled demersal stocks of commercial sea fish. [1914/15]

97. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department issued any instruction or advice, formal or informal, to the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority in respect of alleged unlawful landings or quota controlled demersal stocks of commercial sea fish. [1915/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 96 and 97 together.

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. In the normal course, the SFPA do not report or discuss specific allegations of unlawful fishing or landings with me or my Department

formally or informally. Neither I, nor my Department instruct the SFPA in relation to operational matters of fisheries control. The Marine Institute and BIM have no role in fisheries control.

From time to time I receive allegations or such allegations are sent to the Department in relation to illegal fishing activity. In every instance, these allegations are sent to either the SFPA and/or An Garda Síochána, as appropriate, for investigation.

As Minister, I do not have a role in operational matters in relation to sea fisheries control under the Sea Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act, 2006. In the event that policy issues arise in respect of this examination or any other such instance, I expect to receive a report in accordance with Section 43.1(e) of the Sea Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act, 2006 and in relation to any corporate governance issues that may arise.

Aquaculture Licence Applications

98. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if scientific reports provided by the Marine Institute on the Galway Bay licence application were rejected by his Department; the scientific basis for their rejection; and if his assessment of this application has been completed. [1916/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application by Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) for an aquaculture licence for the cultivation of finfish near Inis Oirr in Galway Bay was received by my Department in 2012. The application and its accompanying Environmental Impact Statement are being considered under the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act and the 1933 Foreshore Act. A determination in respect of the application will be made as soon as possible following completion of the necessary assessment process. This assessment process will take full account of all national and EU legislative requirements and will reflect the full engineering, scientific, environmental, legal and public policy aspects of the application.

The fullest consideration is being given to all submissions received as part of the statutory and public consultation stages of the process.

There is always a strict separation between my Ministerial role as decision maker in respect of aquaculture licence applications and my Ministerial duty to promote the sustainable development of the industry. This separation of duties is strictly observed.

As the application is under active consideration as part of the statutory process it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this time.

Departmental Agencies

99. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the moneys spent by the Marine Institute in providing advice to Bord Iascaigh Mhara for the Galway Bay licence application and, separately, the moneys spent by the Marine Institute in advice to his Department as part of the application assessment process. [1917/15]

100. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the moneys spent by Bord Iascaigh Mhara in preparing its Galway Bay licence application; and the moneys spent by BIM to date in preparing its licence application for the deep sea site application in County Mayo. [1918/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 99 and 100 together.

The detailed allocation of resources by the Marine Institute or Bord Iascaigh Mhara is an operational matter for the respective boards of those Agencies. I will forward the Deputy's question to the respective Agencies for direct reply.

Animal Welfare

101. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department has taken any action under the Animal Health and Welfare Act to deal with the alleged chainsaw slaughter of a pig in a housing estate in Dunboyne in December 2014, to ensure that no such atrocities are committed again. [1920/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The incident in question is the subject of an investigation by An Garda Síochána. In view of this, it is inappropriate for me to comment on the matter.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Eligibility

102. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a REPS payment has not been paid to persons (details supplied) in County Galway; when payment will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1927/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in October 2009 and received payments for the first five years of their contract. REPS 4 is a measure under the current 2007-13 Rural Development Programme and is subject to EU Regulations which require detailed administrative checks on all applications to be completed before any payments can issue. During the administrative checks an issue was discovered in relation to the inclusion of an additional name to the herd number which required further clarification. This has now been resolved and the 2014 75% payment will issue shortly. The remaining 25% balancing payment will issue thereafter.

Animal Disease Controls

103. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position in relation to a matter (details supplied) regarding testing of calves diagnosed with BVD; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1928/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The farmer named applied under the Beef Genomics Scheme for 2014. The terms and conditions of this Scheme require that all animals with a positive/inconclusive BVD test result must be removed to the knackery within 7 weeks of the date of the initial test in order to be eligible for aid. The person named had an animal bearing tag number IE181788240776 which tested positive for BVD on 15 August 2014 but was not removed until 8 October 2014. As this is outside the required 7 week period as outlined, the person named is not eligible for payment under the Beef Genomics Scheme.

The applicant may seek a review of this decision setting out any reasons why he was unable to comply with the requirements of the Scheme. The appeal should be submitted in writing to

the, Beef Schemes Section, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Old Abbeyleix Road, Portlaoise, Co. Laois.

Animal Disease Controls

104. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason payment has not issued in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway regarding the beef genomic scheme for 2013 and 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1929/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named applied under the Beef Genomics Scheme for 2014. The Terms and Conditions of this Scheme require that all animals with a positive/inconclusive BVD test result must be removed to the knackery within 7 weeks of the date of the initial test in order to be eligible for aid.

The person named had an animal bearing tag number IE181788240776 which showed positive for BVD on 15 August 2014 but was not removed until 8 October 2014. As this is outside the required 7 week period as outlined, the person named is not eligible for payment under the Beef Genomics Scheme.

The applicant may seek a review of this decision setting out any reasons why he was unable to comply with the requirements of the Scheme. The appeal should be submitted in writing to Mr. Pat Preston, Beef Schemes Section, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Old Abbeyleix Road, Portlaoise, Co. Laois.

Rural Development Plan

105. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if donkeys will be included in the stocking rate for disadvantaged area scheme payments for 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1930/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the new Rural Development Plan 2015-2020, it is proposed that under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme 2015, holdings of eligible applicants will be required to maintain a minimum stocking density of 0.15 livestock units for a minimum retention period of seven consecutive months, in addition to maintaining an annual average of 0.15 livestock units calculated over the twelve months of the 2015 scheme year. The Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme replaces the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme in 2015. Up until the end of 2014, donkeys were eligible for inclusion in the stocking density calculation where the animals in question are appropriately registered in the name of the applicant and maintained on his/her holding in accordance with European Communities (Equine) Regulations 2011(S.I. 357 of 2011) and Equidea (Transfer of Ownership) Regulations 2014 (S.I. 189 of 2014). Discussions are ongoing with the EU Commission on the Draft Rural Development Programme including the proposals on the Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme. Therefore, it is not possible at this stage to confirm whether donkeys will be eligible for inclusion in the stocking density calculation in the scheme approved by the Commission.

Fishery Harbour Centres

106. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the

works that were carried out in 2014 on a project (details supplied) co-funded by his Department in County Kerry; if further works are anticipated; if so, the plans for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1956/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Brandon Pier is owned by Kerry County Council and responsibility for the maintenance and development of the pier rests with that local authority in the first instance. My Department, however, provides funding for the development and repair of Local Authority owned piers, harbours and slipways under the annual Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme subject to available Exchequer funding and overall national priorities.

My Department did receive an application for works at Brandon Pier from Kerry County Council under the 2014 Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme. The works included structural evaluation and the completion of infill grouting to the pier core to fill voids.

A claim submitted for Brandon Pier under the Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme has been processed and I am happy to confirm to the Deputy that a payment in the amount of €57,609.85 has been furnished to Kerry County Council. The funding provided is 75% of the total cost of the project which is in accordance with the terms and conditions of this programme.

In addition to this, as part of the Government's overall co-ordinated response to the damage caused by the winter storms in early 2014, I also approved funding in respect of storm damage at Brandon Pier. The works included repairs to the pier wall.

A claim submitted for Brandon Pier under the Storm Damage Programme has also been processed and I am happy to confirm to the Deputy that a payment in the amount of €2,796.05 has been furnished to Kerry County Council. The funding provided is 90% of the total cost of the project which is in accordance with the terms and conditions of this programme.

At this point no decisions have been made on the issuing of a call to Local Authorities for projects for 2015.

Harbours and Piers Maintenance

107. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the works that were carried out in 2014 on a project (details supplied) co-funded by his Department in County Kerry; if further works are anticipated; if so, the plans for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1957/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Renard Pier is owned by Kerry County Council and responsibility for the maintenance and development of the pier rests with that local authority in the first instance. My Department, however, provides funding for the development and repair of Local Authority owned piers, harbours and slipways under the annual Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme subject to available Exchequer funding and overall national priorities.

My Department did receive an application for pier stabilisation works at Renard Pier from Kerry County Council under the 2014 Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme. The works included constructing a retaining cap around the top of the sheet pile to prevent further spread of sheet piles and phase 1 of stabilisation works to the pier.

A claim submitted for Renard Pier has been processed and I am happy to confirm to the Deputy that a payment in the amount of €112,500 has been furnished to Kerry County Council. The funding provided is 75% of the total cost of the project which is in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development programme.

At this point no decisions have been made on the issuing of a call to Local Authorities for projects for 2015.

Departmental Schemes

108. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to concerns of agricultural planners due to timeframe opportunities for schemes being too short; the way he will address this problem to the benefit of farmers and planners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1965/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the concerns raised in this regard, which are specifically in relation to the new GLAS scheme. The closing date for the submission of applications under the GLAS Scheme is fixed by regulation and must be respected. However, in order to streamline the application process and maximise the use of time available my Department will provide an online application system for the preparation and submission of GLAS applications. This online system will provide advisors with details of all environmental assets, along with maps of LPIS parcels at farm level to facilitate the preparation of GLAS plans. While the timeframe is undoubtedly tight, this new online system will greatly facilitate the preparation of GLAS farm plans.

Beef Exports

109. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the benefits he expects to accrue to beef farmers selling weanlings arising from the opening up of the US market to Irish beef; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1966/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The opening of any major third country market for Irish beef is a very positive development for the entire beef sector given our heavy reliance on exports. This is particularly true of a huge market like the US, even more so given we are the first EU member State to secure such access which I believe is testimony to the quality and production values associated with Irish beef. The total US beef market is estimated at 11 million metric tonnes. It is split 60: 40 between food service and grocery retail (by volume). The US imports 1.2m tonnes of beef every year and demand for Irish beef there is expected to be immediate and exceptionally strong. I know that some of the leading Irish beef exporters have had people on the ground in the US for some time now in preparation for this announcement and they are reporting huge opportunities for Irish companies when the trade commences. Bord Bia has identified the primary target for US market entry as key culinary centres such as New York City, Boston and Washington DC, followed by listings in premium grocery retailers initially in the North Eastern states.

Undoubtedly the opening of any new market is good news for our beef producers, bringing as it does new outlets and new market opportunities which ultimately form the basis for the returns to the primary producers. Irish farmers undertake a variety of beef production systems and the specific practice of raising beef weanlings should benefit from the opening of the US market given that weanling prices are influenced by deadweight prices achieved through meat

factories and by future projections of supply and demand, both in Ireland and elsewhere.

As regards the coming year, the forecast is for some slight improvement in Irish cattle prices in 2015 as a result of tighter Irish cattle supplies and a shift in the UK beef supply and use balance. While there are a number of factors which can of course influence the market, I am hopeful that Irish weanling prices should also increase in line with this movement in finished cattle prices.

Fuel Prices

110. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the benefits he expects to accrue to farmers in 2015 as a result of reduced oil, diesel and petrol prices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1990/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I would call on the fuel supply sector to ensure that the maximum possible benefits of the falling prices are fully reflected in retail prices, which will obviously be of direct benefit to the farming sector and all consumers. It is not possible to be precise in quantifying the benefits that might accrue to farmers this year arising from the recent fuel price falls. However I would expect that some indirect benefits may arise through downward pressure in contracting charges and fertiliser costs, although other factors may mitigate the extent to which these costs may fall. These factors include profitability challenges in the contracting sector and falling fertiliser manufacturing capacity in Europe over the past 10 years, which has reduced market supplies. Feed costs are not as heavily impacted by fuel prices and, although the costs of drying, processing and transport will be reduced, other factors will come into play such as global growing and harvest conditions in 2015.

On a broader level I note and welcome the fact that generally input prices are falling, as the CSO's agricultural input price index was down 3.5% on annual basis in November 2014 compared with November 2013. This is an indication that, amongst other things, the recent fall in fuel prices is already having a real and measurable impact.

Agriculture Schemes Payments

111. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 210 of 9 December 2014, when payment will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1997/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2014 Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Areas' scheme application on 7 May 2014. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases Remote Sensing (i.e. satellite) inspections, be completed before any payments issue. The application of the person named was selected for a Remote Sensing eligibility inspection.

This inspection has been completed and payments due under the Single Payment Scheme and the Disadvantaged Areas' Scheme issued to the nominated bank account of the person named on 11 December and 22 December 2014, respectively.

Beef Exports

112. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the process for exporting beef to jurisdictions (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2018/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland is not currently approved for the export of beef to the Chinese or Taiwanese markets. However, there have been significant developments recently regarding China. Following political, technical and diplomatic engagement with the Chinese authorities over several years, the Chinese Ministers for Agriculture and for Quarantine and Inspection Services agreed, during my trade mission in November 2014, to send an inspection team to audit Ireland's beef production system and BSE controls in particular, with a view to removing the ban on Irish beef.

The Inspection Team (comprising delegates from the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) and the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA)) duly visited Ireland from 10-20 December 2014. They also visited laboratories, meat plants, rendering plants, cattle farms and a feed mill. My Department is currently awaiting the report of the visit.

My Department and the Irish Embassy in Beijing will continue to engage with the Chinese authorities in order to progress this matter with a view to obtaining access to the Chinese market for Irish beef in the near future.

Aquaculture Licence Eligibility

113. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine in view of the determination process of aquaculture licensing, his plans to carry out an appropriate assessment on Kincasslagh Bay in County Donegal to ensure compliance with the EU birds and habitats directives; when such an assessment on the bay will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2112/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Kincasslagh Bay is located within Gweedore Bay and Islands Special Area of Conservation (SAC). In order to ensure compliance with the EU Birds and Habitats Directives, an Appropriate Assessment has to be carried out before any aquaculture licensing determination may be made in respect of aquaculture applications for sites in the bay. My Department is working with the Marine Institute, Bord Iascaigh Mhara and the National Parks and Wildlife Service to achieve full compliance with the EU Birds and Habitats Directives through a multi-annual work programme. This programme required the gathering of the necessary baseline data appropriate to the Conservation Objectives of aquaculture sites located within designated Natura areas. This data collection programme, which is substantially complete, together with the setting of Conservation Objectives, will enable all new and renewal aquaculture applications to be assessed for the purpose of ensuring compliance with the EU Birds and Habitats Directives. This work is ongoing and a great deal of progress has been made to date.

The Appropriate Assessment process has been completed in respect of a number of bays. While these Appropriate Assessments are carried out on a bay by bay basis, each licence application within the bay must be assessed individually. Factors to be considered include location of the site within the bay, species, scale, etc. In addition to the Natura requirements, under the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive, all licence applications must undergo an Environmental Impact pre-screening assessment. This requires significant input from the Department's

scientific and technical advisors. All applications, in compliance with the requirements of the Aarhus Directive, are advertised in order to facilitate public consultation, and submissions or observations received must be considered as part of the licence application determination process.

The list of bays is kept under continuous review by my Department so as to facilitate the use of scientific and other resources on a flexible basis across the full range of bays. A completion timeline for a number of bays, including Gweedore, is part of this review process. Every effort is being made to expedite the completion of the overall process as a priority, having regard to the need to comply with all national and EU legislation.

Agriculture Schemes Payments

114. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a disadvantaged area payment and single farm payment will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2113/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2014 Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Areas' scheme application on 4 April 2014. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases Remote Sensing (i.e. satellite) inspections, be completed before any payments issue. The application of the person named was selected for a Remote Sensing eligibility inspection.

The inspection identified discrepancies between the areas declared and the area found resulting in an over-declaration in area of less than 3% and less than 2 ha. Under the Terms and Conditions of these schemes this resulted in the 2014 payments being based on the area found.

The person named was notified of this decision on 24 November 2014. The person named was also informed of the right to seek a review of this decision however no request for a review has been received by my Department to date. In the event that the person named is dissatisfied with the outcome of any such review, the decision can be appealed to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office, within 3 months.

Payment, on the basis set out above, under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme issued to the nominated bank account of the person named on 24 November 2014.

Payment, on the basis set out above, of the advance and balancing payments under the Single Payment Scheme issued to the nominated bank account of the person named on 4 November and 1 December 2014, respectively.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Payments

115. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he will take to ensure that a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath received a REPS payment for 2014 which had been subject to a review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2120/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in October 2009 and received payments for the first five years of their contract. REPS 4 is a measure under the 2007-13 Rural Development Programme and is subject to EU Regulations which require detailed administrative checks on all applications to

be completed before any payments can issue. Following an inspection in July 2014 a letter issued advising the person named of the application of a 25% penalty for failure to abide by the regulations governing the “Protection and Maintenance of Watercourses” and a 2% penalty for failure to abide by the regulations governing the “Maintenance of the visual appearance of Farm and Farmyard”. This initial inspection is currently being reviewed by the Regional Inspector who has been in contact with the herdowner with a view to completing the process as soon as possible.

Semi-State Bodies Remuneration

116. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide in tabular form the performance related awards made to chief executives of semi State companies in 2013 and 2014 under the aegis of his Department. [2320/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are currently twelve State Bodies under the remit of my Department. Of these, eight are non commercial entities and four are commercial entities.

Non-Commercial Bodies	Commercial Bodies
Aqua licensing Appeals Board	Bord na gCon
Bord Bia	Coillte
Bord Iascaigh Mhara	Horse Racing Ireland
Marine Institute	Irish National Stud
National Milk Agency	
Sea Fisheries Protection Agency	
Teagasc	
Veterinary Council of Ireland	

The pay arrangements, including bonuses and performance related pay, for chief executives of semi State companies is a matter for the State Bodies themselves within the context of Government Public Sector Pay Policies.

In April 2009 the Department of Finance requested the suspension of performance-related schemes in non-commercial State Bodies and again in February 2010 following the report of the Review Body on Higher Remuneration in the Public Sector. In relation to the commercial State Bodies, the Government agreed in 2012 to the continuation of the current policy requesting Commercial State Bodies not to award bonus payments in recognition of the serious state of the public finances. No performance related awards were paid to the Chief Executives of the 12 State Bodies under the aegis of my Department in the years in question.

Immigrant Investor Programme Administration

117. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views that a programme to encourage high-end holidaymakers to Ireland to consider investing here will be agreed between her Department and its agencies and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and its agencies; if such a programme will include points of contact information for potential investors and so on; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1970/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department has operated the Immigrant Investor Programme since April 2012. This programme has been open for applications since 2012 and would appear to cover what the Deputy is seeking. Detailed guidelines and application materials are available from the investor and entrepreneur page of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service website www.inis.gov.ie.

Ground Rents Abolition

118. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the system for householders to buy out their ground rent; if she will provide a list of the State system and charges; if a landlord must sell at seven times annual rent or is a landlord legally entitled to go higher; if a landlord can charge administration, search and registration fees or if these are all available free under the State system; if a landlord is legally entitled to claim arrears; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1879/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The general position regarding ground rents is that section 2 of the Landlord and Tenant (Ground Rents) Act 1978 introduced a prohibition on the creation of new leases reserving ground rents on dwellings. As regards existing ground rents, Part III of the Landlord and Tenant (Ground Rents) (No.2) Act 1978 contains a statutory scheme, administered by the Property Registration Authority (PRA), whereby the holder of a leasehold interest may, at reasonable cost, acquire the fee simple in his or her dwelling. To date, over 80,000 applicants have acquired freehold title to their property under this scheme. Comprehensive details of the scheme, including details of the manner in which the fee simple can be acquired and the fees involved, are available on the PRA's website (www.prai.ie).

Garda Divisional Headquarters

119. **Deputy Eamonn Maloney** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to provide a new Garda divisional headquarters in Tallaght, Dublin 24; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1884/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The programme of refurbishment of Garda accommodation is based on agreed accommodation priorities which are established by An Garda Síochána. This programme is progressed by An Garda Síochána in co-operation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), who have responsibility for capital expenditure in this area.

In that context, I am informed by the Garda authorities that the OPW prepared a feasibility report for the development of a new Garda Divisional Headquarters on the existing Garda site in Tallaght in 2008. Further activity on the proposed development will be considered in accordance with the available resources within the Vote for the OPW and An Garda Síochána's identified accommodation priorities. However, I am advised by Garda management that there are no immediate plans to commence work on a new Divisional Headquarters in Tallaght.

The existing facilities in Tallaght Garda Station were supplemented by the OPW in October 2009 through the provision of additional accommodation at the Plaza Office Complex.

Television Licence Fee Collection

120. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide in tabular form by county the number of prosecutions brought for non-payment of TV licences in 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1895/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions, which include the provision of information on the courts system.

In order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the table below sets out the number of summonses served for non payment of TV licences for Court Offices in 2014. As the Deputy will be aware the initiation of a prosecution for non-payment of a TV licence is a matter for An Post which does not operate under the aegis of my Department.

Court Office	No. of Offences
Athlone	88
Ballina	37
Bray	162
Carlow	104
Carrick On Shannon	57
Cavan	189
Castlebar	107
Clonakilty	125
Clonmel	335
Cork	256
Donegal	10
Dublin *	9,761
Dundalk	331
Ennis	393
Galway	306
Kilkenny	108
Letterkenny	78
Limerick	391
Longford	162
Loughrea	86
Mallow	250
Monaghan	82
Mullingar	195
Naas	390
Nenagh	317
Portlaoise	242
Roscommon	39
Sligo	170
Tralee	540
Trim	292
Tullamore	207
Waterford	298
Wexford	399

Court Office	No. of Offences
Youghal	59
Total	16,566

*The statistics available for Dublin are for all summonses issued including those not served.

15/01/2015WRM01700Garda Investigations

121. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the outcome of a Garda investigation into the alleged chainsaw slaughter of a pig on a Dunboyne housing estate in December 2014. [1919/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the matter referred to by the Deputy is currently under investigation by Gardaí at Dunboyne Garda station.

The Deputy will appreciate that as the matter is under investigation it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

Garda Misconduct Allegations

122. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she has read the full GSOC Special Report from May 2013 to the then Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence issued pursuant to Section 80(5) of the Garda Síochána Act, 2005; and her plans to publish the report with the appropriate redactions. [1932/15]

123. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if her attention has been drawn to the promotion of any member of An Garda Síochána under investigation over matters of serious public importance in the GSOC Special Report from May 2013 issued pursuant to Section 80(5) of the Garda Síochána Act, 2005; and her views on the promotion of such a member of An Garda Síochána. [1933/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 122 and 123 together.

I dealt with the issues arising from the GSOC Report in my reply to PQ No. 43791/14 of the 18th November 2014. For ease of reference this is set out hereunder.

The first thing I want to emphasise is that I as Minister for Justice and Equality have no role in relation to prosecutions or decisions whether or not to initiate a prosecution.

In May 2013, the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC) made a Report to my predecessor under Section 80(5) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 following its investigation into allegations of collusion between an individual and members of the Garda Síochána.

In its letter accompanying the report GSOC stated that a file relating to its public interest investigation was sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions. Having considered the file the DPP advised that the file did not warrant prosecution of any individual. Thereafter GSOC considered and decided against launching any investigation of matters which may constitute indiscipline.

The Report by GSOC also contained a series of recommendations related to informant handling procedures within An Garda Síochána, oversight of those procedures, as well as intelligence handling and information exchange between GSOC and An Garda Síochána.

At the time my predecessor sought the observations of the Garda Commissioner on the Re-

port and its recommendations. In response, the Garda Commissioner pointed that following the putting in place of a code of practice for the management of Covert Human Intelligence Sources many of the recommendations made by GSOC were already incorporated into Garda procedures. The Commissioner also emphasised that informants are clearly instructed that they may not commit crimes or act as agents provocateur.

I should emphasise that there has been, since 2010, an independent, external oversight mechanism in place to ensure compliance with the code of practice. The current holder of this appointment is Mr Justice Thomas Smyth, former judge of the High Court. Mr Justice Smyth's report for 2012 has been published and I am currently making arrangements to publish his reports for 2013 and 2014. I am pleased to note that the Judge has indicated that he received full cooperation from relevant members of An Garda Síochána in compiling his report and he records substantial compliance with the code of practice by An Garda Síochána.

I should mention that the recent Inspectorate report makes a number of recommendations in relation to the handling of information and these will be addressed.

A Memorandum of Understanding, Protocols and Agreement on Operational Matters, agreed by the Commissioner of An Garda Síochána and the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC) has been in place between An Garda Síochána and GSOC since the establishment of the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission in 2007. However, a new Memorandum of Understanding, Protocols and Agreement on Operational Matters has been agreed between An Garda Síochána and GSOC and was signed by the Commissioner of An Garda Síochána and the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission on 23rd September, 2013. The Memorandum of Understanding agrees protocols for operational matters between An Garda Síochána and GSOC, including the provision of information to GSOC by An Garda Síochána. There is continued ongoing co-operation between An Garda Síochána and GSOC to address any issues that arise during the course of an investigation. A working relationship is maintained between the two organisations with regular formal and informal meetings between senior management representatives. In addition, the Garda Commissioner has established a dedicated office (GSOC Liaison Office) to process and monitor all such requests and ensure that all correspondence with GSOC is attended to in a timely manner.

In the context of Garda oversight generally, the Deputy will be aware that I recently introduced the Garda Síochána (Amendment)(No. 3) Bill 2014. The main purpose of the Bill is to amend the Garda Síochána Act 2005 to expand the remit and powers of the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC). The Bill will bring the Garda Commissioner within the remit of GSOC for the first time. It will also ensure that An Garda Síochána provides information sought by GSOC for an investigation as soon as practicable."

Promotions in the Garda Síochána to all ranks from Sergeant to Assistant Commissioner (inclusive) are covered by the Garda Síochána Promotion Regulations of 2006 (S.I. No. 485 of 2006) and I have no involvement in the selection process. While it would clearly not be appropriate to comment on individuals persons selected, I am not aware that any person has been selected who remains under investigation as outlined by the Deputy.

Human Trafficking

124. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality since the enactment of the Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) Act 2008 and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2013, the number of persons have been prosecuted for trafficking children and adults for the purposes of sexual exploitation and soliciting or importuning for the purposes of prostitution of the trafficked person in each of the years 2009 to 2014 inclusive. [1944/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): On 1 January 2009,

the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit of my Department initiated a data collection strategy for the purpose of gaining a more in-depth understanding of the nature and extent of human trafficking in Ireland. To date, annual reports for 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 have been published and are available from Ireland's dedicated anti-human trafficking website, www.blueblindfold.gov.ie, in addition to my Department's website.

For the purposes of clarity, the information sought, as outlined in these annual reports, is below. As the report for 2013 is to be published soon, the figures for 2013 are preliminary as are the figures for 2014.

The specific information sought by the Deputy is set out in the table beneath.

YEAR	of a Minor	Prosecutions in relation to trafficking for purpose of sexual exploitation of an Adult
2009	3	-
2010	4	1
2011	6	1
2012	13	-
2013	16	-
2014	14	-

For the sake of completeness, I would note that although prosecutions were initiated as a result of human trafficking related investigations in 2 cases in 2012 and 1 case in 2014, the offenders were prosecuted for offences other than human trafficking and are not included in the figures for those years set out above.

There were no prosecutions for the soliciting or importuning for purposes of prostitution of a trafficked person contrary to section 5 of the Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) Act 2008 during the period

Garda Equipment

125. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views that modern communications and surveillance technology can play a role in the policing of very isolated rural areas; her further views that the use of Garda surveillance equipment at strategic locations such as unavoidable intersections and so on would act as a deterrent to criminals who feel confident of travelling long distances in rural areas without being seen or intercepted by gardaí; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1988/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised that extensive use is made of CCTV systems for the purposes of crime prevention and as aids to policing in areas to which the general public routinely have access. Existing arrangements fall into two distinct categories: Garda CCTV systems and community-based CCTV systems.

Garda CCTV systems are planned and implemented on the basis of An Garda Síochána's identified operational needs and priorities. Accordingly, decisions in relation to the introduction or extension of such systems are a matter for the Garda Commissioner. I am advised by the Garda authorities that current Garda CCTV arrangements are kept under ongoing review in the

context of An Garda Síochána's operational requirements. I am further informed that there are currently no plans to extend existing Garda CCTV systems.

A community-based CCTV Scheme was launched in 2005. This scheme provided financial assistance to qualifying local organisations towards meeting the capital costs associated with the establishment of a local community CCTV system. Two major rounds of funding were advertised under that scheme.

The current position is that all available funding provided under the previous two rounds has been fully allocated and there are currently no plans to further extend the Scheme. However, the matter will continue to be kept under ongoing review in the context of overall policy considerations and the availability of funding.

I should also mention, as a further example of how technology is assisting in community policing, the Garda Text Alert Scheme, which was launched in September 2013. This scheme provides a further mechanism for Gardaí to provide crime prevention information to community contacts who in turn forward the information to all members of a community group. This initiative has developed as an important crime prevention mechanism with over 500 local groups involving in excess of 100,000 subscribers and with an estimated 200,000 text messages sent each month under the scheme. I am informed that every Garda Division, rural and urban, now offers the text alert service and An Garda Síochána have published guidelines to assist in the establishment and operation of local groups.

The further development and application of technology by An Garda Síochána is a matter in the first instance for the Garda Commissioner and I will of course give careful consideration to any future proposals which she may make in this regard.

Garda Resources

126. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide in tabular form the budget and human resources allocation to the Garda traffic corps in each year from 2009 to 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2012/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): A report has been sought from the Gardaí and will be forwarded directly to the Deputy.

Human Trafficking

127. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of convictions of human traffickers for the past five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2016/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Anti-Human Trafficking Unit of my Department publishes annual reports setting out information on the criminal justice response to human trafficking in Ireland as well as information on alleged victims of human trafficking encountered by An Garda Síochána and International and Non Governmental Organisations working in the field disaggregated by gender, age, region of origin and type of exploitation. To date, annual reports for 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 have been published and are available from Ireland's dedicated anti-human trafficking website www.blueblindfold.gov.ie and on my Department's website. For the purposes of clarity, the information sought, as outlined in these annual reports, is below. As the report for 2013 is to be published soon the figures

for 2013 are preliminary as are the figures for 2014.

The specific information sought by the Deputy is set out in the table beneath.

YEAR	Number of Convictions
2010	5
2011	4
2012	6
2013	10*
2014	10

NOTE:

1. Convictions are in respect of offences under the Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) Act 2008 and in respect of other offences related to human trafficking under other Acts, e.g. Child Trafficking and Pornography Act, 1998, Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 1993. In addition, *2 cases in 2013 where offenders were prosecuted and convicted for offences other than human trafficking, though prosecutions were initiated as a result of human trafficking related investigations are included in the figure for that year.

2. Convictions occurring in any calendar year may be the result of prosecutions initiated in previous calendar years.

Human Trafficking

128. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans for revising laws around human trafficking to ensure more prosecutions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2017/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I would draw the Deputy's attention to the strong legislative provisions that have been put in place in Ireland to combat and prevent trafficking in human beings over the past number of years. The Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) Act 2008 prohibits trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, labour exploitation and for the removal of body organs. Any person found guilty of such an offence shall be liable to imprisonment for life or a lesser term, and at the discretion of the court, to a fine. This legislation was further bolstered in 2013 with new forms of exploitation, for forced begging and forced criminal activities, being provided for in new legislation. The Criminal Law (Human Trafficking)(Amendment) Act 2013 also provided, for the first time, a definition of 'forced labour' in Irish law, based on the International Labour Organisation's definition.

I am, of course, committed to keeping under review the adequacy of the measures taken to combat human trafficking, including legislation. In that context, I published on 27 November 2014 the General Scheme of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 2014 which includes two new offences of purchasing, in the context of prostitution, sexual services. The first is a general offence of purchasing sexual services which carries a penalty of a fine of up to €500 for a first offence and fines of up to €1000 for a second or subsequent offence. The second is the offence of purchasing a sexual service from a trafficked person and carries a potential penalty of up to 5 years imprisonment and/or a fine. In both cases, the person selling the sexual service will not be subject to an offence.

Unlike the existing offences relating to prostitution such as soliciting, loitering or brothel keeping, the new offences will specifically target the demand for prostitution. It is estimated

that over 80% of persons trafficked in Europe are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The purpose of this new legislation is to reduce the demand for the services of victims of human trafficking who are being sexually exploited in prostitution.

Criminal Law

129. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to introduce laws to deal with white collar crime; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2021/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The term ‘white collar’ crime is not formally defined. It broadly describes a range of non-violent crimes that people in positions of responsibility and trust commit for their own personal gain. It can cover fraud, embezzlement, insider trading on the stock market, bribery, corruption and regulatory offences in specialist fields such as financial activity, occupational health and safety, environmental protection, and food safety. My Department has responsibility for legislation addressing some aspects of white collar crime including fraud and corruption. Other aspects, such as insider trading, Companies Acts offences and environmental offences fall within the responsibility of other Government Departments.

There is extensive legislation on the statute book addressing white collar and corporate crime and amendments to this legislation are also considered in the light of the experience of law enforcement agencies such as the Garda Síochána and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions in operating the legislation and in light of relevant court rulings. Where there is an identified requirement for additional legislative provisions to further enhance existing provisions in the law, I will not hesitate in bringing forward proposals.

I would draw the Deputy’s particular attention to the Criminal Justice Act 2011, as a recent example of such developments in white collar crime legislation, and one which represents an important step in delivering on the Government’s commitment to tackle white collar crime. Its main purpose is to facilitate the more effective investigation of white collar crime and to reduce associated delays. The Act provides for new procedures to facilitate Garda access to essential information and documentation to assist in current and future investigations of white collar crime. The Act is targeted at specified serious and complex offences (“relevant offences”) attracting a penalty of at least 5 years imprisonment, including offences in the areas of banking and finance, company law, money laundering, fraud and corruption. The Act will provide vital assistance to the Gardaí in the completion of current and future investigations.

Another recent provision of relevance to white collar crime is Part 5 of the Courts and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2013. It makes provision for the selection of up to 15 jurors to serve in a criminal trial which is likely to last more than 2 months, with 12 jurors to be selected to consider the verdict. These provisions, which give effect to a recommendation of the Law Reform Commission’s recent Report on Jury Service, are of relevance to lengthy trials involving fraud or other complex financial matters where there is a risk of jurors becoming unavailable during the course of a protracted trial.

While the breadth and diversity of the issues faced in addressing serious, organised and white collar crime are such that no one piece of legislation could effectively address it in all its facets, the overall body of legislation in place is comprehensive and, as I have outlined, is continuously under review and development in light of operational experience and other relevant considerations.

In terms of forthcoming legislation, the Prevention of Corruption Acts 1889 to 2010 will be replaced by the Criminal Justice (Corruption) Bill which will be published in the coming months. The Bill will:

- replace and update the offences of giving and receiving bribes contained in the old legislation
- address the bribery of foreign public officials
- provide for the liability of corporate bodies for the corrupt actions of their directors, employees and agents
- include discrete offences outlawing trading in influence
- take account of the Mahon Tribunal recommendations to criminalise the making of payments knowingly or recklessly to a third party who intends to use them as bribes

The Bill is also intended to enhance the ability of the DPP to bring prosecutions by providing presumptions of corrupt gifts or payments such as:

- where an interested party makes a payment to a public official;
 - where a public official has failed to declare interests as required by ethics legislation;
- and
- where an official accepts a gift in breach of ethical or disciplinary codes.

Penalties of up to 10 years' imprisonment and unlimited fines are envisaged for persons convicted on indictment. It is also intended to allow a judge to order a public official convicted of an offence to forfeit their office and exclude them from seeking public office for a period of years. These forfeiture provisions will apply to senior office holders as well as a wide range of civil and public servants.

Residency Permits

130. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2033/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned has had their permission to remain in the State renewed for a further twelve month period, valid to 14th January, 2016. This decision was conveyed in writing to the person concerned by registered post dated 14th January, 2015.

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

Immigration Status

131. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration might be given to awarding Stamp 4 status to undocumented residents here who have been living continuously and working in this jurisdiction for several years, whose children have been born here, such children having no knowledge of any other lifestyle; if cognisance might be taken of the recent announcement by President Obama in respect of Irish undocumented in

the US as a template for a similar situation in this country; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2034/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have no plans to introduce a policy on the lines suggested by the Deputy. The Deputy might wish to note that at EU Level, the Member States, in agreeing the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum at the European Council in October 2008 made specific commitments “to use only case-by-case regularisation, rather than generalised regularisation, under national law, for humanitarian or economic reasons”. While the Pact is not legally binding, the political commitment among Member States, then and now, is clearly against any form of process that would in any way legitimise the status of persons present in the State without first examining the merits of their individual cases. This is the approach that has been consistently followed by successive Ministers in this respect. It is open to a person who is in the situation referred to by the Deputy to seek to have their case considered on its merits and to respect the decision that is ultimately made. In some cases that decision would result in their being granted leave to remain. In other instances they would be required to leave the State.

While I appreciate the Deputy’s concerns on this issue, it is the responsibility of all non-EEA nationals who are resident in the State to ensure that they have an appropriate permission from the Minister for Justice and Equality. Most migrants do in fact comply with this condition and obey the State’s immigration laws. It does not follow that a Stamp 4 immigration permission, which is generally seen as being the most sought after immigration status, should be conferred on a broad basis on persons who have lived here illegally while others who have complied with all of the immigration rules enjoy a lesser status.

Deportation Orders Re-examination

132. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 272 of 19 December 2014, if cognisance might be taken of the extent to which circumstances have changed since the making of a deportation order seven years ago in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; if their case might be re-considered in view of this new information; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2035/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is not the subject of a Deportation Order. The person concerned is, however, subject to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) given that their asylum and subsidiary protection applications have been refused. In response to the notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned has submitted written representations. These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement, in advance of a final decision being made in the case of the person concerned.

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

Residency Permits

133. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2036/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed that an application in respect of the person referred to is currently being processed by the Student Review Office of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service. I am further informed that this application will be finalised shortly and that the person will be contacted in relation to their case by the Student Review Office of INIS in the coming weeks.

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

Naturalisation Applications

134. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if reconsideration might be given to the application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 24, given that they have not come to the attention of the Garda since 2008 in respect of motoring or any other offences which are verifiable and their family members are already Irish citizens; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2037/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, provides that the Minister for Justice and Equality has absolute discretion to grant an application for a certificate of naturalisation where certain conditions for naturalisation are satisfied.

The application from the person concerned was refused following consideration of the information presented, including information provided by the applicant. There is no provision under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, for appeal of a decision to refuse an application. It is open to any individual to lodge a new application for a certificate of naturalisation at any time if they consider they are in a position to meet the prescribed statutory requirements.

The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and I know the Deputy will appreciate that it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

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

Deportation Orders Re-examination

135. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2038/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person along with 2 of her children are the subject of Deportation Orders and therefore have no entitlement to residency in the State.

Representations were received from the persons' legal representative, pursuant to Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), to revoke the Deportation Orders. The Deputy might wish to note that any such decision will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Orders. In the mean-time, the Deportation Orders remain valid and in place.

The cases of the husband along with a further 2 children of the person referred to are still under consideration and therefore have no entitlement to residency in the State.

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

136. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2040/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that the person referred to by the Deputy was granted permission to remain in the State for a period of five years expiring on 19 December, 2017. This permission is based on being the spouse of an EU citizen who is resident in the State and in exercise of EU Treaty rights in accordance with the provisions of S.I. No. 656 of 2006 European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) (No. 2) Regulations 2006 (as amended) and Directive 2004/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the right of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States.

I am advised that the person concerned wrote to the EU Treaty Rights Section advising of a change in circumstances. It has however been recently established that the person concerned continues to hold a right of residency in the State in accordance with the provisions of the Regulations and Directive. Officials in my Department will therefore contact the person concerned directly to clarify the position on the matter.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may

consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Naturalisation Applications

137. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2043/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a valid application for a certificate of naturalisation has been received from the person referred to by the Deputy, who currently has permission to reside in the State until 6 May, 2015.

The application is being processed with a view to establishing whether the applicant meets the statutory conditions for the granting of naturalisation, such as good character and lawful residence. A letter was issued to the solicitor of the person concerned on 16 September 2014 requesting certain information. Upon receipt of the requested information the case will be processed further and submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

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

Firearms Licences

138. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if her Department has received submissions from various sporting bodies with reference to the control and regulation of firearms; if she will meet the concerns of the sporting organisations while maintaining good regulation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2053/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Following public safety concerns raised by An Garda Síochána in relation to specific categories of firearms a joint Department and Garda Síochána Working Group was established to examine this issue in October 2013. The Report also refers to difficulties in the interpretation of the legislation expressed by members of the judiciary. The Working Group Report was published on 13 November. The deadline for receipt of submissions by my Department is 31 January 2015. The Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality also sought submissions on the Report.

Submissions have been received to date from a number of individuals and sporting bodies. Further submissions are expected. I am asking stakeholders and other groups who have an interest in this area to engage with this process so that their views can be considered before final decisions are made in relation to this matter. With respect to the Report's recommendations on proposed changes and restrictions, I wish to take this opportunity to reiterate a commitment that I have given that will not make any final decisions until I have had the opportunity to consider all the submissions which are made and I have met the key stakeholders, including the organisations that represent those who use firearms for sporting purposes.

Crime Data

139. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when crime categories are likely to be reviewed with reference to the need to ensure that all serious crime is particularly recorded to reflect its seriousness and frequency accurately. [2054/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, responsibility for the compilation and publication of crime statistics rests with the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency.

Arising from the recent Garda Inspectorate Report on Crime Investigation, the CSO are carrying out a detailed analysis of certain issues raised by the Inspectorate in relation to the recording, classification and reclassification of crime, to see whether and to what extent they may have implications for the crime statistics which that Office produces. This process is ongoing.

In addition, the CSO has also agreed to chair an expert panel to examine the Inspectorate's recommendations on crime statistics. The expert panel will review the crime counting and detection rules, as recommended by the Inspectorate, with a view to introducing new national standards. As well as including representatives of the Department and An Garda Síochána, the intention is that the panel will have outside experts with relevant expertise. Terms of Reference for this group are being drawn up at present.

I can also advise the Deputy that, while this work is underway, the Garda authorities have put in place a number of immediate measures arising from the Inspectorate's recommendations in relation to the recording of crime. In particular, these include the establishment of a new Data Quality Team in the Garda Information Services Centre (GISC), as well as measures to strengthen PULSE governance arrangements. Work is also underway with respect to planning for the necessary investment in Garda technology to support the recording and management of crime information, and to bring outdated paper based practices into the 21st century.

I look forward to making progress on these issues, as part of the overall arrangements to take forward the wide-ranging recommendations of the Inspectorate, with a view to ensuring that we have a police service which is fully equipped to meet the needs of our society, now and into the future.

Garda Resources

140. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on whether adequate resources remain available to An Garda Síochána to continue to fight against crime, with particular reference to organised crime. [2055/15]

148. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she remains satisfied regarding the adequacy and availability of state-of-the-art telecommunications to enable the Garda to combat crime effectively; if the updating of transport vehicles continues to progress; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2096/15]

149. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she is satisfied that her Department has ready access to sufficient resources, technology, transport and communications systems and intelligence to enable the Garda to combat all manner of crime including terrorism; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2097/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 140, 148 and 149 together.

Under the Garda Síochána Act, 2005 the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of available Garda resources. This includes personnel, Garda vehicles and the various technologies utilised to support frontline Gardaí and intelligence led operations against organised crime. This process takes account of annual policing priorities determined by me as Minister for Justice in consultation with the Commissioner as provided for under Section 20 of the Garda Síochána Act, 2005.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that they are continually looking to ensure that the latest information, communications and forensic technologies are sourced and deployed to achieve their strategic objectives as set out in the context of their annual policing plans, as provided for in section 22 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, which includes commitments to target individuals and groups engaged in organised criminal activity and terrorism. This policy is designed to ensure that the Garda Síochána will be in a position to meet the evolving needs of a modern effective police force and take advantage of proven up to date technological developments in crime detection and prevention as they occur.

In terms of existing technology, the Deputy will be aware that a considerable amount of new Garda ICT solutions has been delivered over the past number of years. These include the deployment of a secure national digital radio system (NDRS), the deployment and support of Garda and Community CCTV systems, an automated number plate recognition (ANPR) system, and the addition of many new functions to the PULSE system, which itself is further supported by a dedicated Garda data entry service in Castlebar.

In the area of forensics the situation is that the Garda authorities currently employ state-of-the-art automated fingerprint and ballistics identification systems which I am informed are at least on a par with those used by police forces in other EU jurisdictions. The Deputy will also be aware that the forensic capacity of An Garda Síochána will be further enhanced by a new national DNA database, scheduled to become operational shortly, which was established on foot of the Criminal Justice (Forensic Evidence and DNA Database System) Act, 2014.

I have also clearly signalled my intention to support the Garda Síochána in their efforts to address deficits which were identified in the recent Garda Inspectorate report on crime investigation. However, the Deputy will appreciate that the issues raised in the report are widespread, varied and far-reaching and, when taken together with the review of the Garda Síochána under the Haddington Road agreement, will demand significant structural reform within the Garda Síochána. The need for additional resources across a number of areas will be examined within that context. Furthermore, I have been informed by the Garda authorities that the Garda Commissioner has commenced an in-depth examination of all recommendations of the Garda Inspectorate Report with a view to determining what can be implemented in the short, medium and long term. I also look forward to the significant contribution to this process of reform that will be made by the new policing authority which is to be established shortly.

There have been other recent positive developments with regard to the resources available to An Garda Síochána. An intake of 200 new recruits, including 25 reserve Gardaí, commenced training in 2014 and a further 100 recruits are due to enter the training college at the end of this month. I also secured an additional investment of €10 million for the Garda fleet last year.

Immigration Status

141. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration will be given to upgrading residency status from stamp 2 to stamp 4 in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare who is in a position to provide vital back-up care

to a family in unique and compelling circumstances; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2078/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred to by the Deputy has not made an application to INIS. If the person referred to wishes to change their immigration status and has compelling reasons to do so, they should make an application to INIS outlining the reasons for the request.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by the 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

142. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if reconsideration will be given to offering stamp 4 status in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 1 whose two children were born here and whose family resides here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2080/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As previously stated in my answer to Parliamentary Question 102 of 22 October 2014, the person referred to by the Deputy made an application to INIS for residency which was refused by letter dated 24 July 2014. The situation remains as stated in that correspondence.

All non-EEA students resident in the State are subject to the student immigration rules set out under the "new immigration regime for full time non-EEA students" which was published in September 2010 and has been in effect since 1 January 2011. These rules stipulate that non-EEA nationals may reside in Ireland as students, subject to the provisions of the new regime, for a maximum period of seven years. Three years are permitted at non degree level. The person referred to by the Deputy arrived in the State at the end of 2006 and registered with GNIB on student conditions on 15 January 2007. The person has now accumulated 7 years as a student. As such they do not qualify for Stamp 4 status.

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

Temporary Travel Documents

143. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a temporary travel document and return of their national passport will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Louth; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2082/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish

Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned has submitted written representations. These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement, in advance of a final decision being made.

I am advised also that in exceptional cases an application for a temporary Irish Travel Document may be considered in respect of qualifying non-Irish nationals who are resident in Ireland. In all such cases, however, the INIS must first be satisfied that there is no alternative open to the applicant before a temporary Irish Travel Document will be issued. In the context of the person concerned, they would have to show that they have made reasonable and formal efforts to obtain a national passport, that it has been formally and unreasonably refused and that their own consular authorities are unable to offer consular assistance to them whilst resident in the State.

I am advised that the INIS has no record of having received an application for a temporary Irish Travel Document from the person concerned. It is, however, open to the person concerned to submit such an application, accompanied by the relevant supporting documentation. Any such application should be addressed to the INIS' Travel Document Unit, Residence Division, Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, Department of Justice and Equality, 13-14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2. Detailed information on the application process and the relevant application form is available on the INIS Website - www.inis.gov.ie.

I am advised that the passport of the person concerned is not held on their immigration case file.

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

Residency Permits

144. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current residency status of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2083/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred to by the Deputy has not made an application to INIS. This person arrived in the State on 21/07/2011 and was registered as a Student from 08/08/2011 to 04/08/2014.

As the person referred to was registered in the State as a non-EEA Student, they are subject to the student immigration rules as set out under the "new immigration regime for full time non-EEA students" which was published in September 2010 and has been in effect since 1 January 2011. These rules stipulate that non-EEA nationals may reside in Ireland as students, subject to the provisions of the new regime, for a maximum period of seven years. A maximum of three years student residence is permitted for courses at non degree level. The person referred to has now exhausted three years on non-degree courses. In order to be further registered as a student they must progress to a degree course.

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

Residency Permits

145. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if all documentation requested in respect of their residency-permission to remain in the State has been received in her Department in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 1; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2087/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that correspondence issued to the person mentioned on 16 December 2014. In this correspondence, my officials requested documentation and information. To date no response has been received.

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

Naturalisation Applications

146. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a satisfactory response has been received from a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; if it is acceptable that all penalties have been satisfactorily discharged in accordance with the requirements in that letter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2093/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a valid application for a certificate of naturalisation has been received from the person referred to by the Deputy.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process. Certain information was requested from the applicant and a response has been received. A letter has issued to the person concerned requesting additional information. When a response has been received, the case will be finalised and submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

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

Garda Review

147. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which she expects restructuring of An Garda Síochána to take place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2095/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The review of An Garda Síochána under the Haddington Road Agreement will make recommendations on the use by the force of the resources available to it, with the objective of achieving and maintaining the highest level of efficiency and effectiveness in its operations and administration.

The elements of the review dealing with the structure and organisation of the Garda Síochána and the deployment of members and civilian staff to relevant and appropriate roles are being undertaken by the Garda Inspectorate.

The review which is expected to be completed shortly will encompass all aspects of the operation and administration of An Garda Síochána.

Questions Nos. 148 and 149 answered with Question No. 140.

Prisoner Data

150. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the total number of persons currently serving prison sentences; the extent to which they receive rehabilitative training or have access to programmes of a nature likely to encourage them away from crime; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2100/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can advise the Deputy that on the 14 January 2015 there were 3,661 prisoners in custody. Of this 3,169 were serving prison sentences.

The Irish Prison Service provides to those in custody a wide range of rehabilitative programmes that include education, vocational training, health care, psychiatric, psychological, counselling, welfare and spiritual services. which have the dual purpose of providing prisoners with purposeful activity while serving their sentences and encouraging them to lead non-offending lives on release. These programmes are available in all prisons and all prisoners are eligible to use the services.

The development of prisoner programmes forms a central part of the Irish Prison Service Three Year Strategic Plan 2012 - 2015. There is a clear commitment in the Strategy to enhance sentence planning through Integrated Sentence Management and the delivery of prison based rehabilitative programmes.

Other areas where there has been significant progress in prison education are in physical education, in the provision of higher education, in the arts and in preparing prisoners for release and supporting their transition to life, and often to education, on the outside. A top priority for the Irish Prison Service is ensuring help for those with reading and writing problems and peer mentoring programmes are currently active in all of our prisons.

As well as seeking to draw on best practice in adult and further education in the community, there has been a lot of curriculum development over the years that is specific to prison circumstances, such as courses on addiction, health issues and offending behaviour.

The guiding principles which underpin the prisons' work and training service are to make available, work, work-training and other purposeful activities to all those in custody aiming to give useful skills and serve the purpose of promoting rehabilitation. Training activities are designed to give as much variety as possible and also to give opportunities for those in prison to acquire practical skills which will help them secure employment on release. The areas include catering, laundry, industrial cleaning, woodwork, construction, industrial skills and gym.

The Irish Prison Service has also been expanding the number of accredited courses and opportunities available to prisoners in Work Training in recent years. Enhanced partnership arrangements with accrediting bodies such as City and Guilds, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), and the Guild of Launderers and Cleaners and the centralising of coordination and quality assurance arrangements have enabled us to extend the number of available courses and activities with certification.

On committal, all prisoners are interviewed by the Governor and are informed of the services available in the prison. At this point prisoners may be referred to services or they can self refer at a later date. Where Governors consider, on the information available, that a prisoner needs a particular intervention they will initiate a referral.

I can inform the Deputy that figures that the latest available figures (22/11/14 - 28/11/14) show that an overall total of 1,816 offenders participated in Education activities which represents almost 48% of the prisoner population at that time.

Similarly an average of 1,051 prisoners engaged in vocational training activities each day in November and this represents 28% of the average prison population in that month. It should be noted that a prisoner may participate in more than one activity.

Organised Crime

151. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of members of organised criminal groups who have been charged with serious crimes annually during the past five years; those convicted or found not guilty for whatever reason; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2101/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will appreciate that membership of criminal groups tends to be fluid and the nature of criminal activity is such that offences committed by members may or may not be connected with the individual's membership of such groups. The existence of such groups and their membership does not remain static. It is therefore not possible to accurately attribute crime figures to criminal group members.

I have however asked the Garda Authorities to provide me with any relevant information that may be available and I will be in further contact with the Deputy when the information is to hand.

Garda Recruitment

152. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the degree to which she expects the Garda recruitment programme to benefit all divisions throughout the country by way of increased strength; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2102/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be

aware, 100 new recruits entered training at the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014, the first intake of Garda recruits since 2009. This was followed by an intake of a further 100 new recruits in December. A further intake of 100 is due to enter training at the end of this month. This will bring to 300 the number of recruits in the Garda College since last September and is a measure of this Government's commitment to the Garda Síochána. The first intake of recruits will attest as members of the Garda Síochána in May of this year and will be assigned to Garda Stations by the Garda Commissioner.

It is of course a key objective of the Garda Commissioner to allocate all of the resources at her disposal in a manner which maximises their impact on the protection of the public and on the prevention and detection of crime. In that context, Garda management keep under continuing review developments in relation to security assessments, crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of resources.

Garda Investigations

153. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which adequate resources remain available to the Garda for the pursuit of cold cases; the number of such cases still unsolved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2106/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the function of the Serious Crime Review Team (SCRT) is to assist Senior Investigating Officers assigned to the case in question in bringing investigations to a successful conclusion by identifying further investigative opportunities and ensuring that investigations conform to approved best practice guidelines.

At the conclusion of each review a substantive report is provided to the Senior Investigating Officer who considers the opportunities for further investigation for dissemination back into the investigative and operational units. Any recommendation of organisational effect is disseminated within the Garda organisation to improve the overall investigative capability of An Garda Síochána.

As the Deputy will be aware, the provision and allocation of Garda resources is a matter for the Garda Commissioner in the light of identified operational demands. In this regard I am informed that the SCRT continues to review serious cases that remain unsolved and continues to identify evidence and witnesses to assist in the development of these cases.

Garda Strength

154. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of posts at all ranks awaiting to be filled in An Garda Síochána; when such appointments are likely to take place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2107/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): One of the primary functions of the Garda Commissioner under the Garda Síochána Acts is to direct and control An Garda Síochána. The Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel among the Garda Regions, Divisions, and Districts. Garda management keep this distribution under continuing review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. This necessary ongoing flexibility in the distribution of personnel means that it is not feasible to identify specific vacancies within specific areas of the force.

At a national level, sanction has been given by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for a maximum strength in each rank. The agreed strength for ranks above Garda rank are given in the table overleaf, together with actual strength as of the end of November 2014. Where current actual strength is below the approved maximum strength, it is the Garda Commissioner who will make the necessary arrangements to have the balance of posts filled through promotion competitions.

Promotion competitions to fill vacancies at the ranks of Chief Superintendent and Superintendent have been completed and panels for appointment to these ranks have been put in place. Competitions for promotion to the ranks of Inspector and Sergeant will commence as early as possible this year.

Rank	Actual strength	Approved max. strength
COMMISSIONER	1	1
D/COMMISSIONER	0	2
A/COMMISSIONER	8	8
C/SUPERINTENDENT	39	45
SUPERINTENDENT	140	166
INSPECTOR	297	300
SERGEANT	1,927	2,000
Garda	10,404	

Prison Accommodation Standards

155. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when she expects overcrowding in prisons to cease; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2108/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will be aware that the average number of prisoners in custody in Ireland has risen in recent years, from 3,321 during 2007 to 4,318 during 2012, an increase of over 30%. Likewise the total number of committals to prison has also risen sharply during the same period, from 11,934 in 2007 to 17,026 in 2012 – an increase of over 43%.

2013 saw the first significant decrease in prison numbers since 2007. There were 15,735 committals to prison in 2013 which was a decrease of 7.6% on the 2012 figure.

In addition, a 40 month capital programme is being implemented to eliminate slopping out and to improve prison conditions in the older part of the prison estate. I am advised by my officials that work is continuing on the modernisation project at Mountjoy prison. “D” Wing is the last wing in Mountjoy requiring refurbishment and on the completion of this, all cells in Mountjoy prison will have in cell sanitation facilities. Works commenced in early June, 2014 with a completion date of the second quarter in 2015.

As outlined in the Irish Prison Service Three Year Strategic Plan, it is intended to align the capacity of our prisons with the guidelines laid down by the Inspector of Prisons in 2014, in so far as this is compatible with public safety and the integrity of the criminal justice system. An examination of yesterday’s figures when there was 3,612 prisoners in custody shows that only Cork, Limerick and Arbour Hill are outside the parameters set by the Inspector of Prisons. This figure was 91% of his recommended total of 3,982.

In relation to Cork Prison, a contract for the construction of a new prison to replace the existing facility was awarded late last year and construction began in January, 2014 with a

completion date on the third quarter of 2015.

I can advise the Deputy that plans in respect of the Limerick Prison Redevelopment Project are advancing well.

Finally, the average number in custody for 2014 was 3,916 a reduction of 10.8% on the 2011 average of 4,390. The Deputy may wish to note that the number in custody reached a peak of 4,621 on 23rd February 2011. Today there are 973 less prisoners in custody which represents a decrease of 21%.

Garda Deployment

156. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of members of An Garda Síochána in County Longford, the number that is allocated to Longford town, Granard, Edgeworthstown, Ballymahon and Lanesboro; her plans to increase the number of gardaí in County Longford to deal with issues that have been highlighted by the Longford Joint Policing Committee; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2117/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have requested the information sought by the Deputy from the Garda Commissioner and as soon as it is to hand I will pass it on to the Deputy.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

157. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in relation to the terms of reference for the new investigation into the mother and baby homes, the reason for an exclusion of the Magdalen laundries and adoptions involving State hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2002/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I announced the proposed Terms of Reference for the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and certain related matters last week. In developing the Terms of Reference due regard has been given to the emphasis on “Mother and Baby Homes” in the motion approved by Dáil Eireann on the 11th June 2014 and the investigation will examine a wide agenda of matters in relation to these homes. I believe the Terms of Reference reflect the range of matters that we were asked to consider by this House, and by those most centrally affected by the issues, and are a fair and balanced response to the many requests for related issues to be included. In particular, the investigation will thoroughly examine the experience of the many mothers and children who were resident in a Mother and Baby Home over the period 1922-1998.

Clear criteria have been used to define and identify Mother and Baby Homes for the purposes of this investigation. These include having the main function of providing sheltered and supervised ante- and post-natal facilities to single mothers and their children, including both board and lodgings; and an ethos which those running the institutions considered to promote a regime of work, training or education as part of an overall approach to either rehabilitating single mothers, or to give them training for living independently. On the basis of the available information it would not be appropriate to consider the types institutions raised by the Deputy as Mother and Baby Homes, as they did not provide this specific range of services. However, the Terms of Reference ask the Commission to examine the extent to which institutions which had a clear relationship with Mother and Baby Homes were part of the entry or exit pathways for single mothers and children into or leaving these Homes. It is certainly open to the Com-

mission to give consideration to the types of institutions raised by the Deputy in this context. The issues to be examined by the social history module also explicitly cite the Magdalen Laundries in this regard.

The proposed arrangements also ensure that the Commission has sufficient opportunity to bring any additional matter which it considers may warrant investigation to my attention.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

158. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide a definition regarding a submission (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1897/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): In responding to the details supplied by the Deputy, it is important to clarify that the central focus of the Commission is on mothers and children accommodated in the specified Mother and Baby Homes for the purposes of extended ante- and post-natal maternity and infant care services. While due regard has been given to the emphasis on “Mother and Baby Homes” in the motion approved by Dáil Eireann, the terms of reference also reflect a much wider agenda of directly related matters than was evident at the initiation of this process. The investigation will thoroughly examine the experiences of the many mothers and children who were resident in Mother and Baby Homes.

In accordance with Article 1(VI) of the Terms of Reference, the Commission is directed to investigate the entry of children into the institutions listed in Appendix 1 of the Order in circumstances when their mother was not also resident at the time of their entry. Clear criteria have been used to define and identify Mother & Baby Homes for the purposes of this investigation. These include having the main function of providing sheltered and supervised ante- and post-natal facilities to single mothers and their children, including both board and lodgings; and an ethos which those running the institutions considered to promote a regime of work, training or education as part of an overall approach to either rehabilitating single mothers, or to give them training for living independently.

On the basis of the available information it would not be appropriate to consider the types of institutions raised by the Deputy as Mother and Baby Homes, as they did not provide this specific range of services. However, the Terms of Reference ask the Commission to examine the extent to which institutions which had a clear relationship with Mother and Baby Homes were part of the entry or exit pathways for single mothers and children into or leaving these Homes. It is certainly open to the Commission to give consideration to the types of institutions raised by the Deputy in this context. The issues to be examined by the social history module also explicitly cite laundries in this regard.

The Confidential Committee is intended to facilitate individuals who may wish to describe their experiences of living or working in the relevant homes with the Commission to assist in its investigations.

Foreign Adoptions

159. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a bilateral agreement with Russia on adoption will be concluded in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1911/15]

160. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the progress in relation to negotiations between the Irish and Russian Governments to agree a bilateral agreement on adoption between the two countries; when such an agreement will be reached; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1922/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 159 and 160 together.

Efforts are ongoing in my Department in relation to a bilateral agreement on intercountry adoption between Ireland and the Russian Federation. Following a meeting with a delegation of Russian officials in October 2013 my Department prepared revised draft wording on a number of specific points, which was forwarded to the Russian Authorities in February 2014. In transmitting these revisions it was suggested that should these revisions be acceptable to the Russian Federation, it would be useful for both sides to meet again for further discussions. In April 2014 the Ministry of Education and Science advised the Irish Embassy in Moscow that all proposed adoption agreements were on hold while the Russian Government considered proposals in relation to how they deal with adoption agreements in general.

A reply from the Russian authorities was received in my Department in October 2014 with further correspondence from the Russian authorities received in the Department on 24 December 2014. Consideration of these communications is currently taking place in my Department.

I met the Russian Irish Adoption Group in September of last year to update them on the background to and the current situation with regard to discussions on a possible bilateral adoption agreement with Russia.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

161. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and Certain Related Matters will include investigation into citizens of the Twenty-six Counties who were forcibly relocated to the north of Ireland during the time period examined. [1947/15]

162. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the terms of reference for the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and Certain Related Matters will ensure that the commission investigates the experience of children and mothers who were transferred from the Republic of Ireland to homes in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1995/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 161 and 162 together.

I announced the proposed Terms of Reference for the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and certain related matters last week. Relevant details are available on my Department's website. In developing the Terms of Reference due regard has been given to the emphasis on "Mother and Baby Homes" in the motion approved by Dáil Eireann on the 11th June 2014 and the investigation will examine a wide agenda of matters in relation to these homes. The investigation will thoroughly examine the experience of the many mothers and children who were resident in a Mother and Baby Home over the period 1922-1998. These institutions have not been the central focus of previous statutory investigations.

The Commission is tasked with investigating the nature of the relationships between Mother and Baby Homes and other key institutions – these include children's homes; orphanages; and

adoption societies. As identified during the scoping work, some of these pathways may have led to mothers and children travelling into the State from other jurisdictions, or leaving the State as part of the exit pathway from these homes for example to Northern Ireland, Britain and the United States, etc and Article (1)(VII) of the Terms of Reference provides for the Commission to investigate these matters. While the statutory powers of the Commission do not extend beyond the Republic of Ireland it is expected that the Commission will explore how best to it might follow such pathways through cooperation with other relevant authorities.

Universal Social Charge Application

163. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if his Department has made an estimate of the administrative costs associated with the implementation of universal health insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1950/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Department of Health is undertaking a major costing exercise to estimate the cost of Universal Health Insurance (UHI) for individuals/households and the Exchequer, and is working closely with the ESRI and the Health Insurance Authority on this. The exercise will also take account of administrative costs associated with the model of UHI as set out in the White Paper.

The Minister expects to have the initial costings in April. These results will assist Government in deciding on the next steps towards achieving a single tier health service providing universal healthcare.

National Lottery Funding Applications

164. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the reason a registered charity (details supplied) failed to qualify for his Department's recent lottery grants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1882/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Applications for National Lottery grants far exceed resources and as the funds available for 2014 have been disbursed it is not possible, unfortunately, to assist in this particular case. However, if funding for this project is required in 2015, the organisation may wish to apply for a grant from the 2015 National Lottery allocation. Details of which will be put on the Department's website www.health.gov.ie.

Medical Card Administration

165. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the reason behind the decision to make the income level for a couple applying for the over 70s' medical card €900 and not €1000; and if he will review this matter in the future. [1886/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch) (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The gross income limit for an over 70s medical card was set in law at €500 per week for a single person and at €900 per week for a couple from 1 January 2014. The gross income limits up to that date were €600 per week for a single person and at €1,200 per week for a couple.

The over 70s gross income limit for a single person was reduced proportionately less than the gross income limit for a couple under the Budgetary change as the Government recognises

that the living costs of an individual living alone are more than half the living costs of a couple living together and that expenditure does not necessarily diminish relative to the number of people in the household. This is recognised, inter alia, through the provision of the Living Alone Increase and differential income limits for medical cards for persons aged under 70 years between individuals and couples. There are no proposals to change these gross income limits.

The Deputy will be aware that persons aged 70 or older, who are assessed as ineligible under the gross income thresholds, may also have their eligibility assessed under the means tested medical card scheme in the event that they face particularly high expenses, e.g., nursing home or medication costs. This assessment is based on net income and assessable outgoing expenses and the qualifying income thresholds under this scheme are lower than over 70s gross income thresholds. Furthermore, persons aged over 70 years may still be eligible for a medical card on a discretionary basis where they face undue hardship in arranging medical services as a result of medical or social circumstances.

The Government has, in addition, approved the drafting of a Bill to provide a GP service without fees for all persons aged 70 years and over. Drafting of the Bill is at an advanced stage and the expectation is that the Bill will be published shortly.

Hospital Appointment Status

166. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health when a date for an appointment with an ear specialist will be provided in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1893/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she would be in the best position to take the matter up with the consultant and hospital involved. In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up with them.

Hospital Waiting Lists

167. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will review a referral for an operation procedure at Kerry General Hospital in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1896/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the Health Service Executive, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up with them.

National Lottery Funding Applications

168. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet with the representatives of a support group (details supplied) in County Dublin in order to appreciate the work that they are involved with and in view of being overlooked for his Department's lottery grants; and the way they can be assisted in addressing their urgent financial needs in order to secure a premises to conduct the vital support work that they are engaged in. [1898/15]

173. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a meeting in respect of a support group (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1948/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 168 and 173 together.

My Office has recently received a meeting request from this organisation and it is currently being considered.

Hospital Waiting Lists

169. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the number of persons waiting more than 12 months for an outpatient appointment to see a neurologist which has increased to 1,695 at the end of last year, up 746 from 949 earlier in the year; and his plans to reduce these waiting lists. [1910/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Vaccination Programme

170. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the number of cases of meningitis B there have been in County Kerry on a yearly basis by age; when will the vaccine be rolled out as part of the vaccination programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1923/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The number of cases of Meningitis B in County Kerry on a yearly bases by age is not held by my Department. I have asked the Health Service Executive to collate this information and send directly to the Deputy.

The immunisation programme in Ireland is based on the advice of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC). The NIAC is a committee of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland comprising of experts in a number of specialties including infectious diseases, paediatrics and public health.

NIAC has issued guidance in relation to the use of the Meningitis B vaccine in the control of clusters or outbreaks of Meningococcal B disease. Deliberations regarding the introduction of the Meningococcal B vaccine into the primary immunisation schedule continue.

Health Services Provision

171. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied); if support will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1925/15]

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. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Equipment

172. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when the necessary funding for the fit-out of the cystic fibrosis unit under construction at University Hospital Limerick will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1926/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Question No. 173 answered with Question No. 168.

Respite Care Services

174. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding efforts to improve the provision of respite services at a facility (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1959/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The vision for the Health Service Executive's Disability Services Programme is to contribute to the realisation of a society where people with disabilities are supported, as far as possible, to participate to their full potential in economic and social life, and have access to a range of quality personal social supports and services including respite care to enhance their quality of life.

In relation to the specific query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service issue, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, he can contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with the HSE.

Services for People with Disabilities

175. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding efforts to improve the provision of multidisciplinary services at a facility (details supplied) in County Kerry; if concerns of parents of children using the service have been addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1960/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the Health Service Executive. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Of-

fice and they will follow up the matter with them.

Mental Health Services Provision

176. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the construction of a facility (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1993/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply as the delivery of the health care infrastructure is a service matter.

If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office who will follow up on the matter.

Medicinal Products Availability

177. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on the continued availability of a drug (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2003/15]

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

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 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.

Roaccutane has not been banned from any markets for regulatory reasons. It is understood that Roche Pharmaceuticals, the manufacturer of Roaccutane, has discontinued marketing in some countries, including the US, for commercial reasons. Generic forms of isotretinoin continue to be available in these countries.

Accident and Emergency Department Waiting Times

178. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on conditions at a hospital (details supplied) in Dublin 9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2004/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Government regards trolley waits of over 9 hours as unacceptable and acknowledges the difficulties which the current surge in ED

activity is causing for patients, their families and the staff who are doing their utmost to provide safe, quality care in very challenging circumstances.

Beaumont Hospital acknowledges and regrets the difficult conditions experienced by patients and staff at its Emergency Department, which provides services to over 50,000 patients each year, many of whom are older and have complex care requirements. As well as contributing to high levels of ED admissions, these factors can present difficulties in discharging such patients to home or other appropriate care settings. In addition, changes in service provision (e.g. cancer services) have increased the general patient attendance at Beaumont, placing additional pressures on bed capacity.

All hospitals have escalation plans to manage not only patient flow but also patient safety in a responsive, controlled and planned way that supports and ensures the delivery of optimum patient care. Beaumont Hospital has undertaken a number of initiatives to improve the patient pathway both through the ED and the hospital, in addition to working closely with the community. All available bed capacity is open and off-site capacity is also being utilised. Elective surgeries (with the exception of cancer cases) have been cancelled for this week and this option is being kept under constant review. With regard to nursing shortages, Beaumont Hospital is working with other major hospitals to initiate an overseas recruitment campaign to help meet their needs for nursing staff. The HSE would encourage patients to contact their GPs in the first instance where they can be directed appropriately to services such as rapid access clinics, day hospital services for older people and acute medical assessment units, as appropriate.

The Government has provided additional funding of €3 million in 2014 and €25 million in 2015 to address delayed discharges. This funding is being targeted at hospital and community services which can demonstrate initiatives to address specific needs of delayed discharge patients most positively and therefore improve timeliness for admissions from Emergency Departments and waiting lists. The Minister convened the Emergency Department Taskforce to find long term solutions to overcrowding by providing additional focus and momentum in dealing with the challenges presented by the current trolley waits. Following an initial meeting in December, the HSE is working on an action plan to be finalised by the end of January to specifically address ED issues with a view to a significant reduction in trolley waits over the course of 2015.

Health Services

179. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding funding for medical treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2019/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): In relation to the individual case raised, the HSE has been asked to investigate the specific issues surrounding this case and respond directly to you. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Speech and Language Therapy

180. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an appointment for speech therapy in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 3; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2029/15]

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. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Waiting Lists

181. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a hospital appointment for a knee replacement in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2030/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the Health Service Executive, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up with them.

Health Services

182. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a residential care in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2031/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, he can contact my Private Office and they will follow the matter up with the HSE.

Hospital Waiting Lists

183. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if and when a tonsilectomy procedure will be offered in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2044/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the Health Service Executive, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up with them.

General Practitioner Services

184. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding recruitment of general practitioners (details supplied) in the Health Service Executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2048/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): GPs are private contractors who provide services to the public health system under the General Medical Services (GMS) Scheme and other schemes.

Under the Health (Provision of General Practitioner Services) Act 2012, a registered medical practitioner:

(a) whose name is included in the Specialist Division of the register of medical practitioners established under section 43(2)(b) of the Medical Practitioners Act 2007, and

(b) who holds a current certificate of registration within the meaning of section 2 of that Act in respect of the medical specialty “General Practice” recognised under section 89(1) of that Act;

is eligible to apply to the HSE for a contract to provide services to medical card and GP visit card holders under the General Medical Services Scheme. Any GP who holds a GMS contract is eligible to apply for a vacant GMS panel. Such panels are filled through open competition and interview following advertisements in national and medical newspapers. There is no restriction on the HSE placing advertisements for such competitions.

The HSE is currently engaged in a medical workforce planning project, which will include workforce planning for GPs. The Medical Workforce Planning Project underway within the HSE’s National Doctor Training and Planning Unit is on target to develop a medical workforce planning system by June 2015. The system will be based on a statistical model of supply and demand which will be informed by expert stakeholders, population and medical workforce data across all medical specialties. Both entrants into and exits from the workforce will be accounted for. Furthermore, a measure of patient need and the demand for medical specialist services will be determined and included in the statistical model. Medical workforce planning for General Practice is included in this work and will be prioritised in the development of workforce projections based on both the supply of GPs and the demand for GP services over the next 20 years.

HSE Funding

185. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be provided for a smoking area in a day care centre (details supplied) in County Kerry; if funding will also be provided to transport persons from their homes to the centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2051/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service issue I have referred your question to the HSE for direct reply. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Nursing Home Accommodation

186. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if consideration will be given to increasing the nursing home accommodation at St. Brigid's Nursing Home, Crooksling, County Dublin, given the recent shortage of step-down bed accommodation in the region and given the suitability of St. Brigid's Nursing Home to meet such requirements; if consideration might be given to re-introducing all previously decommissioned accommodation at the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2071/15]

187. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which the current maximum patient capacity at St. Brigid's Nursing Home, Crooksling, County Dublin, might be expanded to meet the step-down bed needs in the region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2072/15]

188. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which any management-nursing posts remain to be filled at St. Brigid's Nursing Home, Crooksling, County Dublin; the extent to which staff numbers continue to be augmented thereat as required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2073/15]

190. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if consideration has been given to the provision of sheltered housing or similar back-up facilities for older persons at St. Brigid's Nursing Home, Crooksling, County Dublin, in view of the suitability of such a location for this purpose; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2075/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 186 to 188, inclusive, and 190 together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

HSE Properties

189. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which issues relating to the title of the property at St. Brigid's Nursing Home, Crooksling, County Dublin, have been resolved to the satisfaction of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2074/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply as the management of the health property estate, including title issues, is a service matter.

If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office who will follow up on the matter.

Question No. 190 answered with Question No. 186.

Medical Card Applications

191. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if and when a medical card will be issued in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2084/15]

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. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Medical Card Applications

192. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if and when a medical card might be awarded in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2086/15]

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. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Appointment Status

193. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when an appointment with an ear specialist will be made in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2089/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she would be in the best position to take the matter up with the consultant and hospital involved. In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up with them.

Mental Health Services Provision

194. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 18; and when the person can expect an appointment with the mental health team in the hospital. [2109/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service issue I have referred your question to the HSE for direct reply. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will

follow up the matter with them.

Health Services

195. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Health his view on the impact of the closure of a day care centre (details supplied) in County Roscommon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2123/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service issue I have referred your question to the HSE for direct reply. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Health Services

196. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Health the plans regarding the Health Service Executive hostel in Cloonbrackna, Roscommon town; if it will continue to operate; the plans to refurbish it; if there are plans to close it; the reason a service user moved from this hostel in Cloonbrackna to a house in Athleague over the Christmas period without any consultation or notice to their family; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2124/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service issue I have referred your question to the HSE for direct reply. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Semi-State Bodies Remuneration

197. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form the performance related awards made to chief executives of semi-State companies in 2013 and 2014 under the aegis of his Department. [2323/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Voluntary Health Insurance Board is the only semi state company under the aegis of my department. The Chief Executive of this company did not receive any performance related awards in 2013 and 2014.

Passport Applications

198. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the way an Irish national who is imprisoned in the UK can apply for and acquire a first passport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1887/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Passports Act 2008 provides that only Irish citizens may obtain Irish passports. Each applicant must therefore provide documentary evidence that demonstrates his/her entitlement to Irish citizenship and which verifies his/her identify.

In general, first time applicants should provide the following:

- a completed and suitably witnessed application form and photographs;
- an original long form birth certificate and a civil marriage certificate if appropriate;
- any other evidence of Irish citizenship where applicable;
- additional photo identification;
- documentary evidence to show use of name;
- evidence of residency at the applicant's postal address.

More details in regard to the documentary requirements are available on the Department's website www.passports.ie

In terms of Irish citizens in prison in England and Wales or those in Scotland, they may write to the Embassy of Ireland in London or the Consulate in Edinburgh respectively for confidential advice and assistance in regard to their specific situation. However, it should be noted that in situations where passports are issued to persons in prison, these are sent in the care of the Governor's office for safekeeping, as appropriate, until the person's release.

The contact details for the Embassy and Consulate are as follows:

Embassy of Ireland

17 Grosvenor Place

London

SW1X 7HR.

Consulate General of Ireland

16 Randolph Crescent

Edinburgh

EH3 7TT.

Employment Rights

199. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding a diplomatic matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1963/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am aware of the matter referred to by the Deputy. I have raised my concerns in relation to this matter with the diplomat concerned and his authorities and I hope that it will be possible to achieve a satisfactory resolution in these cases.

While I am not in a position to comment further on the matter in question, I would like to reiterate my strong commitment to the protection of domestic workers in Ireland. My position on the rights of private domestic workers employed by diplomatic staff is clear: diplomatic staff who wish to employ private domestic workers are expected to respect Irish laws, including labour law and apply good employment practice. I have been proactive in the promotion of best employment practices. Last September, I introduced guidelines in relation to the employment

of private domestic employees by diplomats in Ireland and I am committed to monitoring their implementation. These guidelines, which set out clearly expectations regarding payment, employment records, health insurance and social security, can be accessed on my Department's website.

I know that the majority of diplomatic staff already follow good practices in respect of employment practices, but I believe that the guidelines that I have introduced, combined with strong implementation, will help to prevent possible exploitation of domestic workers in diplomatic households and to assist victims. The Department works closely with other Government Departments, State Agencies, An Garda Síochána and Migrant Rights Centre Ireland in relation to the implementation of the guidelines.

The Department also continues to work closely with the authorities of the country of the diplomat concerned in the promotion of strong bilateral relations across a wide range of areas.

Foreign Conflicts

200. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has raised at the UN Human Rights Council the plight of those affected by the atrocities of Boko Haram; the actions taken at an EU level to tackle these atrocities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2013/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am appalled by ongoing reports of outrageous acts of violence perpetrated in Nigeria by the terrorist group Boko Haram. These include the very recent killing of a large number of civilians, estimated by Amnesty International to be as high as 2,000, in an attack by militants in the north-eastern state of Borno. I am utterly appalled by reports of the use of innocent young children to carry primed explosives. I have also previously condemned the abduction of more than 200 young girls from a school in the Nigerian town of Chibok last April.

Nigeria was the subject of a Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council in Geneva in October 2013. During that process, Ireland raised a number of issues including the ongoing atrocities being committed by Boko Haram and its total disregard for the human rights of the people affected.

The EU remains committed to providing a comprehensive range of political, development and humanitarian supports to Nigeria and its people in tackling the terrorist threat and in ensuring the sound development of the country. At the fifth Nigeria-EU Ministerial Dialogue held in Abuja on 27th November 2014, both the EU and Nigeria expressed concern that the violence of Boko Haram was becoming deep-rooted and was also affecting the wider region, including through refugee movements across borders. The EU emphasized the importance of a strong and human rights-compliant leadership in the fight against Boko Haram and in maintaining state control over the north-eastern states. The parties noted the enhanced regional cooperation between Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger.

The Nigerian Government has primary responsibility for addressing the security and human rights situation in their country. The EU, as well as several individual EU Member States, and also the UN and the USA, continue to assist the Nigerian authorities in strengthening their ability to provide security and to combat terrorism. Our Embassy in Abuja is working locally, in co-operation with the EU and other key partners, in support of these efforts.

Foreign Conflicts

201. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the conflict in the Ukraine will be discussed at the next EU Foreign Affairs Council; his position regarding the current sanctions imposed on Russia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2014/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The conflict in Ukraine is not formally on the agenda of the next meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council on 19 January. However, Ministers will have a comprehensive discussion on the EU's relationship with Russia and it is likely that the situation in eastern Ukraine will be raised in the context of this debate.

The crisis in Ukraine and its impact on relations with Russia remains a major foreign policy challenge for the EU. Following Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in March and clear evidence of its ongoing direct involvement in the destabilisation of eastern Ukraine, the response of the EU has been graduated.

A three-phase approach was agreed by EU leaders at the March European Council, beginning with the suspension of talks on a proposed new EU-Russia agreement and on visa liberalization (Phase 1), moving to asset freezes and visa bans (Phase 2) and culminating at the end of July with a move to targeted sectoral sanctions (Phase 3). The latter measures were further strengthened in early September following a serious deterioration of the situation on the ground in eastern Ukraine.

The sanctions were imposed in response to Russia's actions in Ukraine and with the clear aim of encouraging a change in its behaviour towards its neighbour. They are designed to be flexible and can be intensified or lessened depending on developments on the ground in Ukraine.

The ceasefire agreements signed in Minsk last September provide the basis for a comprehensive settlement of the conflict. It is crucial, therefore, that all sides, including the Russian Federation, follow through on the commitments that they signed up to under these accords. The lack of progress on key elements of the agreements in the intervening period is deeply disappointing. Serious violations of the ceasefire in certain parts of eastern Ukraine occur on an almost daily basis and the current situation remains very fragile.

I remain of the view that the restrictive measures against Russia, coupled with open dialogue and continued political and economic engagement with the various sides involved in the conflict, offer the best way of creating the conditions for a breakthrough.

Overseas Development Aid Expenditure

202. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the amount paid out in foreign aid over the past five years; the percentage of GDP this applies to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2020/15]

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. "One World, One Future" our policy on International Development, sets out our vision for a sustainable and just world, and reaffirms our commitment to achieving the UN target of providing 0.7% of Gross National Product (GNP) for Official Development Assistance (ODA), when economic circumstances permit.

Over the past five years Ireland has provided a total of over €3.0 billion in Official Development Assistance (ODA). Of this, approximately 80% has been managed by my Department under Vote 27 -International Cooperation. The remainder consisted of contributions from other Government Departments and Ireland's share of the EU Development Co-operation Budget.

A summary of Ireland's total contribution to ODA and as a percentage of Gross National Product (GNP) in the years 2010 through to 2014 is set out in tabular form below

-	Total ODA	ODA as a % of GNP
Year	€m	-
2014	599.16	0.43%
2013	637.09	0.46%
2012	628.90	0.47%
2011	657.04	0.50%
2010	675.83	0.51%

I should note that the figure provided for 2014 is the budget allocation for that year. Detailed expenditure data for 2014 are currently being collated and verified for ODA eligibility. When finalised, the data will be published in the statistical annexes to the Irish Aid Annual Report, which will be available at www.irishaid.ie.

Departmental Funding

203. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide a breakdown of all departmental funding provided to a school (details supplied) in County Donegal, both capital and revenue, for each of the past five years including the amount and the purpose of the funding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1889/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department provides capitation funding to all recognised primary schools. The amount of grant paid to an individual primary school for capitation and ancillary services is determined by the school's enrolment, subject to a minimum grant for both capitation and ancillary services in respect of schools with enrolments up to 60, and a maximum ancillary services grant in the case of schools with enrolments of 500 or more. In 2015 the capitation grant is €170 per pupil, and the Ancillary Services Grant is €147 per pupil. The Deputy may wish to note that Circular 40/2009 clarifies issues relating to the allocation of funding for primary schools. The circular states that capitation funding provided for general running costs and funding provided for caretaking and secretarial services may be regarded as a common grant from which the Board of Management can allocate according to its own priorities. The Minor Works Grant has issued to primary schools with permanent recognition since 1997 with the exception of the school year 2012/2013. The Minor Works Grant must be spent on the physical infrastructure of the school or on items of furniture and equipment for educational use including IT equipment. The following table contains a breakdown of the funding issued to the school to which the Deputy refers in the last five years, as requested.

School	Description	Amount paid	Payment date	Section name
St Peter's NS	SOUNDFIELD SYSTEM FOR A PUPIL	1,250.00	30-Jan-2009	PAS2

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School	Description	Amount paid	Payment date	Section name
St Peter's NS	CAPITATION GRANT	18,200.00	30-Jan-2009	Central Funds Unit
St Peter's NS	ANCILLARY SERVICES GRANT C49	21,235.00	30-Mar-2009	Central Funds Unit
St Peter's NS	ASSISTIVE TECH GRANT FOR A PUPIL	343.00	14-Apr-2009	PAS2
St Peter's NS	SOUNDFIELD AMPLIFICATION FOR A PUPIL	1,100.00	14-May-2009	PAS3
St Peter's NS	CAPITATION GRANT	9,200.00	30-Jun-2009	Central Funds Unit
St Peter's NS	PBU MINOR WORKS GRANT (ENROLL)	2,534.50	18-Nov-2009	Central Funds Unit
St Peter's NS	PBU MINOR WORKS GRANT	5,500.00	18-Nov-2009	Central Funds Unit
St Peter's NS	ICT INFRASTRUCTURE	6,438.83	27-Nov-2009	ICT Policy Unit
St Peter's NS	STANDARDISED TESTING GRANT	493.20	17-Dec-2009	Central Funds Unit
St Peter's NS	CAPITATION GRANT	19,180.00	27-Jan-2010	Central Funds Unit
St Peter's NS	ANCILLARY SERVICES GRANT C49	19,530.00	12-Apr-2010	Schools Division - Financial
St Peter's NS	ASSISTIVE TECH GRANT FOR A PUPIL	249.72	17-Jun-2010	Schools Division - Financial
St Peter's NS	SCHOOL BOOKS GRANT	1,386.00	25-Jun-2010	Schools Division - Financial
St Peter's NS	CAPITATION GRANT	6,020.00	25-Jun-2010	Central Funds Unit
St Peter's NS	BUILDING GRANT 100%-PEST CONTROL	5,309.00	11-Oct-2010	Building Unit Financial
St Peter's NS	SWS 2010-100% GRANT - WINDOWS	19,674.00	27-Oct-2010	Building Unit Financial

School	Description	Amount paid	Payment date	Section name
St Peter's NS	ICT INFRA-STRUCTURE	6,198.20	11-Nov-2010	ICT Policy Unit
St Peter's NS	100% OF GRANT ENERGY EFFICIENCY SCHEME	7,171.04	12-Nov-2010	Building Unit Financial
St Peter's NS	PBU MINOR WORKS GRANT (ENROL) & PLAYGROUND/PE EQUIPMENT GRANT	3,591.00	26-Nov-2010	Building Unit Financial
St Peter's NS	PBU MINOR WORKS GRANT AND PLAYGROUND/PE EQUIPMENT GRANT	6,500.00	26-Nov-2010	Building Unit Financial
St Peter's NS	STANDARDISED TESTING GRANT	453.60	08-Dec-2010	Central Funds Unit
St Peter's NS	CAPITATION GRANT	16,758.00	31-Jan-2011	Schools Division - Financial
St Peter's NS	WATER CONSERVATION MEASURES 100%	1,910.00	25-Feb-2011	PBU
St Peter's NS	ASSISTIVE TECH GRANT FOR A PUPIL	334.00	10-Mar-2011	Special Needs & Tuition Grants Section
St Peter's NS	ANCILLARY SERVICES GRANT C49	18,228.00	31-Mar-2011	Schools Division - Financial
St Peter's NS	SCHOOL BOOKS GRANT	1,364.00	29-Apr-2011	Schools Division - Financial
St Peter's NS	ONCE-OFF GRANT FOR AUTISTIC UNIT	6,500.00	17-May-2011	Building Unit Financial
St Peter's NS	CAPITATION GRANT	6,802.00	24-Jun-2011	Schools Division - Financial

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School	Description	Amount paid	Payment date	Section name
St Peter's NS	THINKING TOYS IN-VOICE 5171 FURNITURE	65.98	08-Jul-2011	Primary Building Unit
St Peter's NS	70% OF SUMMER WORKS GRANT 2011 - MECHANICAL	23,398.77	12-Aug-2011	Building Unit Financial
St Peter's NS	STANDARDISED TESTING GRANT	446.40	14-Oct-2011	QUALIFICATIONS SECTION
St Peter's NS	ADDITIONAL ACCOMMODATION 2010 70% GRANT	210,000.00	15-Nov-2011	Primary Building Unit
St Peter's NS	MINOR WORKS GRANT 2011-TYPE 39	5,500.00	28-Nov-2011	Building Unit Financial
St Peter's NS	MINOR WORKS GRANT 2011/2012	2,294.00	29-Nov-2011	Building Unit Financial
St Peter's NS	ESCORT ADVANCE 11/12	2,636.60	19-Dec-2011	School Transport
St Peter's NS	SUPERVISION GRANT	2,047.58	20-Dec-2011	Payroll Division
St Peter's NS	CAPITATION GRANT	15,884.40	06-Feb-2012	Schools Division - Financial
St Peter's NS	ANCILLARY SERVICES GRANT C49	18,375.00	29-Mar-2012	Schools Division - Financial
St Peter's NS	STANDARDISED TESTING GRANT	637.50	25-Apr-2012	QUALIFICATIONS SECTION
St Peter's NS	SCHOOL BOOKS GRANT	1,375.00	26-Jun-2012	Schools Division - Financial
St Peter's NS	CAPITATION GRANT	9,870.60	27-Jun-2012	Schools Division - Financial
St Peter's NS	ONCE-OFF GRANT FOR MULTI-SENSORY ROOM	7,000.00	20-Aug-2012	Building Unit Financial

School	Description	Amount paid	Payment date	Section name
St Peter's NS	ESCORT REC 2011-12 & ADV 2012-13	2,312.06	14-Sep-2012	School Transport
St Peter's NS	SUPERVISION GRANT	4,635.98	30-Oct-2012	Payroll Division
St Peter's NS	SWS 2011-MECHANICAL-BAL OF GRANT	10,028.05	27-Nov-2012	Building Unit Financial
St Peter's NS	CAPITATION GRANT	17,832.50	16-Jan-2013	Schools Division Financial
St Peter's NS	ANCILLARY SERVICES GRANT C49	15,288.00	11-Mar-2013	Schools Division Financial
St Peter's NS	BALANCE (30% & ICT) OF ADDITIONAL ACCOMM. GRANT 2010	95,000.00	08-Apr-2013	Planning Building
St Peter's NS	STANDARDISED TESTING GRANT	530.40	29-Apr-2013	QCAP
St Peter's NS	SCHOOL BOOKS GRANT	1,144.00	30-May-2013	Schools Division Financial
St Peter's NS	CAPITATION GRANT	3,946.50	27-Jun-2013	Schools Division Financial
St Peter's NS	ESCORT REC 12/13 & ADV 13/14	5,072.39	26-Sep-2013	School Transport
St Peter's NS	SUPERVISION GRANT	1,725.01	21-Nov-2013	Payroll Financial Control
St Peter's NS	MINOR WORKS GRANT 2013/14 ENROLMENT	2,201.50	28-Nov-2013	Planning Building
St Peter's NS	MINOR WORKS GRANT 2013/14 FLAT RATE	5,500.00	28-Nov-2013	Planning Building
St Peter's NS	CAPITATION GRANT	14,981.40	14-Jan-2014	Schools Division Financial
St Peter's NS	ANCILLARY SERVICES GRANT C49	14,406.00	21-Mar-2014	Schools Division Financial

School	Description	Amount paid	Payment date	Section name
St Peter's NS	STANDARDISED TESTING GRANT	499.80	29-Apr-2014	Curriculum Assessment
St Peter's NS	SCHOOL BOOKS GRANT	1,078.00	26-May-2014	Schools Division Financial
St Peter's NS	CAPITATION GRANT	5,382.60	17-Jun-2014	Schools Division Financial
St Peter's NS	ESC REC 13-14 ADV 14-15	1,459.38	27-Aug-2014	School Transport
St Peter's NS	ESCORT ADV 14-15	3,492.16	21-Nov-2014	School Transport
St Peter's NS	Minor Works Grant 2014/15 - Enrolment	2,090.50	08-Dec-2014	Planning Building
St Peter's NS	Minor Works Grant 2014/15 - Flat Rate	5,500.00	08-Dec-2014	Planning Building
St Peter's NS	POD IMPLEMENTATION GRANT	147.00	22-Dec-2014	Schools Division Financial

School Accommodation

204. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will review a submission by management of a school (details supplied) in County Kerry for an additional room to cater for rapidly expanding pupil numbers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1892/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I am pleased to confirm that an all-in devolved grant was recently approved for the school to which the Deputy refers. This funding will allow the school to build two additional classrooms and the school has been advised of this decision.

These additional classrooms will greatly enhance the school's accommodation and will meet the school's long-term accommodation needs.

School Funding

205. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason her Department has not sanctioned funding to maintain the third stream in a school (details supplied) in County Kildare despite the clear demand; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1901/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I wish to clarify for the Deputy that the school in question is recognised as a two-stream school by my Department. I also wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is in contact with the school Patron for the primary schools in the area in question regarding pupil enrolments. My Department under-

stands that the Patron is consulting directly with the schools involved, including the school referred to by the Deputy, in relation to the enrolment matters being raised. My Department will continue to liaise with the Patron, who has ultimate responsibility for the governance and management of the schools concerned.

Site Acquisitions

206. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress that has been made in the efforts to secure a permanent site in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1904/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Department has been working in conjunction with Cork County Council to secure a site to provide permanent accommodation for the school to which the Deputy refers. A preferred option has been identified and is being progressed. However, due to the sensitivities associated with land acquisitions generally it is not possible to provide further information at this time.

Student Grant Scheme Appeals

207. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will review a Student Universal Support Ireland application which has been refused in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly under Section 14(4) of the Student Support Act 2011 and Regulation 5 of the Student Support Regulations 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1931/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Under the residency requirement of Section 14(4) of the Student Support Act 2011, a student must have been resident in Ireland for at least 3 of the 5 years immediately prior to commencing an approved course in an approved institution in order to qualify for a grant. However, a student may qualify for a grant, having met the residency requirement during the course of their studies. From the information provided by the Deputy the student referred to would not have satisfied the residency requirement at the commencement of the 2014/15 academic year, however, that condition may be satisfied for 2015/16, should the student continue her studies in that year.

School Placement

208. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to the difficulties that many parents are experiencing in accessing second level schools in and around the catchment area of Harold’s Cross, Mount Argus, Kimmage and Crumlin, Dublin; in view of the planned closure of a school (details supplied), if she will acquire the school site with a view to developing it as a secondary community school, thereby alleviating the burden on families who are experiencing difficulties in enrolling their children in a secondary school in this catchment area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1945/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My Department is aware of the closure of the school to which the Deputy refers. While my Department has no plans at the moment to acquire the school in question, it is currently engaged in a nationwide demographic exercise to determine where additional post-primary school accommodation may be needed from 2016 onwards. The area where the school is located is included in this review. When this

exercise has been completed arrangements will be made to make additional accommodation available where it is needed. Should a new school be required for the area in question, the model of provision will be determined by an open patronage determination process overseen by the New Schools Establishment Group. In the meantime, I understand that school in question is closing on a phased basis. In this regard, it did not enrol first year students for the 2014/15 school year. I also understand that the school will remain open so that the current cohort of junior and senior cycle pupils can finish their programmes. The school authority has informed my Department that it is assisting parents in securing alternative placements for the residue of pupils to ensure a smooth transition for these pupils to another school. The Deputy may wish to know that area concerned has 9 post-primary schools and there is spare capacity in a number of these schools at the moment.

Emergency Works Scheme Applications

209. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a school (details supplied) in County Mayo was not successful in its application for funding for additional accommodation under the emergency works scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1946/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The management authority of the school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application for funding under my Department’s Emergency Works Scheme for the provision of new temporary accommodation and to have works carried to facilitate the enrolment of a special needs pupil. As the provision of additional accommodation is outside the terms of the Emergency Works Scheme it cannot be considered for funding. However, the school authority has been advised to submit a revised application for funding to facilitate the enrolment of the special needs pupil only and as soon as this application is received it will be assessed and the school authority advised of the outcome.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

210. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will review the situation whereby a student who elects to do a course of equal level as a previously completed course is denied any grant aid; her views that this is a highly restrictive factor and that many persons who would like to re-educate themselves are prevented from doing so as a direct result of this restriction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1949/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): To satisfy the terms and conditions of the student grant scheme in relation to progression, a student must be moving from year to year within a course, having successfully completed the previous year or be transferring from one course to another, where the award for the subsequent course is of a higher level than the previous course. The objective of this policy is to help as many students as possible to obtain one qualification at each level of study. Given the level of demand on the student grant budget from first time students and students that are progressing with their studies to a higher level, there are no plans at present to change the arrangements in place. A student holding a qualification would not satisfy the progression requirements of the Scheme on commencing a further programme at the same level. In the context of a person re-educating I would like to draw the Deputy’s attention to Springboard, a specific initiative that strategically targets funding of free part-time higher education courses to enable unemployed people to upskill or reskill in areas where there are identified labour market skills shortages or employment opportunities. The courses, which are at level 6 (higher certificate) to level 9 (master’s degree)

on the National Framework of Qualifications, are being delivered in public and private higher education providers around the country. Tax relief is also available on tuition fees. Details in relation to this relief are available from the Revenue Commissioners. I have no plans at present to change the current arrangements.

Schools Building Projects Status

211. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the construction of a new building for a school (details supplied) in County Galway will commence; when approval to go to tender will be granted to the school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2007/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The major school building project for the school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of architectural planning. The schools Design Team are currently working on Stage 2b - Detailed Design, which involves obtaining planning permission, fire certificate and disability access certificate and the completion of tender documents. When all of the relevant statutory approvals have been obtained and the Stage 2b report submitted and reviewed, the Department will contact the Board of Management with regard to the potential, at that time, for further progression of the project. The project was not included in the 5 year construction programme announced in 2012. It is not possible to progress all projects within the Department’s building programme to construction concurrently due to competing demands on the Department’s capital budget. However, school building projects, including this project, which have not been included in the five year construction programme but which were previously initiated will continue to be progressed to final planning stages in anticipation of the possibility of further funds being available to the Department in the future.

Schools Building Projects Status

212. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary schools that have band 1.1 rating and are at stage 2B detailed design or are having tender documents prepared; the names and addresses of these schools; if it is intended to approve these schools to go to tender this year; if these schools will be included in the list of schools to go to construction in 2015 and 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2008/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Building projects for sixteen Primary Schools have a Band 1.1 Rating and are currently at Stage 2b (Detailed Design) which includes applications for Planning Permission, Fire Safety Certification, Disability Access Certification and the preparation of tender documents. A table noting the details of these schools is attached. Ten of these schools are included in my Department’s five year construction programme to proceed to Tender and Construction. When the Stage 2b Submissions for these projects have been received and assessed, my Department will then be in touch with the relevant school authorities regarding the progression of their projects to tender stage. Due to competing demands on my Department’s capital budget, imposed by the need to prioritise the limited funding available for the provision of additional school accommodation to meet increasing demographic requirements, it was not possible to include the remaining six projects, currently progressing through Stage 2(b), in the current five year construction programme. School building projects, which have been initiated but not included in the current five year construction programme continue to be progressed to final planning stages of architectural planning in anticipation of the possibility of further funds being available to my Department in the future.

These six projects remain available to be considered for progression in that context.

Roll No	School Name, Address	County
13447Q	Scoil Mhuire, Lucan	Dublin Belgard
17705J	SN Cros Ban, Julianstown	Meath
19994G	Gaelscoil Mhic Amhlaigh, Galway City	Galway City
19796C	St Patricks BNS, Clane	Kildare
17961E	SN Lusca, Lusk	Dublin Fingal
20269J	Scoil Chormaic, Linked to new Stephenstown PP	Dublin Fingal
15040T	Mercy Convent Primary School, Naas	Kildare
17949O	SN Pdraig Naofa B	Louth
19608V	Mullagh Central NS, aka St Killians	Cavan
18057F	Scoil Mhuire, Tullamore	Offaly

Projects at Stage 2b with Band 1.1 Listing which are on the 5 Year Construction Programme

Roll No	School Name, Address	County
19545A & 19636D	Corduff NS St Patricks Jnr & Snr	Dublin Fingal
18106P	SN Na Trionoide Naofa, Lios Muilinn	Meath
12954F	SN Bhride, Lackagh, Tur- loughmore	Galway County
19336O	Scoil Phoil Naofa, Doora- doyle, Limerick	Limerick County
16208N	Termonfeckin Mixed NS	Louth
19415K	Scoil An Athar Tadhg, Car- rignavar	Cork County

Projects at Stage 2b with Band 1.1 Listing which are in Architectural Planning but not on the 5 Year Construction Programme.

Third Level Participation

213. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progression rate to third level from post-primary for students from Clondalkin. [2011/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The information requested by the Deputy on progression rates to third level from post-primary by geographic area is not available from my Department. My Department calculates progression rates at overall national level only for the purposes of compiling projections of third level demand.

214. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the school building projects, including extensions and new builds, undertaken in Cork by her Department in each of the past four years; the total amount of money spent on each project; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2064/15]

215. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the school building projects, including extensions and new builds, planned to be undertaken in County Cork over the next three years; the total amount of money allocated to each project; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2065/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 214 and 215 together. The current status of all projects, including those in Cork, may be viewed on my Department’s website at www.education.ie and this will be updated regularly throughout the year. The Deputy will be aware that the 5 year School Plan announced in March 2012, together with the schools announced in June 2013 under the Government’s “investment in Infrastructure & Jobs” package and the schools included in the 2015 construction programme, details the major school projects, including those for Cork, that will commence construction over the duration of my Department’s €2 billion capital investment programme (2012-2016). The primary aim at the core of my Department’s construction programme is focussed on meeting demographic demands to ensure that every child will have access to a physical school place and that our school system is in a position to cope with increasing pupil numbers. In the case of Cork, 43 school projects are listed to proceed to tender and construction over the duration of the programme. For the Deputy’s convenience a list is attached containing details of all Cork major school building projects that have been completed in each of the past four years and the funding allocated in the case of each of these projects. As the Deputy will be aware, all publicly funded projects are subject to public procurement guidelines and a competitive tender process. In that context it is not possible to publish funding allocations until projects are completed. In addition to these major projects, my Department also approves funding on an on-going basis for devolved projects under the Additional Accommodation Scheme in response to applications from schools for funding to meet an immediate accommodation requirement because of increased enrolments and where an additional teacher is being appointed. In addition, the Deputy will be aware of the funding provided under the Prefab Replacement Initiative to replace prefabs with permanent classroom and resource rooms accommodation. Details of schools approved, including those in Cork, can also be found on my Department’s website and are updated regularly. My Department is currently analysing demographic data on a nationwide basis, including the Cork area, to determine where additional school accommodation might be needed from 2015 onwards and to ensure that this is provided in a timely manner.

NEW SCHOOLS COMPLETED

	Roll No	School	Year	Expenditure
1	20354A	Cara Jnr (Special) School, Mayfield	2014	5,419,321.92
2	20435A	St Joseph’s NS & St John’s NS, Kinsale	2014	3,218,420.36
3	17609N	Rathcormac NS, Rathcormac	2013	2,732,114.63
4	20006A	Gaelscoil Chloich na Coillte, Clonakilty	2013	4,212,891.82

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	Roll No	School	Year	Expenditure
5	20310D	Carrigaline ETNS, Carrigaline	2013	4,351,964.58
6	81008W	Ashton Comprehensive School, Blackrock Road	2013	8,843,587.42
7	13450F	Rushbrooke NS, Cobh	2012	4,751,031.04
8	16746S	Ballygarvan NS, Ballygarvan	2012	3,215,161.09
9	17667E	SN Pádraig Naofa, Whitechurch	2012	2,996,470.78
10	19839R	Gaelscoil Uí Riordán, Ballincollig	2012	4,396,306.14
11	20001N	Gaelscoil Bheantraí, Bantry	2011	PPP Bundle 2
12	20105C	Star of the Sea Primary School, Passage West	2011	3,147,808.90
13	76090G	Bantry Community College, Bantry	2011	PPP Bundle 2

LARGE SCALE EXTENSIONS COMPLETED

	Roll No	School	Year	Expenditure
1	17600S	SN na Scairte Leithe, Saleen, Cloyne, Middleton	2014	3,672,540.57
2	19351K	SN Cill Criodain, Ladysbridge	2014	2,386,167.47
3	62690E	Scoil Mhuire, 2 Sydney Place, Wellington Road	2014	2,017,350.37
4	91388S	Carrigaline CS, Waterpark Road, Carrigaline	2014	7,435,897.42
5	20106E	Scoil Nioclais, Frankfield, Grange	2014	6,027,025.65

	Roll No	School	Year	Expenditure
6	20335T	Scoil Phadraig Naofa, Rochestown	2013	2,634,256.76
7	18279A	St. Mary's NS, Waterpark, Carrigaline	2012	779,309.29

School Enrolments

216. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if consideration will be provided under a section 29 appeal in progress in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2091/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I understand from my officials that a section 29 appeal against Kildare Wicklow Education and Training Board (ETB) on behalf of this case has now concluded.

It is now open to the parents of the child in question to take a section 29 appeal to the Secretary General of my Department.

My Department has no authority to compel a school to admit a pupil, except in the case of an appeal under section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 being upheld.

School Enrolments

217. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will indicate, notwithstanding reply to a previous parliamentary question in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare, if consideration will be given to the unsuccessful application regarding enrolment at a school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2094/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I understand from my officials that a section 29 appeal against Kildare Wicklow Education and Training Board (ETB) on behalf of this case has now concluded.

It is now open to the parents of the child in question to take a section 29 appeal to the Secretary General of my Department.

My Department has no authority to compel a school to admit a pupil, except in the case of an appeal under section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 being upheld.

Dormant Accounts Fund Deposits

218. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the current balance in the Dormant Account Fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2028/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Dormant Accounts Acts 2001 to 2012, together with the Unclaimed Life Assurance Policies Act 2003, provide a framework for the administration of unclaimed accounts in credit

institutions (i.e. banks, building societies, An Post and insurance companies) and unclaimed life assurance policies in insurance undertakings. The primary purpose of the legislation is to re-unite the original account holders with their moneys, including all interest due. In addition, the legislation provides that disbursements from the fund may be made for charitable purposes or for purposes of community benefit.

Since its establishment in April 2003 to the end of November 2014, the transfers to the Fund have totalled some €779 million, which includes interest earned of approximately €40.6 million. Funds reclaimed in that period by account holders amounted to around €294.6 million. €301 million of disbursements has been approved, with €252 million already spent on projects designed to benefit the community over the same period. The net value of uncommitted funds is currently €114 million. This does not include a Reserve Fund, currently standing at €65.8 million.

Further data in relation to the Dormant Accounts Fund are available on my Department's website at <http://www.environ.ie/en/Community/DormantAccounts/>.

Irish Water Establishment

219. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding the €100 being provided to all registered members of Irish Water; if it is a rebate to allow Irish Water to be set up as a semi-State company outside of the Government sector as otherwise it would be considered a subsidy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1883/15]

220. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the €100 subsidy to non-registered customers of Irish Water is a thank-you gesture as he has stated or a compulsory gesture in order to get Irish Water off the ground; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1885/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 219 and 220 together.

To promote sustainable use of water and to enhance water conservation in households, the Department of Social Protection will administer, on behalf of my Department, a €100 water conservation grant for households (principal private dwellings) that complete a valid response to Irish Water's customer registration process.

While Irish Water, as part of the transition phase, will have a 'first fix free' scheme to fix customer leaks, it is recognised that some leakage may be internal to the house. The €100 annual water conservation grant can be used in this regard to address issues such as leaking cisterns, dripping taps etc. Equally, households can use the grant towards other conservation measures such as the costs of water butts or installing dual flush toilets or rain water systems, de-sludging septic tanks or maintaining wells to ensure operating efficiency.

The water conservation grant replaces the tax rebate and social protection measures previously announced, as it is a more straightforward means of addressing water issues for all households on equal terms and will reduce households' outlay on water services both now and in the future.

As the Department of Social Protection will administer the grant the process is streamlined and clearer for householders. It is also important that all households have an equal chance to reduce their water consumption in their principal private dwellings. This approach has a num-

ber of policy advantages as it makes water charges more affordable for lower income groups; conservation ensures a better use of our water resources and avoids unnecessary or premature expansion of water treatment plants; and it is environmentally sustainable and protects our water environment which is to the benefit of all citizens.

Library Services

221. **Deputy Michael P. Kitt** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount owed in non-recouped library fees to councils who operate library services; if he will provide the total figure for amounts owed in fines to all local authorities; if he will provide a breakdown of the figures by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1902/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The charging of library fees and levying of fines and all decisions relating to the management of library fines and fees are operational matters for local authorities. Accordingly, the information sought is not available in my Department.

Local Authority Staff Data

222. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the local authorities that have one or more access officers; if the access officers are full-time or part-time positions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1905/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department gathers quarterly data on staff numbers in local authorities. The data gathered do not provide detail in respect of individual grades or job titles within each local authority, and accordingly, the information requested is not available in my Department.

Building Regulations

223. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the steps he will take to ensure that all county development plans prioritise facilitating access for all, in particular for wheelchair users; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1906/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): My Department's Sectorial Plan, as provided for in section 31 of the Disability Act 2005, was developed in consultation with groups representing people with disabilities to assist the Department and local authorities in supporting an inclusive society with accessible buildings, facilities, services and information. In accordance with my Department's Sectorial Plan, all local authorities were required to carry out an accessibility audit in respect of all public spaces, public buildings and services owned and operated by them. In total, my Department provided over €77 million, between 2005 and 2010, to assist local authorities in improving access to public spaces, buildings and services for people with disabilities. Funding was allocated annually for purposes of Disability Services to local authorities, on the basis of priority areas identified by them in implementation plans.

The Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) takes a central role in the implementation of the Disability Strategy in the local government sector and provides a range of advice

and support to local authorities in that regard.

The Building Control Act 1990 and the Building Regulations 1997-2014 set down the minimum, legally enforceable standards that must be applied to the design and construction of buildings including in respect of access and use. The statutory requirements are set out in the relevant parts included under the Second Schedule to the Building Regulations 1997-2014. Technical guidance document Part M demonstrates how the statutory requirements in relation to access and use may be achieved in practice and aims to foster an inclusive approach to the design and construction of the built environment.

Under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, the development plan must set out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area concerned. Section 10 of the Act requires a development plan to include, *inter alia*, objectives for the integration of the planning and sustainable development of the area with the social, community and cultural requirements of the area and its population. Accordingly, planning authorities include objectives in their development plans as appropriate to take significant and inclusive account of relevant statutory obligations including the building regulations.

Given the roles of the Building Control Act 1990, and Regulations made thereunder, and the Development Plan in specifying requirements and standards in relation to sustainable development generally, inclusive of access related matters, I am satisfied that the building control and planning processes fully support enhancement of access for all.

Local Authority Housing Eligibility

224. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the criteria for awarding medical priority for local authority housing lists. [1935/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): Decisions as to the priority to be awarded to individual households in the allocation of dwellings are a matter for the housing authority concerned, having regard to section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and the associated Social Housing Allocation Regulations 2011. This legislation requires all housing authorities, as a reserved function, to make an allocation scheme determining the order of priority to be accorded in the allocation of dwellings to households qualified for social housing support and to households in receipt of such support that have been approved for a transfer to another dwelling provided by a local authority or approved housing body.

Under the legislation, a housing authority may provide in its allocation scheme that it shall obtain, and have regard to, a report from a medical practitioner employed by the Health Service Executive in allocating dwellings where priority is claimed on grounds consisting of, or including, exceptional medical grounds. A housing authority may also disregard the priority provided under its allocation scheme in specified exceptional circumstances, including where a household is being allocated social housing support on exceptional medical grounds.

Foreshore Issues

225. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his Department will facilitate the removal of gravel from a river (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1961/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The removal of gravel from the foreshore requires consent under section 3 of the Foreshore Act 1933. Details of how to make such an application can be found at <http://www.environ.ie/en/Foreshore/ApplyingforaForeshoreConsent/>.

Homelessness Strategy

226. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding responses to the issues of homelessness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2005/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): On 20 May 2014, the Implementation Plan on the State's Response to Homelessness was published in which the Government's approach to delivery on its objective of ending involuntary long-term homelessness by the end of 2016 was outlined. A copy of this plan is available on my Department's website at, <http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/SpecialNeeds/HomelessPeople/>.

This plan sets out a range of measures to secure a ring-fenced supply of accommodation to house homeless households within the next three years and mobilise the necessary supports. Progress in implementing the plan is reported quarterly through the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform and a copy of the Quarter 3 2014 Progress Report is also available on my Department's website at the link provided above.

On 4 December 2014, I hosted a special Summit on Homelessness to reaffirm the Government's commitment to end involuntary long-term homelessness by the end of 2016. The Summit was attended by Oireachtas members, elected members and officials from the four Dublin Local Authorities, representatives from Government Departments, State Agencies and the NGO sector, and the Catholic and Church of Ireland Archbishops of Dublin.

A number of actions arising from the Summit were considered at the meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform on 8 December and were then formalised into an Action Plan to Address Homelessness which was noted by the Government at its meeting on 9 December 2014. In addition to those actions which constitute an immediate response to the issue of rough sleeping in Dublin, actions have been identified which tackle the more systemic issues, classified under the three categories of the 'housing-led' approach. A copy of this action plan is available on my Department's website at the link provided above. Progress in implementing this plan was considered by the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform at its meeting on 17 December.

The long-term solution to homelessness is to increase the supply of homes. In November 2014, I launched the Government's Social Housing Strategy. This six-year strategy sets out to provide 35,000 new social housing units at a cost of €3.8 billion and restores the State to a central role in the provision of social housing through a resumption of direct building on a significant scale by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies.

Water Quality

227. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans for a scheme to deal with contaminated water in housing estates (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2023/15]

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. Under the European Communities (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014, suppliers of drinking water, including Irish Water, are required to ensure that the water supplied complies with the chemical and microbiological parameters set out in the Regulations. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the supervisory authority with responsibility for monitoring Irish Water's compliance with these Regulations. In the event of non-compliance with the quality standards set out in the Regulations, the water supplier is required to investigate the cause in consultation with the EPA and, if a potential risk to human health exists, with the Health Service Executive (HSE), to ensure that the appropriate remedial action is taken.

Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. I have no responsibility for, or role in relation to, the management, operation or maintenance of water services infrastructure. The Water Services Act 2007 provides that where a property is connected to a public water or wastewater system the property owner is responsible for the maintenance and replacement of any water or wastewater pipes, connections or distribution systems which are connected within the boundary of the premises. The introduction of a grants scheme for any purpose must be managed within current budgetary constraints and, insofar as the funds administered by my Department are concerned, there are no plans to introduce a scheme in relation to the replacement of lead pipes within housing estates.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Funding

228. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his Department has received submissions from Kildare County Council in respect of the Kilmacreddock/Barrogstown group sewerage scheme; if his attention has been drawn to comments by the proposers; when he will be in a position to approve the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2049/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Responsibility for the administration of the Rural Water Programme, which includes group sewerage schemes, has been devolved to local authorities since 1997.

The annual block grant allocations provided by my Department to the local authorities under the programme are based, in the first instance, on the requests for funding received from the authorities at the beginning of each year. The authorities' requests for funding under the 2015 Rural Water Programme, received this month, are being examined by my Department with a view to informing authorities of their 2015 allocations as soon as possible.

Kildare County Council's request for funding, which includes reference to Barrogstown & Kilmacreddock group sewerage scheme, will be considered as part of this examination.

Departmental Expenditure

229. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the total amount of money allocated by his Department for the housing adaptation grant for people with a disability in each of the past four years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2057/15]

230. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and

Local Government the total amount of money allocated by his Department for the mobility aids grant scheme in each of the past four years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2058/15]

231. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the total amount of money allocated by his Department for the housing aid for older people scheme in each of the past four years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2059/15]

232. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the total amount of money allocated by his Department to Cork City and County Councils for the housing adaptation grant for people with a disability in each of the past four years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2060/15]

233. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the total amount of money allocated by his Department to Cork City and County Councils for the mobility aids grant scheme in each of the past four years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2061/15]

234. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the total amount of money allocated by his Department to Cork City and County Councils for the housing aid for older people scheme in each of the past four years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2062/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey) (Deputy Paudie Coffey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 229 to 234, inclusive, together.

Under the terms of the suite of Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability, which is administered by the local authorities, grants are available to assist households with specific needs to have necessary repairs or improvement works carried out in order to facilitate the continued independent occupancy of their homes. Three separate schemes are available - the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability, the Mobility Aids Grant Scheme and the Housing Aid for Older People Scheme. The schemes are 80% funded by my Department, with a 20% contribution from the local authority. The Exchequer funding provided by my Department for the last 4 years across the three measures is set out in Table 1 below. The funding for Cork City and County for these measures over the same period is in Table 2.

Table 1 **Overall Funding**

-	Housing Adaptation Grant	Mobility Aids Grant Scheme	Housing Aid for Older People
2014	€17.385m	€5.569m	€13.498m
2013	€20.885m	€5.548m	€11.247m
2012	€26.147m	€6.764m	€19.910m
2011	€27.696m	€6.383m	€27.102m

Table 2 **Cork City/County Funding**

-	Housing Adaptation Grant	Mobility Aids Grant Scheme	Housing Aid for Older People
2014	€1.644m	€0.488m	€2.733m

-	Housing Adaptation Grant	Mobility Aids Grant Scheme	Housing Aid for Older People
2013	€2.401m	€0.882m	€1.713m
2012	€2.436m	€1.044m	€4.563m
2011	€2.376m	€0.836m	€4.521m

Local Government Reform

235. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the savings expected to be generated over the next five years by the reduction in the number of councillors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2063/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Details of payments to individual councillors, which are not available in my Department, would be required in order to provide a reasonably accurate estimate of the savings arising on account of the reduction of the number of councillors. Notwithstanding this, it is estimated that the savings involved will amount to approximately €3.7 million per annum. However, this is a very tentative estimate and it is difficult to disaggregate the savings, for example in relation to the annual expenses allowance as there are a number of variables such as varying distances of elected members' places of residence from local authority head offices. More detailed information could be sought from individual local authorities.

Air Pollution

236. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the reason for the delay in designating Maynooth, County Kildare, in the smokeless fuel zone, in view of the fact that Kildare County Council sought Maynooth's inclusion two years ago; and if he will now make the regulation to include Maynooth under the Air Pollution Act (Manufacture, Sale, Distribution and Burning of Specific Fuels) Regulations. [2115/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The main provisions of the ban on the marketing, sale, distribution and burning of bituminous solid fuels (or 'smoky coal ban' as it is commonly known) were last reviewed in 2012, following a public consultation exercise. Following this review, all towns with populations greater than 15,000 people were added to the smoky coal ban, which aligned the ban more closely with EPA air quality monitoring zones and provided for greater consistency in air quality standards for major urban areas. In addition, the boundaries of most pre-existing ban areas were reviewed to take account of more recent urban development and census data. In County Kildare, the review resulted in amendments to the boundaries of the ban areas in Naas, Celbridge and Leixlip as well as the addition of the town of Newbridge, with effect from May 2013. No change was made to the status of Maynooth then, as the population of the town was below the threshold for compulsory inclusion and no representation was made at that time for the ban to be further extended elsewhere in the county.

Kildare County Council subsequently voted in favour of a motion calling for the extension of the ban to Maynooth and wrote to inform my Department of this in June 2013. This motion was supported by the Health Service Executive. My Department requested that the local authority place a notice of this proposal in local newspapers to allow for a period of consultation. A notice was subsequently placed by the local authority and no objections were received. My Department then agreed to address this proposal as part of the next update to the Principal

Regulations made under the Air Pollution Act.

Having considered this proposal, my Department considers that there is merit in extending the clean air benefits of the ban to the town of Maynooth, given its size, fast-growing population and close proximity to the existing specified ban area of Celbridge-Leixlip. Accordingly, I intend to finalise, shortly, regulations that will extend the ban area of Celbridge–Leixlip to include the Electoral Division of Maynooth with effect from 1 June 2015. This lead-in period will allow time for businesses and households to change over to smokeless fuel as well as for the local authority to raise awareness of the main provisions of the ban at local level in advance of its introduction.

Semi-State Bodies Remuneration

237. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide in tabular form the performance related awards made to chief executives of semi-State companies in 2013 and 2014 under the aegis of his Department. [2322/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The non-commercial semi state agencies under the aegis of my Department do not make bonus payments to the Chief Executives. The Water Services Act 2013 provided for the establishment of Irish Water as a subsidiary of Bord Gáis Éireann to be formed and registered under the Companies Act. The Managing Director of Irish Water was appointed by the Board of Bord Gáis Éireann, and his remuneration was approved by my predecessor as Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and following consultation with the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources . The remuneration of the Managing Director does not provide for a performance related pay award.

Television Licences Data

238. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide in tabular form the number of television licences that were purchased by county in 2014; the total amount paid to RTE from the moneys collected for television licences in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1894/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): €213.3 million was received in respect of television licence fee sales and ‘free’ licences issued by the Department of Social Protection. As the Deputy will be aware, An Post receives a portion of licence fee revenue to cover the cost of its activities as the Minister’s issuing and collecting agent for TV licences.

Under the provisions of the Broadcasting Act 2009, 7% of net licence fee revenue is distributed to the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) for onward distribution via the Broadcasting Funding Scheme to assist independent producers and broadcasters in the development of appropriate audiovisual and sound broadcasting programmes, as well as archiving projects. The remaining funds are distributed to the public service broadcasters, RTÉ and TG4. The total amount of funding allocated from licence fee income in 2014 to RTÉ was €178.8m.

While data on licence sales per county is not available, I can confirm that the total number of direct sales in 2014 was 1,018,370.

Broadband Service Provision

239. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will fast-track State investment in improving the rural broadband network, as rural areas are suffering serious disadvantage as a result of not having adequate broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1964/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The National Broadband Plan aims to ensure that every citizen and business, regardless of location, has access to a high quality, high speed broadband service. This will be achieved through a combination of commercial investments and a State led intervention in areas where commercial services will not be provided. The commercial telecommunications sector is currently investing approximately €2.5 billion in network upgrades. Approximately 1.6 million of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland are expected to have access to commercial high speed broadband services over the next two years. These very significant investments represent a step-change in the quality of broadband services available.

On the 24 November last, a public consultation on a national high speed coverage map 2016 was launched. The map can be accessed at www.broadband.gov.ie. The areas on the map marked Blue will all have access to high speed broadband services of at least 30mbps from the commercial sector by end of 2016. The areas marked Amber will require the intervention of the State.

The map allows all members of the public, be they business or residential, to see whether their premises / home will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016 or whether they will be included in the Government's proposed intervention. It also provides detailed information on over 50,000 townlands in every county in Ireland.

It is anticipated that speeds of at least 30Mbps will be also delivered through the Government's intervention and the network will be designed to cater for future increased demand from consumers and business.

The next steps in this process will see a further public consultation on a detailed intervention strategy in mid-2015. This is a requirement under EU state aid rules. A detailed procurement process will be undertaken in order to select a potential preferred bidder(s) towards the end of 2015. In this regard the Department will design a tender in a way that maximises efficiencies and keeps the cost to taxpayers as low as possible. It is expected that the physical build of this network will commence from 2016.

This is a large and complex project and we need to get it right. Our aim is to deliver high-quality, high speed broadband infrastructure that will stand the test of time. This requires careful planning. This complex and ambitious project is a key priority for Government. It aims to conclusively address current connectivity challenges in Ireland.

Inland Fisheries

240. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide details of plans for 2015 for a fishery (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1977/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh) (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Annascaul River system, also

known as the Owenascaul River, in County Kerry is classified, in the Conservation of Salmon and Sea trout (Catch & Release) Bye-law No. 929 of 2014, as open for fishing on a Catch and Release basis, for the 2015 season, The Byelaw relates to fishing for all salmon and also any sea trout over 40cm in length. A person is allowed to fish for, and take, any sea trout under 40cm in length or any brown trout, subject to national and local bag limits and fishing permissions.

In fishing for any species of fish in this river it is prohibited to use or attempt to use worms as bait and it is prohibited to use or attempt to use any type of hooks except single, barbless hooks. These provisions assist in the Catch and Release classification by minimising impact on the fish ahead of release.

The open season for fishing for salmon runs from 17th March to 30th September inclusive. The open season for fishing for sea trout or brown trout runs from 17th March to 12th October inclusive.

The suite of regulations for the 2015 fishing season are publically available my Department's website at, <http://www.dcenr.gov.ie/Natural/Inland+Fisheries/Legislation/>

Offshore Exploration

241. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his expectations for Ireland's offshore oil industry in 2015; his plans to generate increased economic activity in this area during 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1978/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh) (Deputy Joe McHugh): Ireland has a very clear strategy in respect of the Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration sector, key elements of which are: to seek to maximise the benefits to the people of Ireland from its indigenous natural resources; to provide opportunities and encourage private industry to take the risk associated with investing in exploration; to take initiatives to deepen knowledge of the potential of Ireland's offshore, in particular through supporting key research projects; and to seek to have a robust regulatory regime in place to ensure that activities are carried out in a safe manner that does not harm the environment. Recent years have seen an increase in interest in the potential of the Irish Offshore as evidenced by:

- Today, Ireland has the highest number of exploration authorisations in place, since exploration began in our offshore four decades ago; and

- The level of seismic acquisition has risen significantly with more 2D and 3D seismic acquired in the period 2013 to 2014 than in the preceding ten years combined.

Despite the low level of commercial discoveries to date, working petroleum systems are known to exist in many of Ireland's offshore basins. Nevertheless, the oil and gas potential of the Irish offshore is largely unproven and is likely to remain so until there is a significant and sustained increase in the number of exploration wells being drilled from the current levels of 1 or less wells per year.

Ireland competes for exploration investment and there have been significant changes in petroleum markets over the past year, however it is anticipated that drilling levels will increase from a low base over the next two to five years, as drilling commitments now in place are delivered and as new drilling commitments are entered into following on from decisions made by companies currently investing in seismic acquisition.

With regard to production, it is estimated that construction of the onshore section of the Corrib gas field pipeline will shortly be completed, with first gas anticipated in mid-2015. With successful exploration and development, Ireland has potential to benefit from its natural resources of oil and gas in terms of taxation of profits, strengthened energy security of supply and from the economic activity generated through the construction and production phases of any new development. I understand that more than 1,000 jobs have been generated over the past five years in respect of the development of the Corrib field.

What we are witnessing in our offshore is positive and there is a clear forward momentum. The Government's intention is that momentum should be maintained in 2015.

In that regard my Department will progress a broad range of initiatives during 2015 including:

- Promotion of the 2015 Atlantic Margin Licensing Round which closes in September 2015 and includes all of Ireland's major Atlantic basins.

- Completion of Irish Offshore Strategic Environmental Assessment (IOSEA) 5 encompassing the Atlantic Margin basins offshore west of Ireland together with the Fastnet, Celtic Sea and Kish Basins offshore south and east of Ireland. The purpose of IOSEA 5 will be to assess any potential impacts on the marine environment associated with activities conducted under petroleum exploration and production authorisations, including any new authorisations awarded under the 2015 Atlantic Margin Licensing Round; and

- Working with the Department of Finance and the Revenue Commissioners to give operational effect in the Finance Bill 2015 to revised oil and gas fiscal arrangements arising out of the recommendations of the Wood Mackenzie Report published in June 2014.

Wind Energy Generation

242. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he has requested a report on the recent mechanical failures witnessed at wind farms on the island of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2015/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): I am advised that this matter relates to an incident at Tursillagh wind farm in Co. Kerry in which a blade became detached from a turbine. My officials have contacted the wind farm operator who has advised that the incident is being investigated. The operator has sought a report from the turbine manufacturer and has agreed to keep my officials informed of developments. My Department has also been in contact with the Health and Safety Authority (HSA), the agency with responsibility for workplace safety under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005. It should be noted however that a 'place of work' as described in that Act would only cover wind turbines during their construction or during any maintenance that might need to be undertaken thereafter. Nevertheless, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, under whose aegis the HSA operates, has advised that the Authority is aware of the incident and is also making enquiries with the operator of the farm to establish the facts and consider any future action.

Semi-State Bodies Remuneration

243. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide in tabular form the performance related awards made to chief exec-

utives of semi-State companies in 2013 and 2014 under the aegis of his Department. [2321/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White):

All directions issued by the Government in relation to remuneration of CEOs in semi-State Companies have been brought to the attention of the relevant State Companies. While the information sought by the Deputy regarding payments made to CEOs in semi-State Companies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each company, I will ask the bodies to provide this information directly to the Deputy.

Coast Guard Services

244. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans regarding the future of the Gweedore coast guard service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1888/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The principle roles of the Bunbeg volunteer Coast Guard Unit (CGU), located in the Gweedore area, are to operate a rescue boat, for which a new nine meter RIB (Rigid Inflatable Boat) was provided in 2011, and provision of a shoreline search team.

A Value for Money review of the Coast Guard service, published in 2012, recommended the continuation of boat and shoreline rescue service and cessation of cliff training for this unit, while retaining cliff rescue services in neighbouring CGU's, Mulroy and Killybegs. The recommendation arose principally because of the non-utilisation of the cliff service balanced against the safety considerations of delivering a highly technical and intrinsically hazardous activity.

The Coast Guard, having monitored the demand for cliff rescue services has noted that the level of call outs responded to by Bunbeg CGU does not justify the maintenance of a cliff rescue service. Since the establishment of a cliff rescue service in the late 90's, the team has not been called upon to intervene in any lifesaving cliff recovery incident. For a CGU to engage in a high risk activity that demands a high level of resources in terms of training time, equipment and supervision, the benefits must clearly outweigh the risks. The maintenance of a cliff rescue team has been deprioritised, thus enabling the unit to concentrate on its boat rescue and shoreline search operations, which are regularly called into action. The investment which my Department has made in the Coast Guard rescue helicopter services has mitigated some of the demands for cliff rescue services.

The Bunbeg CGU will continue to be a well-resourced team and I have recently provided a new off-road vehicle to support its roles. Enhancement of boat rescue services and shoreline search by the unit will continue to be the priority based on need and risk.

Tourism Policy

245. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on Fáilte Ireland disposing of a premises of integral importance to tourism in the west Cork region (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to and his further views on the comprehensive proposals put forward by an organisation to his Department to utilise the premises; the expenditure incurred by the State when originally purchasing-acquiring the premises; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1942/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The acquisition

and disposal of the property or consideration of proposals for alternative use of the premises are operational matters for the Board and management of Fáilte Ireland.

However for the information of the Deputy, I understand that the property in question came into the ownership of Fáilte Ireland following its amalgamation with the South-West Regional Tourism Authority, which had been leasing the premises to an independent third party organisation since the 1970s. In 2013, however, this organisation surrendered its lease back to Fáilte Ireland although it had not yet run full-term.

As the Deputy may be aware, the role of Fáilte Ireland is to support the tourism industry and work to sustain Ireland as a high-quality and competitive tourism destination. Neither the operation of tourism attractions nor the leasing of facilities or land to third parties are core functions of the Agency and it has in recent years been seeking to rationalise its property portfolio. The breaking of the lease afforded Fáilte Ireland the opportunity to sell the property and rationalise its portfolio, thereby generating capital funds and reducing operating costs.

Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's Question to them for further information and direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Greenway Development

246. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on establishing a funding scheme for local authorities planning to carry out feasibility studies on possible new greenway or cycle and walkway routes, such as the possibility of extending the planned Glenbeigh to Renard Greenway from Glenbeigh to Killorglin and-or Farranfore, Kerry Airport and Fossa; his further views that funding feasibility studies would be of great assistance to the planning of future greenways; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1958/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The establishment of a funding scheme under which local authorities can apply to undertake feasibility studies for possible new greenways-cycle routes is a very worthwhile proposal.

My Department established such a funding scheme in 2013 in advance of the 2014-2016 National Cycle Network Funding (NCN) call. The purpose of this scheme was to make available some 'seed finance' to a small number of authorities to undertake initial project planning, design or necessary studies for which the authority would not otherwise have had the financial resources and which would enable the authority to be well placed to submit a developed proposal under the upcoming funding call.

28 authorities responded to my Department's invitation to submit an expression of interest under this scheme submitting a total of 33 proposals. 12 proposals were selected and shared in funding of €420,000. Kerry County Council were awarded €50,000 to undertake an environmental and geotechnical assessment for the Glenbeigh to Reenard Trail which subsequently received funding under the NCN 2014-2016 and Stimulus funding programmes.

Given that all funding under the NCN programme is now fully committed to end 2016 a repeat of this scheme cannot be considered at present.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

247. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the situ-

ation regarding a sports capital grant in respect of a club (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1962/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): As I previously informed the Deputy, the Department would be happy to consider such a request. However, the club referred to by the Deputy has not actually made any such request. The designated club contact should therefore contact the Sports Capital Unit in Killarney to discuss the issue in detail as soon as possible. The club will of course have to meet certain standard grant terms and conditions and these will be outlined when they contact the Sports Capital Unit.

Tourism Industry

248. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will visit the northern hemisphere's only gold standard dark sky reserve in south Kerry in view of the tourism potential that exists arising from this designation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1971/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have noted with great interest, the designation by the International Dark-Sky Association of an area of almost 700 square kilometres on the Iveragh Peninsula, County Kerry, as the first International Dark Sky Reserve in Ireland. I know that the Kerry International Dark-Sky Reserve, which has been supported by Fáilte Ireland and Kerry County Council, is currently one of only three Gold Tier Dark-Sky Reserves in the world and the only one in the northern hemisphere. I agree that such a designation can benefit tourism in the region and can confirm that the tourism agencies are promoting the Reserve accordingly.

I have yet to experience all that the Reserve has to offer and should be happy to accept the Deputy's invitation to view the sky-scapes in South Kerry. In this regard, I would ask that the Deputy please make direct contact with my Private Office to see if a visit could be incorporated into my schedule.

Road Projects Status

249. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress that is expected on a roads project (details supplied) in County Kerry in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1973/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects such as the N86 is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Public Transport Provision

250. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the provision of a bus shelter at a location (details supplied) in County Kerry;

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1974/15]

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). In addition their functions have been extended to 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.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

251. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he expects the 2015 sports capital programme to open for applications; the budget for the programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1976/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): Detailed preparations are being made at present for the next round of the Sports Capital Programme. I will launch the 2015 Programme when these are complete.

Public Transport

252. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the savings anticipated in 2015 compared with 2014 by Dublin Bus, Bus Éireann and Irish Rail as a result of reduced oil prices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1981/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The issue raised is a matter for Córas Iompair Éireann (CIÉ) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to CIÉ for direct reply.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Cycling Facilities Funding

253. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the possible provision of further funding for greenways that did not receive funding allocations in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1986/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): All available funding within my Department for the development of greenways/cycleways is now fully committed up to 2016.

However, it is likely, given the popularity and success of greenways already delivered, that funding may become available from other sources over the coming years. The EU Structural Funds Programme 2014-2020 is currently being finalised and there may be significant opportunities for cycle infrastructure development under INTERREG and the Rural Development Programmes. I understand that a number of local authorities are now positioning themselves to benefit from such opportunities.

Rail Network

254. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding a disused railway line (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1987/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The issue raised is a matter for Córas Iompair Éireann (CIÉ) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to CIÉ for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Public Transport Subsidies

255. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the passenger numbers, running costs and infrastructure costs that are supplied to him by Iarnród Éireann to enable him to make a decision on the provision of a subsidy to that company; the criteria used in deciding this subsidy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2006/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded 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.

Forbairt Pobail Áitiúla

256. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Brendan Griffin** den an Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cad é an scéal is déanaí maidir leis an ionad nua teanga i mBaile an Fheirtéaraigh, Co. Chiarraí, cad atá ar siúl maidir leis an bhforbairt faoi láthair, cathain a bheidh gach rud críochnaithe, cén méid airgid atá caite ag an bpointe seo agus cén méid atá fós le caitheamh; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [1940/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Tá an obair thógála ar an Lárionad Forbartha Teanga i mBaile an Fheirtéaraigh beagnach críochnaithe ag an bpointe seo, seachas roinnt mionoibreacha atá á ndéanamh faoi láthair. Tá Comharchumann Forbartha Chorca Dhuibhne bogtha isteach san fhoirgneamh ó thús mhí na Samhna 2014 agus bhog an naíonra isteach ann i mí na Nollag 2014. Tuigtear dom go bhfuil Údarás na Gaeltachta ag lorg tionóntaí do na haonaid fiontraíochta atá faoina gcúram san fhoirgneamh. Tuigtear dom fosta gurb é an caiteachas iomlán go dáta ar an bhfoirgneamh ná €3.045 milliún, móide cáin bhreisluacha. Ceadaíodh deontas de €1,746,765 in 2013 ó mo Roinnse chun an Lárionad Forbartha Teanga a thógáil i gcomhar le hÚdarás na Gaeltachta agus le Comharchumann Forbartha Chorca Dhuibhne. Tá €1,362,491 de sciar mo Roinne íoctha ag an bpointe seo. Íocfar an fuilleach nuair a bheidh an obair críochnaithe, na dearbhuithe agus na teastais chúil curtha ar fáil, agus gníomhas iontaobhais réitithe, aontaithe agus sínithe idir mo Roinn agus an Comharchumann.

Ní miste a lua gur ceadaíodh deontas de €26,197 ó mo Roinnse in 2014 chun cur ar chumas an Chomharchumainn fearais áirithe oifige a cheannach, mar aon le deontas de €36,000 i leith trealamh don Ionad Tacaíochta Teaghlaigh.

257. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Brendan Griffin** den an Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil aon phleananna aici chun an lárionad gnó folamh sa Chlochán, Co. Chiarraí, a fhorbairt, cad atá ar siúl maidir leis an bhforbairt faoi láthair, cathain a cheannaigh Údarás na Gaeltachta an lárionad, cén méid airgid atá caite air ag an bpointe seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [1941/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Tuigim ó Údarás na Gaeltachta nach bhfuil aon lárionad gnó i seilbh na heagraíochta ar an gClochán i gCo. Chiarraí.

National Gallery

258. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the position regarding the National Gallery renovation project; the expected timeframe for the conclusion of works; the total anticipated cost and actual cost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1983/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Work is continuing on the major restoration project at the National Gallery of Ireland. The project will include the repair and restoration of the fabric of the Dargan and Milltown Wings, infill of the voids between the wings and the installation of 21st century climate, heating, fire suppression and lighting systems amongst other things. The Office of Public Works, the National Gallery of Ireland and my Department are cooperating on the oversight of this project - which has an expected 24 month duration and a cost of €31.4 million. This is a sizable and historic restoration and upgrade project. It will bring the National Gallery of Ireland back up to international standards and allow it to again present world-class exhibits in a world-class setting.

Census of Population Publication

259. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the progress in respect of the publication of the 1923 census; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2122/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The *Programme for Government* contains a commitment to enabling the publication of the 1926 Census records in due course. The digitisation of the 1901 and 1911 Census returns, which in relative terms was a simpler project than the proposed 1926 Census project, took over four years to complete. The 1926 Census is the next full set of Census records, after the 1911 returns, which is available to the State. However, current legislative provisions, as contained in the Statistics Act 1993, require that census data must be withheld for 100 years. Accordingly, it is not possible at this time to release the 1926 Census returns before the statutory period has elapsed in 2026. If the records were to be released before the expiry of 100 years, a major change in legislation and policy would be required to allow for the early release. This is not currently being proposed.

A 1926 Census Working Group has been formed, comprising officials from my own Department, the National Archives and the Central Statistics Office. The Group has examined this complex project and has assessed the significant resources - in terms of additional financial, staff and infrastructural resources - that will need to be in place to move the project forward to completion. I can say that, following discussions within the Working Group, I am of the opinion that the extensive preparatory work required to prepare the 1926 Census database for process-

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ing, and eventual digitisation to facilitate the release of the data into the public domain, should continue. It must be recognised, however, that, in light of the level of additional resources that will be necessary, and of the current engagement by the National Archives on a number of other important projects, including some that form a key part of the programme for the Decade of Commemorations, it will be necessary to work over time towards building the necessary capacity to undertake and oversee the 1926 Census project.