

Written Answers.

The following are questions tabled by Members for written response and the ministerial replies as received on the day from the Departments [unrevised].

Questions Nos. 1 to 6, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 7 to 113, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 114 to 120, inclusive, answered orally.

Industrial Disputes

121. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on the scheduled teachers' strike on junior certificate reforms. [3371/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I have met with the Teacher Unions and also the other education partners on a number of occasions since my appointment as Minister last summer.

In November 2014, I tabled what I believe is a fair and reasonable proposal. The Unions did not accept my proposal but acknowledged that it was significant. After both teacher strikes, in December and last week, I noted that their strike action was disproportionate and unnecessary.

The current dispute will not be resolved on the picket line. It will be resolved, I believe, through dialogue.

In fact, at our latest meeting, on Wednesday 14th January, it was agreed that dialogue was the best way forward, yet the 22 January strike went ahead anyway.

Dr Padraic Travers, who is facilitating the discussions between the Unions and the Department, has contacted both sides and has proposed further talks to commence later this week.

I welcome this opportunity for further dialogue. My Department will engage in these talks in a constructive manner.

Question No. 122 answered orally.

Value for Money Reviews

123. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the value for money review of small rural schools will be published; the reason for the delay in doing so; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3262/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The report of the value

for money review of small primary schools will be published as soon as my Government colleagues and I have finalised our consideration of the report and its recommendations. I am not in a position to give a precise publication date at this time.

Educational Disadvantage

124. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to include schools built in disadvantaged areas after the commencement of the DEIS programme in the programme; when such schools are likely to be considered for addition to this programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3261/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My key priority at present in relation to educational disadvantage is to continue to maintain and prioritise resources for schools with the most concentrated levels of disadvantage. The last Budget included an increase in spending on education for the first time in recent years, amounting to additional funding of €60m during 2015.

This funding will be used to provide 1,700 additional teachers and SNAs for our schools, as well as to fund prioritised reforms, such as implementation of the literacy and numeracy strategy, reform of junior cycle, and the introduction of education focussed pre-school inspections.

As the Deputy may be aware, the DEIS programme has been the subject of ongoing evaluation by both the Educational Research Centre and my Department's Inspectorate to assess its impact.

An overall report on the Learning from DEIS is also being prepared by the Economic and Social Research Institute which will draw together the main findings of research to date and provide advice to inform future policy to combat educational disadvantage, including DEIS. This report is currently being finalised and I expect to receive it in the coming weeks.

Questions Nos. 125 and 126 answered orally.

Language Schools

127. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she has had discussions with the Department of Justice and Equality on the matter of the recent High Court ruling on English language schools; and if she will provide an update on this matter. [3351/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The judgment in relation to legal proceedings challenging some aspects of the planned reforms to international education was received on Tuesday 13th January, and since that point, I have been involved in a number of discussions on this matter.

The range of options that are available to progress the reforms in a manner consistent with the High Court decision and without prejudice to a possible appeal are being considered by the Department of Justice and Equality in close conjunction with my Department.

The Government is committed to maintaining Ireland's reputation as a high quality destination for international students and will continue to implement all necessary reforms to protect that reputation.

Site Acquisitions

128. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress that has been made on site acquisitions for the provision of two new primary schools (details supplied) in Midleton, County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3348/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Carrigtwohill/ Midleton area is projected by my Department’s Forward Planning section to undergo significant increases in educational demand in the coming years. In that context, projects to provide permanent buildings for Gaelscoil Mhainistir na Corann and Midleton Educate Together National School were included in the five year school building programme. In December I announced that the projects for these schools are expected to proceed to construction this year.

In line with the Memorandum of Understanding which formalises the local authorities’ part in securing sites for educational use, my Department has worked with Cork County Council to identify suitable sites for these two schools. Sites have been identified and the conveyancing process is underway in both cases. In tandem with completion of the conveyancing process, the projects are being progressed under the Department’s Design and Build programme. A project manager has been appointed and plans for the schools are underway.

School Guidance Counsellors

129. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she is satisfied with the current system regarding guidance counselling services in second level schools, in view of the fact that since 2011 the guidance provision is managed from within the standard teacher allocation, requiring principals to use their individual discretion in balancing subject provision and guidance counselling needs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3374/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The decision to provide for guidance from within the overall staffing allocation was a budget measure the alternative to which was to continue with a separate allocation for guidance and to reduce the general allocation. I believe that in a difficult time of reduced resources it was better to give schools flexibility in how best to use the available resources.

I do not believe there is any problem in having a system that includes guidance within having an overall allocation. That said, I am firmly of the belief that schools must use their allocations to support all of their students, including by offering appropriate guidance, counselling and pastoral care.

I believe that the change that is needed is to improve the general allocation of staff to our schools. The last Budget included an increase in spending on education for the first time in recent years, amounting to additional funding of €60m during 2015. I am determined that education will be prioritised for further investment in future years, and I believe that increasing the staffing and funding of our schools should be priorities for such investment.

Schools Data

130. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will demonstrate the figures which her Department is relying on to determine forward planning in north Kildare, in particular with regard to achieving a balanced diversity of choice; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3372/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The detailed data sought for the specific area in question are being compiled. I will arrange for the data to be sent to the Deputy directly.

In relation to overall school provision in that area the position is that with the addition of both planned and recently delivered infrastructural provision in the north Kildare area, the existing schools between them are expected to be able to cater for the overall level of demand for places. This may result in pupils not obtaining a place of first choice.

The Department is not in a position to duplicate provision in such areas in light of the demand on a nationwide basis to provide some 152,000 extra school places to ensure that every child in the country has access to a physical school place in the coming years.

Departmental Properties

131. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if adequate funding will be provided to maximise the potential of the apprenticeship training centre in Mount Lucas, County Westmeath; the rent that is being paid to Bord na Móna for the property; the duration of the lease; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3341/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The National Construction Training Centre in Mount Lucas caters for construction plant training. There is currently a lease on the site for 9 years and 11 months at an annual cost of €10,000, exclusive of VAT. It is due to expire in September 2017.

The facility is the only recognised training centre in Ireland to test plant drivers for the equivalent UK certification, which means plant operators are certified as being competent both in Ireland and the UK to operate plant machinery.

The centre has recently set up a certification unit which processes construction skills certificates for Dublin and Midland counties. In excess of 2,000 learners were certified through this unit in 2014.

A proposal to convert Mount Lucas from a training facility to a national assessment centre for construction plant and related health and safety courses is under consideration and consultation is underway with relevant stakeholders.

Language Schools

132. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the action she will be taking following the recent court decision in relation to language schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3356/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The judgment in relation to legal proceedings challenging some aspects of the planned reforms to international education was received on Tuesday 13th January.

The range of options that are available to progress the reforms in a manner consistent with the High Court decision and without prejudice to a possible appeal are being considered by the Department of Justice and Equality in conjunction with my Department.

The Government is committed to maintaining Ireland’s reputation as a high quality destina-

tion for international students and will continue to implement all necessary reforms to protect that reputation.

Teacher Training Provision

133. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of restoring the grant for student teachers' attendance at Gaeltacht courses; if she has carried out an assessment of the impact of this cut on the cost of teacher training to students; her views on reinstating the grant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3354/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Teaching Council is the statutory body that reviews and accredits programmes of initial teacher education. The Gaeltacht placement is a mandatory component of primary initial teacher education programmes and is governed by the Council's accreditation criteria, published in June 2011 (Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers) and which must be adhered to by all providers of primary initial teacher education providers.

I acknowledge that the funding of the Gaeltacht Placement is a significant cost to students and their families. However, there is special provision in place for students who experience hardship in meeting this cost. The decision to abolish the Gaeltacht Placement grants, from September 2012, has to be viewed in the context of the prevailing requirement to reduce costs and achieve efficiencies where possible. Priority was given to protecting resources for front line education services as far as possible in the coming years, which is especially challenging with rising numbers of school-going children.

The cost of restoring the grant for the 4 week placement would be circa €1m per annum. I am not in a position to reinstate the funding to this area.

Schools Building Projects Administration

134. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a cost benefit analysis has been carried out on the use of public private partnerships to build schools; the number of such projects in the future that will include the management and maintenance of schools; the cost of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3375/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Capital Appraisal Guidelines of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform require projects to be appraised. This involves validating need and consideration of possible solutions including, where appropriate, the PPP option.

To ensure value for money with PPPs, 4 tests are required to be undertaken during the procurement process. The determination of the Public Sector Benchmark (PSB) is the most crucial of these. The PSB provides a robust financial framework for the achievement of value for money. It is presented as the full estimated cost of delivering the project through conventional means. At the tender evaluation stage, the highest ranking bid is compared to the PSB. Tenders lower than the PSB are judged to deliver value for money. Higher tenders have to be looked at very carefully.

Apart from 6 school projects that are at invitation to negotiate (ITN) stage, there are no plans currently to proceed with further school PPPs.

Teachers' Remuneration

135. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will examine the pay conditions for new teachers and the lack of qualification allowances for new post-primary teachers; if she will discuss the wide disparities in teachers' incomes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3343/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Due to the worsening economic circumstances, the Government reduced the salaries and allowances payable to new entrants to public service recruitment grades (including teachers) by 10% from 1 January 2011 and required that new entrants would start on the first point of the applicable salary scale.

Subsequently, a public service-wide review of allowances took place in 2012, following which the Government decided among other measures to withdraw qualification allowances from new beneficiaries. However, the Government partially compensated for this by deciding that new entrant teachers would commence on a new salary scale which had a higher starting point than the old scale.

As part of the Haddington Road Agreement, revised payscales for post-1 January 2011 and post-1 February 2012 entrants to teaching were implemented with effect from 1 July 2013. The Agreement further provided that the salary imbalance between those who entered the public service since 2011 and those who entered before that date would be addressed. My Department therefore implemented a revised salary scale with effect from 1 November 2013 for teachers who entered between 1 January 2011 and 31 January 2012. Their maximum salary is now equal to that which applies for teachers who entered the profession prior to 2011.

Allowances payable to post-1 January 2011 entrants and such allowances as remain payable to post-1 February 2012 entrants were restored to pre-2011 levels as part of this measure.

Capitation Grants

136. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will restore the capitation grant for primary schools to its previous level to help the survival of these schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3342/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The last Budget included an increase in spending on education for the first time in recent years, amounting to additional funding of €60m during 2015. As I have mentioned in response to earlier questions, that increase has provided funding for 1,700 additional teachers and SNAs to be recruited for our schools, as well as funding important reforms. However, it was not possible to secure the funding which would be required to also increase the rates of capitation paid to our schools.

I am determined that education will be prioritised for further investment in future years, and I believe that increasing the staffing and funding of our schools should be priorities for such investment.

Physical Education

137. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of the report Schools Fitness Challenge 2015 that shows that a high number of 15 to 16 year old boys show early onset of heart disease; the steps being taken to counter this; if sport

and exercise for primary school children will be further promoted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2200/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Schools are contributing to the ‘Healthy Ireland’ agenda being led by the Department of Health and supported by my Department.

In my November 2014 proposal on junior cycle, Wellbeing is included as a compulsory element. It would include Physical Education; Social, Personal and Health Education; and Civic Social and Personal Education. The well being of our young people is as important as their academic achievements. With key skills and knowledge our students will be enabled to more confidently make healthier life choices.

The results of the last Lifeskills survey, published in January 2014, indicate that:

- The vast majority of primary schools meet the minimum requirement of 1 hour per week of P.E;

- 81% of primary and 96% of post primary schools are involved in sporting activities outside of school time and the vast majority encourage physical activity during break-times.

A total of 434 primary and 33 post primary schools have achieved an Active Schools Flag to date.

I will shortly be issuing guidance to all schools to encourage them to further promote healthy lifestyles, including promoting physical activity among their pupils.

Schools Building Projects Status

138. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 177 of 2 October 2014, the further progress, in the provision of new schools in Carrigtwohill, County Cork specifically the new second level school (details supplied), the amalgamation of the two primary schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3347/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department has been working very closely with officials from Cork County Council to secure suitable lands for the schools referred to by the Deputy. I can confirm that suitable lands have been identified and the conveyancing process in relation to their acquisition is underway.

In tandem with the completion of the conveyancing process, the project for the schools concerned is being progressed under my Department’s Design and Build programme. A project manager has been appointed and a meeting will shortly be arranged with the school’s patron to explain the Design & Build process and to outline next steps.

School Curriculum

139. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on having transition year used for a series of pre-mini apprenticeship courses allowing students to better explore their prospective further education choices before embarking on the course proper, thereby reducing the drop out rate and expenditure on uncompleted courses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3339/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Transition Year is intended to act as an educational bridge between junior and senior cycle. Its objective is to broaden the students’ experience of second level education by providing them with a variety of opportunities, both academic and practical.

The precise content of any transition year programme is decided by each school. Their programmes typically include elements designed to expose students to new ways of learning, to enhancing their skills for further studies, for work and for life. This is achieved by providing students with access to work experience, project work, enterprise education and interventions such as Young Social Innovators.

Schools are entitled to include modules appropriate to the needs and interests of their students and related to the resources available to them, including work experience opportunities.

However, it would be a retrograde step to focus too closely on any one aspect at the expense of developing transferable skills and competences that students can bring to bear in making decisions relating to further education and their future careers.

School Accommodation

140. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views regarding Kildare Wicklow Education Training Board’s failure to meet parents of pupils in a school (details supplied) in County Kildare, and its general lack of communication; if she will meet with parents of pupils in the school; and if she will ensure primary and post-primary students will not have to share a building. [3353/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board are facilitating the development of the school in question. The ETB engages with the principal and it is the function of the principal to engage with the parent body.

The school has relocated temporarily to the premises it is now occupying to allow repair works, caused by storm damage, to be carried out on its own school premises. These works are expected to be completed in May at which time the school will return to its own premises.

The building currently accommodating the school will then be vacated and will be used for the planned new post primary school that is due to open in September 2015.

My Department is currently assessing the long-term accommodation needs of the school referred to by the Deputy and is liaising with the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board in this regard.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

141. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way she proposes to address concerns that have been expressed regarding the school profiling element of the proposed new special needs model; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3357/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The NCSE working group recommended the development of a new model for delivering teaching resources to schools to support students with special needs.

It recommended that a school's Special Needs Teaching allocation should be determined by a baseline component according to pupil numbers and a school's educational profile. This profile is to take account of the number of pupils with complex needs, the percentage of pupils performing below average in standardised tests and the social context and gender breakdown of the school.

Following consultations with education partners last summer, my Department has developed a new model which could be used to allocate Special Needs teachers to schools. The Department last week engaged in a further round of consultations with stakeholders in relation to the new model.

I am acutely conscious of the challenges faced by parents of students with special needs, and I believe that any new model must be implemented in a manner that is equitable, and best supports all children with special needs in our schools.

Teacher Training Places

142. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to the difficulties in getting teachers to agree to facilitate a student for a ten-week teaching placement in view of the fact that they believe the length is overly disruptive on the yearly plans of work; and if she has spoken to the Teaching Council regarding this matter. [3350/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Teaching Council is the statutory body that reviews and accredits programmes of initial teacher education. The school placement experience is integral to all initial teacher education programmes and is governed by the Council's accreditation criteria, published in June 2011 (Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers) which must be adhered to by all providers of initial teacher education providers. My Department supports the changes introduced.

Based on existing good practice, the Teaching Council has prepared School Placement Guidelines in partnership with stakeholders. The Guidelines provide a structure for the school placement and are aimed at promoting collaboration and a balance of responsibility between programme providers and schools. The operation of the school placement is a matter of concern to the Teaching Council, schools, ITE providers and students alike and it is being examined. While the practical implications of implementing the guidelines are acknowledged, stakeholders in education need to work together to resolve any issues. The regulatory framework will evolve to meet the needs of schools, students and initial teacher providers.

Teacher Training Places

143. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she has spoken to the Teaching Council regarding the potential for introducing a streamlined approach for teacher training colleges to find places for their students' teaching practice placements in view of the projected increase in numbers and the current lack of a standardised approach. [3349/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Teaching Council is the statutory body that reviews and accredits programmes of initial teacher education. The school placement experience is integral to all initial teacher education programmes and is governed by the Council's accreditation criteria, published in June 2011 (Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers) which must be adhered to by all providers of initial

teacher education providers. The extended duration of the placement allows for the development of a more reflective, enquiry-oriented approach and facilitates the development of the teacher as a reflective practitioner. My Department supports the changes introduced. Based on existing good practice, the Teaching Council has prepared School Placement Guidelines in partnership with stakeholders. The practical implications for participant HEIs, students and schools are acknowledged. I understand that discussions are ongoing as to how a more streamlined approach can be introduced nationally. My Department will provide support, as appropriate.

Teachers' Remuneration

144. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will address an anomaly in the process of the abolition of allowances from new beneficiaries from January 2011 which has left a small number of teachers, who were completing their fourth year of an honours degree in Marino Institute of Education in the academic year 2011-12, unequally remunerated; and her views on the announcement of 5 December 2011 as the arbitrary day on which teachers completing further qualifications had to be working to benefit from the allowance for those completing a further qualification during the year 2011-12; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3344/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): In 2012 a public service-wide review of allowances was carried out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. As a result qualification allowances were abolished with effect from 1st February 2012. The Department's Circular provided an exception. This applied where as at 5 December 2011 a teacher was in employment on that date, and was eligible for receipt of a qualification allowance in respect of the post they held on that date, and that teacher was actively undertaking a course of further study leading to an additional qualification. The exception also required that the teacher did not cease to be a registered student on that course before its completion. The issues raised by the Deputy have been brought to the Teachers' Conciliation Council (TCC) by representatives of the teachers concerned and it would therefore not be appropriate to comment further until the issues have been deliberated on by that forum. The TCC is part of the scheme of Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme for Teachers and is composed of representatives of the teacher representative bodies, school management, this Department, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and is chaired by an official of the Labour Relations Commission.

Schools Data

145. Deputy Joan Collins asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out her views with regard to the primary online database of students personal public service numbers and other personal information; the reason there is a need for a centralisation of children's personal information online; who has access and the reason the information is being held until these students are 30 years of age. [3369/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Department has developed an individualised electronic database of primary school pupils (POD – the Primary Online Database). The primary purpose of POD will be to monitor the education progress of primary pupils (in DES aided schools), throughout the primary system and onwards to post primary level and to help them develop their full educational potential. Once up and running other secondary purposes of POD will include becoming the basis for the allocation of teachers and capitation grants. Aggregated POD data will also be used for the production and publication of primary level statistics. Individualised data coverage has already been in place for a number of

years at pre-primary, post-primary and third level education who collect individual information on each pupil, including their PPSN. A PPS number is an individual's unique identification number for all dealings with the Public Service, including Social Welfare, tax, education and health services. Having the PPSN on the database will help ensure that there are no duplicate records in the system i.e. that two schools do not have the same child on their roll. In the future we will be able to track pupils from early childhood education, to primary school and onto post-primary, which will allow us to ensure that every child in the State of compulsory school age is in education. POD application roles have been developed which limit school staff to viewing and maintaining their own pupil records. Access within the Department to POD data is limited to the POD team which is currently less than 15 people. No agency or other Government Department will have direct access to the Primary Online Database. The current retention policy for Primary Online Database (POD) data is for records to be maintained for the longer of either the period up to the pupil's 30th Birthday or for a period of ten years since the student was last enrolled in a primary school. In future schools will no longer be required to keep the Clárleabhar therefore POD will be the official register of pupils in schools and data will be retained to allow pupils to obtain their records in the future. The Department's retention policy is for audit and accounting purposes as pupil's data is used in the allocation of teaching posts and funding to schools. The policy also serves to trace retention trends in the education system, is important for longitudinal research and policy formation, as well as being an important statistical indicator nationally and internationally. Aggregate and not individual data is used for the majority of these purposes. This retention policy has been agreed with the Data Protection Commissioner and the Department is continually reviewing its retention policy for pupil data in consultation with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner. Figuring out which students don't make the transition from primary to post-primary is just one example of how this database could have enormous benefits for our citizens.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

146. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will amend the student grant scheme in order that mortgage repayments on the family home are considered in the means test for grant eligibility and that the income limits be increased according to the number of other dependent siblings, so as to recognise the hard-pressed financial reality of heavily-indebted and larger families that are ineligible for grant aid due to income being in excess of eligibility thresholds, but who cannot afford to send a dependent child to college without grant assistance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3266/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Student grant applications are means tested on gross income from all sources earned inside and outside the State within a specified reference period. The assessment of income from the same starting point is deemed to be fair and reasonable because this approach eliminates any distortion which might arise from different spending decisions in different households. The Student Grant Scheme already provides for higher income thresholds for larger families. In addition to this, further increases in the income thresholds are provided for where additional family members are attending further and higher education at the same time. In the interest of equity, I have no plans to change the current arrangement.

Schools Building Projects Status

147. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when building works on schools (details supplied) in counties Leitrim and Roscommon will commence;

when both new schools are scheduled for completion; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3340/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that in relation to the first school, my Department is currently engaged with the relevant County Council in respect of the identification and acquisition of a suitable site to provide a permanent building for the school in question. Due to commercial sensitivities attaching to site acquisitions generally, I am not in a position to provide further details at this time. In relation to the second school, referred to by the Deputy, I can confirm that the building project for the school in question is currently at an advanced stage of Architectural Planning; Stage 2(b) – Detailed Design. All relevant statutory approvals have been obtained and the Design Team are currently working on the preparation of the tender documentation. The Stage 2(b) submission is expected to be submitted to my Department for review shortly. Both schools concerned have been announced to proceed to construction as part of my Department’s 5 Year construction programme and in that regard, both schools were included on the 2015 building programme announced in December 2014.

School Staffing

148. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will reverse, partially, if not fully, the small school pupil requirement thresholds announced in budget 2012 in view of the improving public finances and the severe negative impact the new thresholds are having on small rural communities in particular; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3265/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My focus in Budget 2015 was on obtaining the additional funding that was necessary to provide for demographic growth. In the budget it was not possible to provide for extra teaching posts that would change the staffing schedule for primary schools, including small schools. The Government recognises that small schools are an important part of the social fabric of rural communities and will continue to be so. However, this does not mean that small schools can stand still or never have their staffing levels changed to something that is more affordable and sustainable. All public servants are being asked to do more with less and the teachers in our small schools cannot be exempt from this requirement. Since becoming Minister each of the education partners that I have met have indicated their own set of priorities. In the school sector these priorities include school leadership, pay restoration, reductions in pupil-teacher ratios, increases to capitation, and the restoration of ex-quota guidance counsellors in schools. Outside of the schools sector, the list of demands includes funding of third level, investment in early years and investment in technology. It is not, and never will be, possible to satisfy all of the demands of the education system at one time. Hence the need to identify priorities for consideration as part of future budgets and as our economy recovers.

School Enrolments

149. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the extent to which she is aware of difficulties arising from the school enrolment process at various schools throughout the country, with particular reference to areas experiencing an increase in the population; her views on the proposed legislation in this regard to address the issues emerging; if it is possible to expedite the process in time for the next school year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3345/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998. In schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary. In this regard a Board of Management may find it necessary to restrict enrolment to children from a particular area or a particular age group or on the basis of some other criterion. The criteria to be applied by schools in such circumstances are a matter for the schools themselves. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. Under section 15 (2) (d) of the Education Act 1998, each school is legally obliged to publish its enrolment policy. Section 29 of the Education Act 1998, provides parents with an appeal process where a board of management of a school or a person acting on behalf of the Board refuses enrolment to a student. Where a school refuses to enrol a pupil, the school is obliged to inform parents of their right under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 to appeal that decision to either the relevant Educational Training Board or to the Secretary General of my Department. The Child and Family Agency, is the statutory agency which can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child. The Agency can be contacted at 01 6352854 or by E-mail at info@tusla.ie. My Department uses a Geographic Information System to identify the location and scale of additional school accommodation needed on a nationwide basis. The outcome of demographic reviews carried out using this system are then fed into my Department’s five year construction plan. This plan 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 accommodate increasing pupil numbers. The Deputy will be aware that Government gave approval in March last year for drafting the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2014. The bill is currently at an advanced stage of drafting and is on the Government legislative programme for publication early in the Spring/Summer session. The objective of the Admissions to School Bill is to provide an over-arching framework to ensure that how schools decide on who is enrolled and who is refused a place in schools is more structured, fair and transparent. The framework also proposes a mechanism for ensuring that every child receives a school place. A key objective in designing the framework is to create greater confidence for parents that the admission criteria laid down by schools are legitimate, reasonable and fair.

School Staffing Appeals Mechanism

150. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will put in place an appeals mechanism to allow isolated small schools appeal their staffing allocation based on their geographic isolation and inability to ever amalgamate; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3264/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30th September. The staffing process also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board. Circular 0007/2014, which is available on the Department website, sets out the staffing and appeals process for the current school year. The staffing arrangements for schools for the 2015/16 school year, including the appeals process, will be published in the coming weeks.

School Guidance Counsellors

151. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set

down her plans to provide schools with ring-fenced resource hours for the employment of those holding a recognised qualification in guidance counselling to enable all schools to provide every student with appropriate guidance as per section 9C of the Education Act 1998; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3355/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I have no plans to re-introduce a separate allocation of resources hours to schools related to guidance counselling. If economic recovery continues I hope the Government will be in a position to improve the standard staffing allocation to schools. However, I believe that it is desirable to give schools discretion on how to use those increased resources. Guidance and counselling is a whole school responsibility with guidance counsellors playing their part within an overall team approach. Guidance counsellors have two distinct functions. The first is general career guidance and guidance on the educational opportunities a child or young person might pursue, while the second involves support for students’ well-being. The principal and leadership of a school have the best knowledge and experience to determine how exactly guidance resources and teaching resources should be allocated.

School Staffing

152. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 178 of 1 July 2014 to detail the number of relief teaching days allocated to teachers on a departmental pension in 2013-14 and the current school year at primary and post-primary, respectively; the steps being taken to reduce this number; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3336/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The most recent information available on retired teachers employed by managerial authorities of schools relates to the 2013/2014 school year. During this period a total of 9,421 teaching days were worked by retired teachers. Retired Primary school teachers worked 5,259 days and retired Voluntary Secondary and Community and Comprehensive schools teachers worked 4,162 days. This is equivalent to 0.09% and 0.15% of the teaching allocation for the 2013/2014 school year in the respective sector. A total of 537 retired teachers were employed during the 2013/14 school year: 302 retired Primary teachers and 235 retired Voluntary Secondary and Community and Comprehensive teachers. Seventy four percent of those teachers worked the equivalent of 20 days or less during the entire school year.

The employment of teachers is a matter for the school management authority. The policy of my Department is to ensure, as far as possible, that school management authorities give priority to the employment of unemployed, registered and qualified teachers when filling vacant teaching posts. My Department has issued a number of circulars underpinning this policy in recent years.

Bullying in Schools

153. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the extent to which her Department continues to monitor the incidents of school bullying; if she is conscious of the fact that a considerable amount of school bullying remains unreported due to fear on the part of the victims; if she will put in place structures to facilitate early identification and intervention with a view to minimising the incidents and protecting children of all ages who are subject to this behaviour; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3346/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Deputy will be aware that my Department published new anti-bullying procedures for all primary and post primary schools at the beginning of the 2013/14 school year. These procedures are designed to give direction and guidance to school authorities and school personnel in preventing and tackling school-based bullying behaviour amongst its pupils. All Boards of Management are required to adopt and implement an anti-bullying policy that fully complies with the requirements of the procedures. A template anti-bullying policy which must be used by all schools for this purpose is included in the procedures. The procedures outline key principles of best practice for both preventing and tackling bullying and require all schools to commit to these principles in their anti-bullying policy. In particular, they emphasise that a cornerstone in the prevention of bullying is a positive school culture. In that regard, the procedures set out the need for schools to encourage and strengthen open dialogue between all school staff and pupils and to ensure that they provide appropriate opportunities for pupils to raise their concerns in an environment that is comfortable for the pupil. The procedures also recognise the importance of good supervision and monitoring systems to prevent bullying and facilitate early intervention. The school’s anti-bullying policy must explicitly confirm that appropriate supervision and monitoring policies and practices are in place to both prevent and deal with bullying behaviour. In relation to reporting bullying behaviour, the procedures make clear that a pupil or parent may bring a bullying concern to any teacher in the school and individual teachers must take appropriate measures regarding reports of bullying behaviour in accordance with the school’s anti-bullying policy. The procedures require that all reports, including anonymous reports of bullying must be investigated and dealt with and that it should be made clear to all pupils that when they report incidents of bullying they are not considered to be telling tales but are behaving responsibly. The procedures include specific requirements in relation to the consistent investigation, follow up and recording of bullying behaviour amongst pupils. There is a requirement in the procedures for the school Principal to report regularly to the Board of Management in relation to the overall number of bullying cases and provide confirmation that they are being dealt with in accordance with the anti-bullying procedures. The Board is also required, under the procedures, to undertake an annual review of the school’s anti-bullying policy and its implementation by the school. Written confirmation that the review has been completed must be made available to the Parents’ Association and published on the school website. There is no requirement for reporting incidents of bullying centrally to my Department. Arising from commitments made in the Action Plan on Bullying, my Department’s Inspectorate is placing a stronger focus on the actions schools take to create a positive school culture and to prevent and tackle bullying. For example, parent and student questionnaires issued as part of whole school evaluations, include, since January 2014, additional questions to get a clearer picture of how the school deals with bullying. Furthermore, the Inspectorate’s plan for 2015 provides for collaborative research to be conducted in a sample of primary and post-primary on how schools provide for pupils’ well-being. This will culminate in a research report which will highlight best practice.

School Staffing

154. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline her plans to support the valuable contribution played by schools within rural communities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3335/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Government recognises that small schools are an important part of the social fabric of rural communities. They will continue to be a feature of our education landscape. However, this does not mean that small schools can never have their staffing levels changed to something that is more affordable and sustainable for the challenging times the country has faced in recent years. As part of the Bud-

get 2012 decisions, the number of pupils required to gain and retain a classroom teaching post in small primary schools was gradually increased between September 2012 and September 2014. An appeals process is available to schools that are affected by this measure. Educational quality for the pupils has to be one of the main criteria in any consideration of primary school size. It is also necessary to consider the needs of local communities and of course there are wider social and cultural factors that need to be considered. How best to sustain provision for widely dispersed and small communities does present as a particular challenge, especially in any locality where enrolment in their schools is declining to single figures and amalgamation is not an option because there is no other school nearby. Our current configuration of small primary schools has been examined by the Department in a value for money (VFM) review. The report of the value for money review of small primary schools will be published as soon as my Government colleagues and I have finalised our consideration of the report and its recommendations. The report contains much detailed and technical data in relation to the small schools in the primary sector and it also contains a suite of recommendations and options. Government needs time to properly consider the review report and its recommendations. There are a range of important matters to be considered. Decisions on school provision and any possible reorganisation must be widely perceived to be cost-effective, equitable and reasonable. These decisions need to be based on a rigorous evaluation of requirements and needs, not just at a local level but also at both regional and national levels.

Teachers' Remuneration

155. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett asked the Minister for Education and Skills to explain the reason the Government has breached the terms of the Haddington Road agreement with the non-payment or delayed payment of incremental salary increases; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3379/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The details of the Haddington Road Agreement for teachers are extremely complex and are outlined in my Department Circulars 5/2014 for post primary teachers and 32/2013 for primary teachers. My Department operates the largest payroll in the State, with approximately 98,000 school employees and pensioners paid every fortnight. These payrolls have become increasingly complex over the past five years, due to the following:

- Introduction of three salary scales and two sets of allowances, by comparison to a single salary scale and set of allowances for all teachers, prior to 2010;
- Introduction of the Universal Social Charge (USC), Pension related Deduction (PRD) and the single pension scheme;
- Implementation of Section 30 of the Teaching Council Act 2001 and new sick leave regulations for schools employees etc.

In addition, the school employee payrolls have a high volume of substitute and casual appointments for payment, which is not a feature of other comparable payrolls for Civil Servants, Army, Garda Síochána etc. Work is ongoing at present to incorporate payments to home tutors through the payroll, which will broaden the range of payees coming within the remit of the school employee payrolls. Accordingly, the development of the software to implement the Haddington Road Agreement (HRA) in the context of the overall numbers being paid on the payroll (including substitute and casual appointees), the payroll complexities referenced above and the complexity of the agreement itself has been a very difficult and complex task. A further complication is the fact that the software programme in addition to dealing with the

deferred increments has to calculate/re calculate the salary reduction provisions of the HRA for those reaching €65,000 taking account of the impact of increments and allowances. The development of the programmes together with the comprehensive testing necessary to ensure the correct application of the terms of the agreement has taken longer than projected to implement. The majority of increments for teachers earning less than €65,000 including allowances became payable from the 1st December as teachers are generally appointed from 1 September. For the majority of those earning in excess of €65,000 increments will become payable from the 1st March. The target dates for the payment of the deferred increments and arrears to primary teachers and special need assistants is the 12th February and to post primary teachers on the 19th February.

School Enrolments

156. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will report on the situation whereby more than 120 applicants cannot access a place in a school (details supplied) in Dublin 15, in particular the case of approximately 20 students from feeder schools; and the measures taken to relieve this situation. [3263/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As the Deputy will be aware, 2 new post primary schools have been established by my Department in recent years in the Dublin 15 area to meet demographic demand. The school to which the Deputy refers is a 1,000 pupil post-primary school. Since the school commenced operation, the school authorities have enrolled children commensurate with the level of demand in the area. However, the Department has been advised that the school must curtail enrolments from September 2015, as to continue with the previous enrolment levels would leave the school in an untenable position into the future with regard to its accommodation. However, the second new post primary school in the area which opened in September 2014 has advised my Department that they have the capacity to enrol additional children from 2015 onwards. In that regard therefore, my Department is satisfied that there are sufficient school pupil places overall to meet the demand in the area in question. This may sometimes, however, lead to pupils not being offered a place in their school of first preference.

School Enrolments

157. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views that many national schools in receipt of public funds are discriminating on religious grounds in their admission policies, in some instances requiring parents and children being forced to adopt or change their religion, attend religious celebrations, get their children baptised solely to be allowed to attend their local national school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3360/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998. The enrolment policy must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants.

This Department’s main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking school places in the area. Parents have the right to choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available the pupil should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection

process may be necessary. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants.

However, this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice.

Existing equality legislation, which outlaws discrimination in relation to the admission of a student, makes provision for exemptions to apply in the case of single sex schools and in the case of schools where the objective is to provide education in an environment that promotes certain religious values. The Equality legislation provides that any school that has this objective may, where it has more applicants than places available, admit a student of a particular religious denomination in preference to other students. However, it is important to be clear that it is a parent who decides the religious denomination of their child. It is not a decision of a school. The legislation also provides that a school whose objective is to provide education in an environment that promotes certain religious values can refuse to admit a student who is not of that religion only where the school proves that this refusal is essential to maintain the ethos of the school.

Parents have the right, if so desired, to ensure that their children do not receive religious instruction. In accordance with Section 30 of the Education Act (1998), no student can be required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent of the student.

It is my firm view that all schools should be inclusive. It is with this spirit of inclusiveness that the proposed Admission to Schools Bill is designed. Drafting of the Bill is currently at an advanced stage and the Bill is on the Government legislative programme for publication early in the Spring/Summer session.

The draft Bill does not propose changes to the existing equality legislation. However, the draft Bill will provide for schools to explicitly state in the school's admission policy that it will not discriminate against an applicant for admission on the grounds of disability, special educational needs, sexual orientation, family status, membership of the traveller community, race, civil status, gender or religion. The draft Bill will also provide for schools to publish an enrolment policy which will include details of the school's arrangements for students who do not want to attend religious instruction.

The Bill and its associated regulations should see improved access to schools for all pupils and ensure there is consistency, fairness and transparency in the admissions policies of schools and in the service they provide to parents.

Apprenticeship Programmes

158. Deputy Patrick O'Donovan asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide details of the progress that is being made to have training in the hospitality sector included in the redesign of the apprenticeship programme under SOLAS; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3260/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): In 2013 a number of representative bodies from the hospitality sector made submissions as part of a consultation process during the review of apprenticeship which was undertaken by an independent Review Group established by the then Minister.

The Review Group recommended that an Apprenticeship Council be established and that it

manage a call for proposals for the development of apprenticeships in new areas. I established the Apprenticeship Council late last year and they have recently invited proposals for new apprenticeship programmes from consortia of enterprise, professional bodies and education and training providers. The proposals will be assessed by the Apprenticeship Council against a range of criteria before recommendations are submitted to me on the establishment of new apprenticeships.

Meetings have been held with a range of interested sectors, including the hospitality sector. Groups in the sector will now be considering making a proposal under the process. The deadline for proposals is 31 March 2015.

Employment Data

159. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Taoiseach the number of persons employed in County Louth from 2007 to 2014, in the manufacturing industry, including agribusiness, multinationals and small and medium enterprises; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3751/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Relevant annual information is available from the CSO's Business Demography release up to 2012. Data for 2013 is not yet available as it is dependent on the receipt of administrative data which are filed in 2014 but are not fully available to the CSO until March 2015.

The primary purpose of Business Demography is to provide estimates of numbers of enterprises and numbers of persons engaged. The data for Business Demography is based on the CSO Central Business Register. The Business Register is a register of all enterprises that are active in the State. There is no lower size limit, but for practical reasons, Business Demography data is based on enterprises that are registered with the Revenue Commissioners.

Table 1 details the number of persons engaged in Manufacturing Industry and in the total Private Business Economy in County Louth in the period 2007-2012.

Table 1 - Persons Engaged (Number) in Manufacturing and in the Private Business Economy in County Louth

Sector	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Manufacturing	6,575	6,127	5,078	5,022	4,733	4,826
Total Private Business Economy	30,362	29,262	24,393	22,846	22,648	22,085

The Private Business Economy comprises sectors B to N of the NACE Rev 2 classification - i.e. the following sectors:

B - Mining and quarrying

C - Manufacturing

D - Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply

E - Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities

F - Construction

G - Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles

H - Transportation and storage

I - Accommodation and food service activities

J - Information and communication

K* - Financial and insurance activities

L - Real estate activities

M - Professional, scientific and technical activities

N - Administrative and support service activities

*NACE code 64.20 (Activities of holding companies) is excluded from sector K

Table 2 provides a breakdown of persons engaged by size class for all enterprises (i.e. the total Private Business Economy) in County Louth.

Table 2 - Persons Engaged (Number) in Louth in all Enterprises by Employment Size and Year

-	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Micro-enterprises: Less than 10 persons	10,798	10,651	9,511	8,851	8,636	8,576
Small and medium enterprises (SMEs): 10-249 persons	16,056	15,265	11,872	11,524	11,714	11,693
Large enterprises: 250 or more persons	3,508	3,346	3,010	2,471	2,298	1,816
Total Private Business Economy	30,362	29,262	24,393	22,846	22,648	22,085

For confidentiality reasons, more detailed breakdowns of business sectors at county level are not available.

The CSO's Business Demography Release 2012 and the Business in Ireland 2012 report are available at www.cso.ie.

Unemployment Data

160. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide details of the unemployment figures in Tallaght, Dublin 24, for the latest month for which figures are available; if he will also provide a comparison for the same month for the previous five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3281/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The exact information requested by the Deputy is not available. The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of estimates of unemployment in the State. The most recent figures available are for Q3 2014. Estimates of unemployment are produced by NUTS3 Regions. NUTS 3 Dublin region includes Dublin City, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal and South Dublin. Due to methodology and sample size it is not possible to produce reliable Tallaght area estimates from the QNHS.

Table 1a shows the number of persons aged 15 years and over in employment classified by NUTS3 Dublin region in Q3 of each year from 2009 to 2014. Table 1b shows the annual change in the number of persons aged 15 years and over in employment classified by NUTS3 Dublin region in Q3 of each year from 2010 to 2014.

The Live Register series gives a monthly breakdown of the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Benefit, Jobseeker's Allowance and other registrants as registered with the Department of Social Protection. Figures are published for each county and local social welfare office. The most recent Live Register figures available are for December 2014.

Table 2a contains the numbers signing on in the Tallaght local office on the last Friday of each December from 2009 to 2014. Table 2b shows the annual change in the numbers signing on in the Tallaght local office on the last Friday of each December from 2010 to 2014. It should be noted that the Live Register is not a definitive measure of unemployment as it includes part-time workers, and seasonal and casual workers entitled to Jobseeker's Benefit or Allowance.

Table 1a Persons aged 15 years and over unemployed (ILO) classified by NUTS3 Dublin region, Q3 2009 - Q3 2014

(‘000)

-	Q3 09	Q3 10	Q3 11	Q3 12	Q3 13	Q3 14
Unemployed	72.6	76.2	83.8	81.3	67.1	65.4

Data may be subject to sampling or other survey errors, which are greater in respect of smaller values or estimates of change.

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, Central Statistics Office.

Table 1b Persons aged 15 years and over unemployed (ILO) classified by NUTS3 Dublin region, Q3 2010 - Q3 2014- Annual change

(‘000)

-	Q3 10	Q3 11	Q3 12	Q3 13	Q3 14
Unemployed	3.5	7.6	-2.5	-14.2	-1.7

Data may be subject to sampling or other survey errors, which are greater in respect of smaller values or estimates of change.

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, Central Statistics Office.

Table 2a Persons on the Live Register in Tallaght Local Office, December 2009 - December 2014

-	Dec 2009	Dec 2010	Dec 2011	Dec 2012	Dec 2013	Dec 2014
Total persons	9,962	10,178	11,206	11,375	10,861	9,608

Source: CSO Live Register

Table 2b Persons on the Live Register in Tallaght Local Office, December 2010 - December 2014- Annual change

-	Dec 2010	Dec 2011	Dec 2012	Dec 2013	Dec 2014
Total persons	216	1,028	169	-514	-1,253

Source: CSO Live Register

Tribunals of Inquiry Expenditure

161. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach the extent to which matters relating to the Moriarty tribunal have been concluded and final bills in respect of costs to all parties

agreed and-or discharged or pending; if the tribunal is still ongoing and the basis of same; if further costs to the Exchequer are being incurred; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3218/15]

The Taoiseach: The Moriarty Tribunal was established in 1997 and published its Final Report in March 2011. Following publication of that Report, the Tribunal's back-up team was substantially reduced. A small legal and administrative staff remains in place to deal with applications for third-party costs and with the ongoing business of wind-down. The Tribunal is also subject to a number of legal proceedings for which it uses its own legal resources as much as possible.

Total expenditure by my Department from the establishment of the Moriarty Tribunal in 1997 to end-December 2014 was €50.8 million.

My Department paid €3.7 million in respect of the Tribunal in 2014. This was made up of costs in respect of its legal team, administration, third-party costs and other (legal cost accountant fees and witness appearance costs).

The Sole Member has indicated to my Department that the majority of applications for third party costs have now been considered by him and that there remain only a very limited number of applications which are still being considered. He has made over 120 orders to date.

The Tribunal determines only entitlement to costs, not the costs themselves. When an order for costs is made, it is a matter for the claimant then to make a claim. Initially, claims were processed by the Chief State Solicitor's Office, using professional legal cost accountants, but claims received since early 2013 are processed by the State Claims Agency. Claims are usually settled in negotiation or, failing agreement, by the Taxing Master.

So far, a total of 49 claims have been settled, all by negotiation. The claims amounted to €10.76m and the amount paid in settlements was €4.77m. Of this, €2.55m was paid in 2014.

National Risk Assessment

162. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Taoiseach the status of the national risk assessment strategy and its planned implementation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3384/15]

The Taoiseach: In September 2013, Government announced that it would publish annually a National Risk Assessment (NRA) the purpose of which is to offer a high level strategic overview of the risks (both financial and non-financial) which might have an adverse impact on Ireland's well-being. It is not intended to replicate detailed work on risk assessment and mitigation carried out by individual Departments and Agencies.

My Department co-ordinated preparation of a draft which was published in April 2014 for public consultation. A final National Risk Assessment for 2014 was published in October 2014.

Work has commenced on preparation of an updated National Risk Assessment for 2015 and I expect that a draft will be published in April.

Income Data

163. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Taoiseach the disposable per capita household in-

come for the years 2011 to 2014, inclusive, in the midland counties of Longford and Westmeath as compared to County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3593/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The latest available estimates of disposable income per person at county level relate to 2011. Disposable incomes per person in Longford for the years 2009, 2010 and 2011 were €18,792, €17,787 and €17,158. Disposable incomes per person in Westmeath in the same years were €19,263, €18,386 and €17,856, while disposable incomes per person in Dublin were €23,503, €20,697 and €21,329. These statistics are based on disposable income estimated for National Accounts purposes, allocated to county level based on Census of Population and population change estimates. Statistics on household incomes from the Survey of Income and Living Conditions for 2013 were published on January 21st; county level breakdowns are not available from this sample survey.

Ministerial Travel

164. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach if he will itemise the exact cost of the Irish delegation's attendance at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in each of the past three years and the estimated cost for 2015; if all such costs will be broken down by admittance-ticket price per attendee, accommodation costs, travel costs, including use of the Government jet, food and entertainment costs, security costs; the number of persons that had all or part of the cost of their attendance covered by the State in each of the past three years and in 2015. [3708/15]

The Taoiseach: I have attended the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos for the past three years and again last week. The Forum provides a unique opportunity to engage with key figures in international business and politics and my focus while I am in Davos is to promote Ireland's strengths as a location for investment and trade and meet existing and potential investors in Ireland. In availing of this opportunity, I instruct my officials to ensure that costs are minimised and that the best value for money is pursued.

There are no admission/ticket costs associated with my attendance at the event for either myself or any accompanying officials, as I attend at the invitation of the WEF.

The delegation has travelled to Switzerland on the Government jet, the costs of which accrue to the Department of Defence, which operates and administers the Ministerial Air Transport Service.

Below is a breakdown of the costs to my Department of accommodation and transport for me and my delegation in Davos since 2012.

Cost to the Department of the Taoiseach re. participation in the World Economic Forum (WEF) Davos:

2012: Delegation = Taoiseach + 6 officials + a security officer

Accommodation - €5,418.29

Ground transport - €3,024.00

Travel & subsistence - € 280.00

Total - €8,722.29

2013: Delegation = Taoiseach + 6 officials + security officer

Accommodation - €5,449.24

Ground transport - €3,331.33

Travel & subsistence - €471.59

Total - €9,252.16

2014: Delegation = Taoiseach + 4 officials + a security officer

Accommodation - €4,376.33

Ground transport - €4,042.55

Travel & subsistence - €234.62

Total - €9,653.50

2015: Delegation = Taoiseach + 5 officials + a security officer

Accommodation - €2,229.16 paid to date; with a second invoice yet to be received.

Ground transport - Invoices have not yet been received

Travel & subsistence - Vouched claims have yet to be submitted.

Question No. 165 withdrawn.

Social Welfare Code

166. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide the details of the reduction to widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's pension in the past two budgets; if further cuts are envisaged; when the pensions will be restored to their previous levels; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3284/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The widows pension was introduced on 1st January 1936; it was extended to widowers on 28th October 1994, and extended to surviving civil partners from 1st January 2011. Once in payment, the pension remains payable while the person remains widowed or a surviving civil partner, (i.e. it is withdrawn if they re-marry), and is increased to the level of the State pension contributory at age 66.

The Deputy may wish to note there was no reduction in the last two budgets to the widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's contributory pension. The rate of payment for this pension has remained unchanged since January 2011, at €193.50 for those under age 66 and €230.30 for those aged 66 or over. Both of these are the maximum personal rates, with additional allowances payable in certain circumstances (e.g. dependent children).

In Budget 2015 the Government increased the living alone allowance to €9.00 for those who are in receipt of certain social welfare payments including the widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's contributory pension.

The overall concern of the Government in recent budgets has been to protect the primary weekly social welfare rates where possible. Maintaining the rate of the widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's contributory pension and other core payments is critical in protecting

people from poverty. The Government has no plans to change this policy.

Social Welfare Code

167. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the current schemes and supports available to a self-employed person who has lost their business and is now unemployed. [3286/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Self-employed persons are liable for PRSI at the Class S rate of 4% which entitles them to access long-term benefits such as State pension (contributory) and widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's pension (contributory) as well as maternity benefit, adoptive benefit and guardians payment (contributory).

Self-employed workers may also access social welfare supports by establishing eligibility to assistance-based payments such as jobseeker's allowance and disability allowance. In the case of jobseeker's allowance they can apply for the means-tested jobseeker's allowance if their business ceases or if they are on low income as a result of a downturn in demand for their services. In assessing means from self-employment, income from the previous twelve months is used as an indicator of likely future earnings. Given the variety of self-employment situations, the means assessment procedures are applied in a flexible manner to ensure that any circumstances that would be likely to lead to a significant variation, either upward or downward, in the level of a person's income from one year to the next are taken into consideration. It is recognised that the downturn in the economy had an impact on many self-employed persons with a consequent reduction in their income and activity levels. This may be reflected in any assessment of their means from self-employment for jobseeker's allowance purposes. As in the case of a non-self-employed claimant for jobseeker's allowance or disability allowance, the means of husband/wife, civil partner or co-habitant will be taken into account in deciding on entitlement to a payment.

Self-employed people in receipt of jobseeker's allowance have access to the full range of activation measures available through the State. Given the scale of unemployment levels, the key objective of activation policy and labour market initiatives is to offer assistance to those most in need of support in securing work and achieving financial self-sufficiency. This policy objective prioritises scarce resources to those in receipt of qualifying welfare payments. Accordingly the employment services and schemes provided by the Department are focused in the first instance on this cohort of unemployed people. However, many services are available to the formerly self-employed who are not in receipt of a social welfare payment.

Some employment services, such as assistance with job-search activities and the use of on-line job search tools, are available to people if they register with the Department's employment services offices, regardless of their social welfare status. Unemployed persons, including the previously self-employed, not in receipt of payments may also be eligible to avail of upskilling opportunities but are not eligible to receive a training allowance while undertaking the course. Springboard courses are open to people who were previously self-employed, regardless of their social welfare status.

Ministerial Meetings

168. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will meet with the Tara Mines pensioners group (details supplied). [3291/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I met the deputy last week. The deputy has agreed to submit a report prepared by the group.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

169. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when an application for a domiciliary care allowance will be finalised in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3315/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance was received on 11 November 2014 from the person concerned. The application was not allowed as the child was not considered to satisfy the qualifying conditions for the allowance. A letter issued on 23 January 2015 advising of the decision.

In the case of the application which was refused on medical grounds the applicant may submit additional information and/or ask for the decision to be reviewed or they may appeal the decision directly to the Social Welfare Appeals Office within 21 days.

Disability Allowance Applications

170. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a decision on their application for disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3421/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned submitted an application for disability allowance (DA) on 17/12/14. Entitlement to DA is based on satisfying medical, means and residency conditions. A decision will be made on the application as soon as possible and the person will be notified directly of the outcome.

Family Income Supplement

171. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the reason the family income supplement payment must stay the same for 12 months even if there is a change in the family's income; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3474/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The family income supplement (FIS) is an in-work support which provides an income top-up for employees on low earnings with children. FIS is designed to prevent child and family poverty and to offer a financial incentive to take-up employment as compared to social welfare payments.

Expenditure on FIS for 2014 is estimated to be of the order of €281 million and it is currently paid to some 50,306 families in respect of almost 111,583 children.

An integral part of the FIS scheme is that once the level of payment is determined, it continues to be payable at that rate for a period of 52 weeks, provided that the person remains in full-time employment. However, in the following two circumstances, the weekly rate of FIS can be revised during the year:

- If a claimant starts to care for an additional child in the course of the 52 weeks;
- If a claimant was getting a one-parent family payment and this payment was stopped be-

cause their youngest child reached the relevant age limit, then the FIS rate can be reassessed to take account of the loss of their one-parent family payment.

The rate of payment will not change if there is an increase or decrease in the recipient's earnings. A key advantage of this approach, which is unique to the FIS scheme, is that claimants can be certain that they will receive a guaranteed level of income support throughout the period. This certainty is important to the success of the scheme as it provides a real incentive to workers with families to avail of employment opportunities. For those who experience a reduction in their income over the course of the year, the rate of payment will be reassessed at the end of the 52 weeks upon renewal of a FIS claim.

This aspect of the FIS scheme is also important in minimising the administrative effort associated with the operation of this scheme and helps to speed up processing times for claims for FIS, which could otherwise be subject to delays due to frequent reviews.

I have no plans to change the existing arrangements.

Pension Provisions

172. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 201 of 17 September 2014, if the review of personal pension vehicles has taken place; if the issue of extending the approved retirement fund options to holders of buy-out bonds derived from defined benefit schemes has been examined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3477/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The current supplementary pension system which comprises a multiple of pension savings vehicles has evolved over time has become extremely complex and difficult to understand without investment of considerable time and effort of the engagement of professional advisors. The present system needs to be simplified so that it is more understandable to members, potential members and to the general public.

The issue you have raised regarding access to the Approved Retirement Fund option to owners of a buy-out bond arising from their membership of a defined benefit pension scheme will form part of a review of the personal pension vehicles. I expect that work will be undertaken during 2015 in this context.

Question No. 173 withdrawn.

Job Initiatives

174. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of persons on JobBridge; the average duration of a JobBridge placement; if participants in JobBridge are counted as employed or unemployed for the duration of the placement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3513/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): The Department's activation measures continue to play a major role in consolidating Ireland's economic recovery. Jobseekers continue to choose JobBridge internships as a means of increasing their skills and work experience and improving their chances of returning to employment.

There are currently 6,271 individuals on JobBridge internships. The majority of internships

are for a period of 9 months. During their internship, JobBridge participants are not included on the Live Register.

Rent Supplement Scheme Payments

175. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she can offer any assistance in this case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3545/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): As detailed to the Deputy in reply to Parliamentary Question No 47 of 15 January 2015, the client concerned is in receipt of their full entitlement to Rent Supplement based on their monthly rent, weekly income and family composition. The Department has not made contact with this client regarding their on-going entitlement to Rent Supplement.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

176. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will ascertain from the carers' allowance section of her Department when relevant departmental papers and comments regarding a carers' allowance refusal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be submitted to the Social Welfare Appeals Office in order to allow an appeal to progress considering that the appeal was registered on 27 November 2014. [3564/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Following a medical review, the carer's allowance (CA) payment of the person in question was stopped on 27 November 2014 as it was decided the care recipient no longer satisfied the medical criteria for CA. The person concerned submitted additional medical evidence in support of their appeal. This additional evidence has now been reviewed by a deciding officer who has revised the original decision and decided that the person in question continues to be eligible for CA.

A letter informing the person in question of the revised decision issued on 26 January 2015. The payment will be restored and any arrears due will issue shortly.

Public Services Card Provision

177. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the reason a driver's licence was retained by staff when a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11 attempted to register for their public service card; the reason this person's passport was not accepted as proof of their Irish citizenship; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3697/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Public Services Card (PSC) has been introduced to enable individuals gain access to public services more efficiently and with a minimum of duplication of effort, while at the same time preserving their privacy to the maximum extent possible. The PSC is designed to replace other cards within the public sector such as the Free Travel Pass and the Social Services Card (SSC) of this Department and to make it easy for providers of public services to verify the identity of customers.

A PSC is currently issued following a registration process. This involves the capture of an individual's photograph and signature and the verification of identity data including the presentation of supporting documentation. Social Welfare legislation provides for an officer to retain such documentation for inspection for up to 21 days where required.

In the case mentioned, there is no record of an Irish passport having been presented. Rather the documents presented were a United Kingdom birth certificate, and an Irish Driving Licence. As the Driving Licence presented was quite worn, and most of the expected security features were no longer visible, it was retained by the officer handling the registration for proper examination, and a receipt in the prescribed form was issued to the person. That examination has now been completed and the licence is being returned.

Question No. 178 withdrawn.

Disability Allowance Appeals

179. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an appeal for disability allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [3743/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 20 January 2015, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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

Disability Allowance Appeals

180. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the progress to date in determination of appeal for disability allowance in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3797/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 11 December 2014. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 12 January 2015 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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

Domiciliary Care Allowance Review

181. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when the

review for the domiciliary care allowance will be completed in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3831/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance was received on the 2nd October 2014 from the person concerned. The application was not allowed as the child was not considered to satisfy the qualifying conditions for the allowance. A letter issued on the 7th January 2015 advising of the decision.

In the case of the application which was refused on medical grounds the applicant may submit additional information and/or ask for the decision to be reviewed or they may appeal the decision directly to the Social Welfare Appeals Office within twenty one days.

A request for a review of the decision or an appeal of the decision has not been received to date.

One-Parent Family Payment Applications

182. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the progress to date in determination of application for one-parent family allowance in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare submitted four weeks ago to their local office; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3836/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned submitted an application for One Parent Family Payment on the 30th of October 2014. The One Parent Family Payment scheme is subject to a means test and in order to carry out a means test a customer must be available for interview or contactable at a given address. The person concerned was recently invited for interview with a Social Welfare Inspector but failed to attend. The Social Welfare Inspector had also tried on a number of occasions to contact the person concerned by telephone and by way of a house call but again was unable to contact the person concerned. To date, no contact or explanation has been received from the person concerned. The application was recently closed and the person concerned was notified of this decision in writing.

Disability Allowance Data

183. **Deputy Peadar Kirby** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide in tabular form the annual number of persons refused disability allowance on the grounds of insufficient medical evidence due to an unclear diagnosis between 2011 and 2014. [3852/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Disability allowance (DA) is a payment for persons with a specified disability who are over 16 but under 66. As a result of that disability, which must be expected to last at least a year, they must be deemed to be substantially restricted in obtaining employment otherwise suitable to their age, qualifications and experience. Applicants must also satisfy a means test and be habitually resident in the State.

The onus is on the applicant to provide the Department with sufficient evidence to demonstrate their eligibility in relation to all conditionality. Insufficient medical evidence is not recorded as a reason for disallowance on medical grounds and I regret to confirm that my Department is not in a position to provide you with the specific information you request.

Although specific numbers are not available, the Department confirms that the quality and relevance of medical evidence supplied is a significant factor contributing to the number of applications which are disallowed in the first instance but allowed subsequently once additional evidence is supplied. The Department is happy to review its decisions in the light of additional supporting evidence but this causes delays for customers. It is in the interests of the customer, their doctor(s) and the Department that comprehensive evidence is furnished by the applicant in support of his/her application in the first instance.

It should be noted that in its assessment of a person's medical suitability for DA, the Department does not dispute the diagnosis(es) of an applicant's doctor(s). Rather, it considers the severity and expected duration of the condition(s) and the resultant care needs (where relevant) and assesses to what extent these match with the statutory conditionality of the DA scheme.

Poverty Data

184. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection in view of recent Central Statistics Office figures that show 30.5% of persons experience enforced deprivation (details supplied), if he will increase the SICAP budget as it is one of the few measures that deals directly with social inclusion; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3944/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The recently published CSO release on SILC 2013 shows that the basic deprivation rate was 30.5 per cent, an increase of 3.6 per cent on 2012. The rise in basic deprivation has affected all income groups and reflects the legacy of the economic crisis since 2008 on many low and middle income households.

The key measure of poverty from a policy perspective is consistent poverty, which is the combination of at-risk-of-poverty and basic deprivation. The rate of consistent poverty in 2013 was 8.2 per cent, a slight though not statistically significant increase on 2012. The Government remains committed to meeting the national social target for poverty reduction, which is to reduce consistent poverty to 4 per cent by 2016 and 2 per cent or less by 2020.

A key component of Government policy to tackle poverty is to provide adequate income support through the social protection system. In 2013, welfare payments and other social transfers (including pensions) lifted a third of the population out of the at-risk-of poverty, thereby reducing the rate from 49.8 per cent to 15.2 per cent, which is 1 percentage point lower than the 2012 at-risk-of-poverty rate.

Growing employment and providing the supports needed through activation to get people back to work will have a direct impact on poverty. While Government policies are restoring economic and employment growth, this recovery is not yet reflected in household living standards, as captured in the 2013 statistics. The Government is committed to delivering a new deal on living standards to ensure that the economic recovery is felt by low and middle income working families. Thus, Budget 2015 increases support for families raising children, assists unemployed families with children to return to work and improves the financial position of vulnerable welfare recipients, including those living alone. There were also significant reductions in personal income tax and the Universal Social Charge, and a major investment programme in social housing. I'm confident that these measures will be reflected in future poverty statistics.

The Deputy refers to the SICAP budget. He should note that responsibility for SICAP (Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme) lies with Minister for the Department of

Environment, Community and Local Government.

Corporation Tax Regime

185. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Finance if he foresees any possible threats to the 12.5% corporation tax regime; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3578/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As myself, the Taoiseach and other members of the Government have repeatedly said, the 12.5% corporation tax rate is settled policy. This position will not change.

A competitive corporate tax rate is a tool to address the economic limitations that come with being a peripheral country, as compared to larger core countries. Ireland's corporation tax rate plays an important role in attracting Foreign Direct Investment ('FDI') to Ireland and thereby increasing employment here.

Further, it is clear that the certainty around the rate of Irish corporation tax is one of its biggest strengths, underlying the Government's commitment to the rate. This certainty is important for business here, both domestic and international as companies plan investment decisions over the medium to long-term.

With regard to international tax issues more generally, the ability of some multinationals to lower the amount of corporation tax they pay world-wide using international structures is an issue that has attracted a lot of public and media attention over the past 24 months. The G20 have acknowledged that this is a global challenge that requires global action, and this is happening through the OECD Base Erosion and Profit Shifting ('BEPS') project.

Ireland is actively engaged in this process and it is anticipated that BEPS will result in changes being made to the international taxation rulebook which countries rely on for international trade. Ireland has always played by these rules and played to win as is evidenced by our successful track record for attracting FDI.

This will not change in the post-BEPS environment, and I believe that the BEPS project will create opportunities for Ireland. For example, one of the key concepts of BEPS is the better alignment of substance with taxing rights. The alignment of substance with a competitive rate of tax has been the cornerstone of our CT policy since the 1950s so I believe that any change that may result from this process will lead to additional opportunities for Ireland.

Primary Medical Certificates Eligibility

186. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance the circumstances in which incapacitated persons applying for a primary medical certificate, can have their medical examination carried out in provincial centres, as opposed to travelling to Dun Laoghaire, County Dublin; his views that it is unfair to expect severely incapacitated persons to make such journeys; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3825/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, a Primary Medical Certificate is required to claim the tax reliefs provided under the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme. The Senior Medical Officer for the relevant local Health Service Executive administrative area makes a professional clinical determination as to whether an individual applicant satisfies the medical criteria to receive a Primary Medical

Certificate. An unsuccessful applicant can appeal the decision of the Senior Medical Officer to the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, which makes a new clinical determination in respect of the individual.

Hearings of the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal are held on average twice a month at the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dun Laoghaire, which has the facilities to cater for people with mobility-impairing disabilities of the kind provided for under the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme.

I am informed by the Medical Board of Appeal that they do hold regional clinics as demand arises. Regional clinics were held at the Mercy University Hospital in Cork City in June 2012, August 2013 and October 2014.

The Deputy will appreciate that Regulation 6(1)(e) of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994 (S.I. 353 of 1994) provides that the Medical Board of Appeal is independent in the exercise of its functions.

Tax Reliefs Availability

187. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider using car parking fees as an option for commuters availing of the annual tax saver scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3298/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The travel pass (Tax Saver) scheme was introduced originally in Finance Act 1999 to encourage greater use of public transport by providing an exemption from BIK (Benefit-In-Kind taxation) for employer-provided bus and rail passes.

While the scheme has proved very popular since its introduction it is not practical, in the current economic circumstances, to consider its extension in any way that would increase the cost to the Exchequer. I would be concerned also that to extend the scheme in the manner proposed by the Deputy would perhaps have the unintended effect of increasing the distance driven by commuters before they switch to public transport. There could also be difficulties in terms of administering such a change and minimising any opportunity for its misuse.

Legislative Measures

188. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the purpose of the finance (tax appeals commission) Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3300/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Among the measures announced in Budget 2014 was reform of the ‘Role, functions and structure of the Office of the Appeal Commissioners, who hear appeals against assessments, decisions and determinations of the Revenue Commissioners on a variety of taxes, and of the tax appeals system’. The stated objective was “To ensure an enhanced and cost effective appeal mechanism for tax cases, providing transparency and increased certainty for taxpayers.”

Since then a public consultation has taken place and officials of my Department have engaged with stakeholders regarding proposals for reform as well as with the Office of the Attorney General.

The Government has approved the drafting of the Finance (Tax Appeals Commission)

Bill on the basis of heads of Bill which incorporate the following main elements: the establishment and structure of the Commission; appointment and removal process for Appeal Commissioners; terms and conditions of Appeal Commissioners; staff and funding of the Commission and its accountability. The heads also provide for a wide range of amendments to the legislation governing appeals in relation to the various taxes under the care of the Revenue Commissioners and consequential amendments to the various tax and duty Acts arising from the reform measures.

In accordance with the Agreed Protocol for Pre-Legislative Scrutiny by Oireachtas Committees, the heads of Bill were sent to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform. The pre-legislative scrutiny process with the Joint Committee will commence this week.

Bank Charges

189. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance in view of the high number of young persons who have emigrated over the past number of years, if he will instruct the State-owned banks to carry out a review of inactive accounts to ensure that persons who have emigrated are not continuously being charged maintenance fees for accounts they no longer use or for overdraft facilities they are not using; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3333/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, I have no direct function in the relationship between banks and their customers. I have no statutory function in relation to banking decisions made by individual lending institutions at any particular time as these decisions are taken by the board and management of the relevant institution. A Relationship Framework has been specified that defines the nature of the relationship between the Minister for Finance and each bank. These Frameworks were published on 30 March 2012 and can be found at:

<http://www.finance.gov.ie/what-we-do/banking-financial-services/shareholding-management-unit/shareholding-management-unit>

As the matter raised is a commercial and operational issue between the banks and their customers, I can confirm that I do not intend instructing the banks as suggested by the Deputy.

Banking Sector Remuneration

190. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the salary the new AIB chief executive officer will earn; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3337/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The recruitment process for AIB's new Chief Executive Officer has only just commenced and the appointment to this position together with the relevant terms (including remuneration) will be a matter for the Board of the bank initially and then be subject to my consent. As the Deputy will be aware, this Government's policy with respect to banking remuneration has been in place since mid-2011. In summary, remuneration is capped at €500,000 (excluding normal pension entitlements) and variable rate pay such as bonuses are not permitted. AIB has not requested a review of the salary cap or bonus restrictions and there are no plans in train to change these restrictions.

Legislative Measures

191. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance the reason behind the decision to regulate the servicing agent for the mortgage rather than the owner or fund holding the loan when preparing the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Bill 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3394/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): During last summer, my Department undertook a public consultation process in relation to the proposed legislation to protect consumers when loan books were sold. This consultation process highlighted an issue with a passive special purpose vehicle, SPV, which we had not intended to intend regulate, outsourcing servicing to a firm that would not be regulated. It became clear from the consultation process that credit servicing, as the customer-facing activity, was the appropriate activity to regulate and this legislation achieves this. Responses to the consultation process were published on my Department's website www.finance.gov.ie.

Once it had been decided to regulate credit servicing rather than ownership, consideration was given to the appropriateness of regulating ownership. While the owner may make decisions on a credit agreement, it is the credit servicer who will communicate these decisions to the borrower. After considerable and detailed examination, I now accept that the best way of ensuring the borrower is protected and retains access to the Financial Services Ombudsman is to regulate credit servicing and ensure borrowers can complain to the Financial Services Ombudsman about any actions affecting the borrower.

The Bill has now been published and I look forward to Second Stage in the House next week.

Living City Initiative

192. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance the progress of the Living City Initiative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3397/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Officials from my Department have held preliminary discussions with the relevant local authorities to identify the areas of the six cities, Cork, Dublin, Galway, Kilkenny, Limerick and Waterford, which might fall within the scope of the scheme. Each of the local authorities has now submitted proposals on the areas which it believes should be included. Further discussions will be held in due course.

My officials have also been in contact with the EU Commission on the application for State aid approval for the Initiative. A number of amendments were made to the Living City Initiative in Finance Act 2014 to ensure that the scheme was in accordance with EU State aid rules. These include the imposition of a cap on the level of relief for the commercial element of the scheme. This means the scheme now falls within the *de minimis* regulation. My officials are in discussions with the relevant local authorities and Revenue regarding operationalizing the scheme. Once the scheme is ready to commence I will make an announcement, in conjunction with my Cabinet colleagues and the local authorities concerned.

It is important to note that I do not see this as a wide-spread initiative, as it is targeted at those areas which are most in need of attention.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

193. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance the reason staff who had multiple renewals of temporary contracts working for the Revenue Commissioners in Ennis, County Clare were not awarded permanent contracts, and to make a statement regarding this practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3405/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the temporary staff in question were recruited to carry out work associated with the introduction of Local Property Tax (LPT). The task of introducing this new tax, the largest extension of the self-assessment system in the history of the State, posed major administrative challenges. The staffing model for its introduction was built on flexible deployment, which included recruiting additional staff on a temporary basis.

The temporary staff in Ennis were employed on fixed-term contracts which specifically stipulated that their employment would end on a specific date or when the task for which they had been employed was completed. In accordance with their contracts, employment of these temporary staff will cease on 27 March 2015.

The recruitment and appointment of permanent staff in Revenue is regulated by the Commission for Public Service Appointments (CPSA). All recruitment for permanent clerical positions in Revenue must be carried in accordance with the recruitment licence granted by the Commission. The licence held by Revenue does not provide for the awarding of permanent contracts to these staff on the basis of their temporary employment.

In January 2014 Revenue ran a competition which enabled serving temporary Revenue staff, including those in Ennis, to fill a number of permanent posts. More recently, the Public Appointments Service held an open clerical officer competition which closed in July 2014. Temporary Revenue staff were eligible to apply for this competition. Revenue will recruit from this panel to fill permanent clerical officer positions as they arise.

NAMA Operations

194. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will investigate a matter (details supplied) concerning the National Asset Management Agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3407/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by NAMA that it has an exposure through its loans to two of the five developments referenced in the Deputy's Parliamentary Question. NAMA advises that in both cases, the developments are managed by the Joint Fixed Charge Statutory Receivers.

The Receivers are responsible for, inter alia, overseeing the sale of properties in accordance with NAMA's requirement that all such sales be fully openly marketed. As the Deputy will be aware the Receivers are obliged, in accordance to their independent statutory and fiduciary duties as agents of the original borrowers, to maximise the proceeds from all sales. The Receivers will, following the culmination of the related sales processes, make a recommendation to NAMA, which it, in turn, will consider in the context of its statutory mandate to maximise the return to Irish taxpayers from the management and ultimately the sale of loans and the sale of properties and other assets securing those loans by debtors and receivers of.

I would advised the Deputy to contact NAMA directly on this issue or similar queries raised by his Constituents and NAMA will follow up directly with the owner of the related property or, as in this instance, the appointed receivers. I am advised by NAMA that members of the public can raise any sales related query or complaint directly with it through its dedicated email

address, info@nama.ie and that all such queries are followed-up on and responded to quickly.

Property Tax Data

195. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the Revenue Commissioners reports a 95% compliance rate for payment of the property tax for the year 2014, in view of the fact that the Revenue Commissioners collect payment from source. [3411/15]

196. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Finance if some residential properties are exempt from payment of the property tax; and if so, the types of properties. [3412/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 195 and 196 together.

The Revenue Commissioners have confirmed that the payment compliance rate for 2014 Local Property Tax (LPT) is approximately 95% at present. This includes applying mandatory deduction at source from salary or occupational pensions in relation to about 40,000 properties.

I am advised that those property owners who have been subject to mandatory deduction at source are still obliged to submit their LPT Return including their self-assessment of LPT due in respect of their residential property. Any property owner who has yet to comply with these obligations should do so as soon as possible in order to avoid paying interest on any outstanding tax or possibly being selected for a Revenue audit which may give rise to additional tax, interest and penalties being charged.

Regarding exemptions from the tax, the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) defines a residential property as any building or structure (or part of a building) which is used as, or is suitable for use as, a dwelling. Part 2 of the LPT Act outlines the LPT exemptions that are available. A broad outline of exempt properties includes:

- New and previously unused properties that are purchased from a builder or developer between 1 January 2013 and 31 October 2016;

- Properties purchased between 1 January 2013 and 31 December 2013, if occupied as the sole or main residence of the purchaser;

- Residential properties constructed by a builder or developer that remain unsold and have not been used as dwellings;

- Properties in unfinished housing estates as prescribed by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government;

- Properties certified as having significant pyritic damage;

- Registered nursing homes;

- Unoccupied properties which had been the sole or main residence of a person who has vacated the property because of long term mental or physical infirmity;

- Properties occupied by permanently and totally incapacitated individuals as their sole or main residence;

- Residential properties owned by a charity or public body and used to provide “special needs accommodation”;

- Properties used by a charity in connection with recreational activities;
- Properties fully subject to commercial rates;
- Diplomatic properties exempt under other legislation.

I am advised by the Commissioners that details of these exemptions were also provided on page 10 of the Guide to LPT, which was issued to all property owners in March/April 2013. The Deputy may also find the following link (<http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/lpt/exemptions.html>) from the Revenue website helpful as it provides additional details of the various exemptions from the tax.

As regards liability for payment of the tax, the Commissioners have also confirmed that where a property has not reached the stage of construction where it is suitable for use as a dwelling until after 1 May 2013, it is outside the scope of LPT for the first valuation period of 1 May 2013 to 31 October 2016. Accordingly, the owner would not be liable to pay LPT on the property until 2017. I am further advised that a property that was not liable to LPT on 1 May 2013 on the basis that it was uninhabitable will not be liable to LPT for the years 2013 to 2016. If such a property were to be refurbished to make it suitable for use as a dwelling by 1 November 2016 then it will be liable to LPT for 2017 and subsequent years.

State Banking Sector

197. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide in tabular form the proceeds by institution from the disposal of investments in the State supported banks in each year since 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3414/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In response to the Deputy's question, the following table details of the proceeds from the sale of the State's investments in the banks since 2012:

Details of the proceeds from the sale of the State's investments in the banks since 2012

Date of disposal	Bank	Transaction	Total proceeds including accrued interest/dividend
2012 no disposals			
January 2013	Bank of Ireland	Sale of convertible contingent capital notes (CoCos)	€1.06bn
July 2013	Permanent tsb	Sale of Irish Life	€1.34bn
December 2013	Bank of Ireland	Sale/redemption of preference shares	€2.05bn
2014 and 2015 to date no disposals			

Bank Guarantee Scheme Fees

198. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide in tabular form the fees received from the eligible liabilities guarantee scheme in each year since its inception. [3415/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Fees paid by the covered institutions in respect of the ELG Scheme guarantee are paid quarterly in arrears and therefore there is a time lag before the fees are paid into the Exchequer (i.e. fees received as cash in Q1 of 2015 are in respect of fees accrued for Q4 of 2014). As the ELG Scheme came into operation on the 9th

of December 2009 no fees were received into the Exchequer until 2010. The figures below are presented on an accrued basis.

The total fees received to date from the covered banks in respect of the ELG Scheme amounts to c.€3.6bn which does not include interest accrued.

Year	€millions
2010	854.8
2011	1,234.6
2012	951.2
2013	421.3
2014	155.2
Total	3,617.1

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

199. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Finance the efforts being made to provide access to full-time Civil Service employment for the 62 temporary clerical officers working for the Revenue Commissioners in Ennis, County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3426/15]

200. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Finance if there will be continuous temporary employment for the 62 temporary clerical staff working for the Revenue Commissioners in Ennis, County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3427/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 199 and 200 together.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the temporary staff in question were recruited to carry out work associated with the introduction of Local Property Tax (LPT). The task of introducing this new tax, the largest extension of the self-assessment system in the history of the State, posed major administrative challenges. The staffing model for its introduction was built on flexible deployment, which included a mix of experienced existing staff, additional staff on a temporary basis, and an external call centre service to provide an information help line.

Revenue has informed me that this flexible mix of resources was considered the most effective model available and was vital to the successful introduction of the tax in a relatively short period of time. The temporary staff in Ennis were employed on fixed-term contracts which specifically stipulated that their employment would end on a specific date or when the task for which they had been employed was completed. In accordance with their contracts, employment of these temporary staff will cease on 27 March 2015. Revenue is not in a position to offer them permanent employment when their fixed-term contracts expire.

The recruitment and appointment of permanent staff in Revenue is regulated by the Commission for Public Service Appointments. All recruitment for permanent clerical positions in Revenue must be carried in accordance with the recruitment licence granted by the Commission. The licence held by Revenue does not provide for the awarding of permanent contracts to these staff on the basis of their temporary employment. However, they are eligible to apply in the normal way for any open competitions being run by the Public Appointments Service (PAS) or Revenue for the recruitment of permanent staff.

The Deputy will be aware from a previous representation that in January 2014 Revenue ran

a competition which enabled serving temporary Revenue staff, including those in Ennis, to fill a number of permanent posts. More recently, the Public Appointments Service held an open clerical officer competition which closed in July 2014. Temporary Revenue staff were eligible to apply for this competition. Revenue will recruit from this panel to fill permanent clerical officer positions as they arise.

Tax Code

201. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance if recent changes in the cap on the finance-benefit in kind transfers that parents can gift to their children tax free also refer to the transfer of land, either as a site for a house or as a farm; if land is an asset for inheritance or gift during lifetime purposes in transactions between parents and offspring; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3445/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Capital Acquisitions Tax (CAT) is the overall name for both Gift and Inheritance Tax. The tax is charged on the amount gifted to, or inherited by, the beneficiary of the gift or inheritance.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that, for the purposes of CAT, the relationship between the person who provides the gift or inheritance (i.e. the disponent) and the person who receives the gift or inheritance (i.e. the beneficiary), determines the maximum life-time tax-free threshold known as the “Group threshold” - below which gift or inheritance tax does not arise.

There are, in all, three separate Group thresholds based on the relationship of the beneficiary to the disponent.

Group A: tax free threshold €225,000 - applies where the beneficiary is a child (including adopted child, stepchild and certain foster children) or minor child of a deceased child of the disponent. Parents also fall within this threshold where they take an inheritance of an absolute interest from a child.

Group B: tax free threshold €30,150 - applies where the beneficiary is a brother, sister, a nephew, a niece or lineal ancestor or lineal descendant of the disponent.

Group C: tax free threshold €15,075 - applies in all other cases.

In the case of the Group A tax-free threshold, each child is separately entitled to receive life-time gifts or inheritances up to the total value of €225,000 from his or her parents before that child would have any liability to CAT. Gifts or inheritances received by the child since 5 December 1991 from his or her parents are aggregated for the purposes of determining whether this threshold is exceeded. CAT is charged on the amount of the gift or inheritance that exceeds the child’s tax-free threshold of €225,000 at the rate of 33% and on that excess only.

Land, either as a site or as a farm, is an asset for both gift and inheritance tax purposes and the transfer of such capital assets by parents to children, either during the lifetime of the parents, or on the death of the parents, is within the scope of CAT. The transfer of such capital assets has always been subject to CAT and the Finance Act 2014 changes in restricting the CAT exemption for normal and reasonable payments made by parents to children for their support, maintenance or education has not changed this position.

It should be noted that since the introduction of CAT in 1975 special treatment has been afforded to gifts or inheritances of agricultural property however, this does not apply to gifts of

sites for house building. Agricultural Relief is available provided the conditions applicable to the relief are fulfilled. The effect of the relief is that market value of agricultural property gifted or inherited is reduced significantly for the purposes of determining the amount of CAT, if any, payable on a gift or inheritance of such property. Currently, the market value of agricultural property is reduced by 90%.

This means that, where agricultural relief applies, parents can normally transfer agricultural property up to the value of €2,250,000 to each of their children, provided the children satisfy the conditions applicable to the relief, without any liability to CAT arising on the transfer. If the agricultural property is worth €2,250,000 and agricultural relief applies, the taxable value of the agricultural property is reduced by 90% from €2,250,000 to €225,000 for CAT purposes. Assuming the child has received no previous gifts or inheritances from the parent since 5 December 1991, the reduced value of the gift or inheritance equals the €225,000 tax-free threshold resulting in no CAT liability for the child.

This special treatment of agricultural property for CAT purposes ensures that the transfer of most family farms by parents to children, either by way of gift or inheritance, is not subject to CAT.

1. Agricultural Property includes: agricultural land, pasture and woodland, crops, trees and underwood growing on such land, farm buildings, farm houses, farm machinery and livestock and bloodstock.

NAMA Property Rental

202. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the options available to a business person otherwise eligible for a National Asset Management Agency rent abatement scheme whose landlord is not co-operating with their application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3471/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): NAMA's Guidance Note on Upwards Only Rent Reviews, which has been in place since December 2011, is available on the NAMA website, www.nama.ie, and sets out for tenants both the process involved in making an application for rent abatement through a NAMA debtor or receiver and the financial information that must be submitted alongside such an application. NAMA can only assess applications submitted by debtors and receivers where all relevant information has been provided.

I am advised by NAMA that it has received 370 applications for rent abatement, through its debtors and receivers, under its Guidance Note and that, of these, 339 have been approved and a further 19 are currently being assessed. The aggregate annual value of approved rent abatements to date is €23m and NAMA has also approved long-term rent reliefs worth over €40 million to small and medium retailers around the country.

NAMA advises that if any tenant considers that his or her landlord is not engaging with them in accordance with the Guidance Note, he or she can contact NAMA directly at info@nama.ie and ask that NAMA look into the matter on their behalf.

Tax Collection

203. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Finance in view of the fact that Horse Racing Ireland is seeking to secure an adequate and consistent level of multi-annual funding

from the Exchequer for horse racing here; if he proposes to increase the tax contribution from the thoroughbred breeding industry in view of the 2012 yields of €700,000 in income tax returns and €6.4 million in corporation tax returns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3481/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I dealt comprehensively with the issue of profits and tax yields from the thoroughbred breeding industry in my replies to Questions Nos. 157 to 160, inclusive, on 18 November last year and Question No. 177 on 9 December last.

In these replies, I explained that there was a range of variables associated with the stallions industry and that profits from a number of activities within the thoroughbred breeding sector are not separately identifiable. As a result, it is unwise to draw any firm conclusions from the figures supplied.

The Deputy will be aware that the figures supplied related only to profits for income tax and corporation tax purposes and took no account of the overall contribution made by the sector in terms of employment taxes and VAT. I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that these amounts may not include gains from the sale of stallions, nor does it include profits earned from the provision of stallion stud services that are owned by syndicates as these are not regarded as having been earned in the course of a trade. It is not possible to state the amount of any profits associated with these activities as they are not separately captured on tax returns.

As to plans to increase the tax contributions from the thoroughbred breeding industry, I have no plans for changes in this area at this time.

VAT Rate Reductions

204. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost to the Exchequer if the 13.5% VAT rate was reduced to 13%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3508/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the cost of lowering the reduced rate of VAT from 13.5% to 13% is estimated at €130m.

Tax Rebates

205. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Finance if a person (details supplied) in County Kildare is due a tax refund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3541/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the person concerned is a chargeable person for income tax purposes. A tax return for 2013 has been received by Revenue and a refund issued to the person concerned in September 2014.

On receipt of the 2014 tax return, the position will be reviewed and any tax and/or universal social charge (USC) overpaid will be refunded.

The Revenue Commissioners have confirmed, that based on the information currently available to them, USC, should not be deducted from the pension of the person concerned. A revised tax credit and USC certificate will issue shortly to the person concerned and to their pension provider. When the amended certificate is received by the pension provider, the USC over de-

ducted in 2015 will be refunded.

Pension Provisions

206. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding PRSA accounts (details supplied) in Dublin 5; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3548/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): A Personal Retirement Savings Account (PRSA) is an easy access private pension savings vehicle designed to allow individuals save for retirement flexibly. PRSAs may be taken out by anyone, regardless of employment status, are transferable from job to job and are available from a variety of authorized providers. However, they have particular relevance for those who are not members of occupational pension schemes and the self-employed (where they operate as an alternative to retirement annuity contracts). In essence, a PRSA is a personally held contract-based defined contribution retirement arrangement between an individual and an authorised PRSA provider, such as an insurance company, credit institution or investment firm. They are maintained in the form of an account that holds units in investment funds managed by the authorized providers.

An individual may make tax-relieved contributions to a PRSA and, where the PRSA is effected by an employer in circumstances where there is no employer-sponsored occupational pension scheme, employers may also contribute but are not obliged to do so. Pension benefits under a PRSA may, with some exceptions, be taken from age 60 to age 75. A tax-free retirement lump sum not exceeding 25% of the fund can be taken, subject to a maximum tax-free amount of €200,000 with the remainder of the fund used to purchase an annuity, retained in the PRSA and drawn-down over time or used to avail of the flexible retirement options which include investing in an Approved Retirement Fund (ARF). All withdrawals are subject to income tax at the individual's marginal income tax rate as appropriate.

There are a number of reasons why, under existing policy, pre-retirement access to pension savings held in the form of pension plans or schemes is not permitted. The principal reason is that these arrangements (and the associated tax reliefs on contributions and pension fund growth) are designed to be long-term savings vehicles based on the principle that the benefits will be "locked away" to help fund an adequate income in retirement. This is why the Government encourages pension savings through generous tax relief on contributions and pension fund growth.

That said, in Budget and Finance Act 2013, I introduced Section 782A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 to provide members of occupational pension schemes with a once-off opportunity to access a part of their Additional Voluntary Contributions (AVCs), including AVCs made by a scheme member to an AVC-PRSA product, prior to retirement. The option is available for a three year period from 27 March 2013, the date that the Finance Act 2013 was passed into law. The take-up of the measure to date has not been particularly significant and most individuals have decided to preserve their AVC pension savings. I would emphasise, of course, that the pre-retirement access allowed for in this initiative is to additional pension savings over and above an individual's core savings in his or her main employer-sponsored scheme. Main pension scheme savings are generally not accessible pre-retirement.

I appreciate that for those in financial difficulties, it is natural to look to their pension savings as a possible means of helping to solve those difficulties. However, I am strongly of the view that it is preferable not to allow early unplanned withdrawals of core pension savings as an inevitable result is to divert the savings, initially intended to finance retirement, to meet short term financial crises. Allowing such access would clearly pose retirement income adequacy

issues and the impact of the early withdrawal of pension savings on the ultimate value of the pension pot at retirement should not be underestimated.

For these various reasons, I have no plans to extend pre-retirement access to pension savings beyond what is provided for in relation to AVCs.

Bank Charges

207. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the amount collected by each State backed bank in maintenance fees or overdraft facility charges for each of the past five years on bank accounts that have been inactive for at least three years. [3558/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The banks have been unable to provide the information as requested by the Deputy within the required timeframe as I understand that this data is not captured by the banks in the normal course of operations.

However one bank, permanent tsb, has provided my Department with an estimate of the information requested which would indicate that the amount over the past five years is not material as only a very small number of their accounts were charged the fees in question and were inactive at any point in time.

Home Repossession Rate

208. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Finance if he has assessed the numbers of home repossessions which are ratified and are occurring; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3577/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank's Residential Mortgage Arrears and Repossession Statistics for Quarter 3 of 2014 can be accessed at the following link: <http://www.centralbank.ie/polstats/stats/mortgagearrears/Pages/releases.aspx>.

I am very aware of this issue and a number of initiatives have been put in place to address it. While the administration of the Courts is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality, it is important to note that there are important protections available to borrowers under the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA).

In accordance with the CCMA, any lender must have complied with the CCMA before a threat of repossession can be made. The CCMA provides an integrated and cohesive package of consumer protection measures for borrowers facing or in mortgage arrears.

Under the CCMA, a lender may only commence legal proceedings for repossession of a borrower's primary residence, where:

a) the lender has made every reasonable effort under the CCMA to agree an alternative repayment arrangement with the borrower or his/her nominated representative; and

b) (i) for co-operating borrowers, eight months from the date the arrears arose, or three months from the date of the letter informing the borrower that an alternative repayment arrangement is not deemed to be appropriate; or

(ii) where the borrower has been classified as not co-operating and the lender has issued the notification required under the CCMA.

While the repossession of a principal dwelling house consequent upon mortgage default should only be considered as a last option for a person in genuine difficulty, repossessions do arise and this can be expected to continue as long as the mortgage crisis remains. It should be noted, however, that when repossessions do arise most are of a voluntary nature and that the legal repossession route only arises in a minority of cases.

It is important to point out, however, that even if a repossession case has commenced in the legal system, the Land and Conveyancing (Law Reform) Act 2013 now provides a power to the Court to adjourn a repossession proceeding in relation to a principal private residence to enable the borrower to consult a personal insolvency practitioner (PIP) and, where appropriate, to instruct the PIP to make a Personal Insolvency Arrangement (PIA) proposal. In formulating a proposal for a PIA, the Personal Insolvency Act 2012 places an onus on a PIP to do so on terms that shall not insofar as reasonably practicable, require the borrower to dispose of an interest or cease to occupy a principal private residence.

The strong view of the Government is that, in respect of co-operating borrowers under the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process, repossession of a person's primary home should only be considered as a last resort and that every effort should be made to agree a sustainable arrangement as an alternative to repossession.

Pensions Levy

209. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Finance his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding altering the conditions of private pensions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3617/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In the details supplied with the Deputy's question, I assume that the issues raised regarding private sector funded pensions are to do with the pension fund levy. I announced in my Budget 2014 speech that the 0.6% Pension Fund Levy introduced to fund the Jobs Initiative in 2011 would be abolished from the 31st of December 2014. I did, however, introduce an additional levy on pension funds at 0.15% for 2014 and 2015. I did this to, among other things, continue to help fund the Jobs Initiative. I confirmed in my Budget 2015 speech that the additional 0.15% levy will expire at the end of 2015.

The issues raised in the details supplied regarding public service pensions are matters for my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Mr. Brendan Howlin TD.

Credit Register Administration

210. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the steps that have been taken to establish a central credit register here; when the register will be up and running; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3632/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Credit Reporting Act 2013 provides that the Central Bank is responsible for the establishment and operation of the central credit register (CCR).

The Central Bank has informed me that it completed a public procurement process in 2014. The purpose of the process was to select a partner and solutions to support the CCR. The Bank is currently negotiating the final details of the contract with the preferred supplier. The Bank also engaged with representative industry groups to explain its approach and gain an under-

standing of the likely implications of the CCR for lenders.

I understand that the Central Bank intends to take a phased approach to the establishment and development of the register. The initial phase of the CCR will focus on the consumer credit market and is expected to become operational by mid-2016. A later phase will address commercial credit and is tentatively scheduled to be operational by end 2017.

The operational implementation of the credit register is a complex process and the final timeline will be influenced by:

1. the scale of technical and operational changes to be implemented by over 500 lenders within the scope of the CCR; and
2. the final detailed obligations to be set out in regulations.

It is anticipated that 2015 will be spent in developing and testing the technical solutions in partnership with relevant stakeholders with credit data being supplied by lenders on a phased basis during the course of late 2015 and into 2016.

Tax Code

211. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to introduce financial transaction taxes and carbon tax on airline ticket levies in order to raise additional resources to fund sustainable development at scale, as encouraged by the UN Secretary General in his December 2014 Synthesis Report on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda (A69/700); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3693/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Government's position is that a Financial Transactions Tax (FTT) would be best applied on a wide international basis to include the major financial centres to prevent the danger of activities gravitating to jurisdictions where taxes are not levied on financial transactions. Notwithstanding this, the Government is not prepared to stand in the way of EU Member States that wish to work together to implement a Financial Transactions Tax and in this regard adoption of a decision formally authorising enhanced cooperation took place during the Irish Presidency of the EU in January 2013.

The proposal for a Directive from the European Commission in the area of financial transaction tax was published in February 2013. Ireland had many concerns about the proposal as drafted, not least of which were the potential impacts on, and the trading of, Irish Sovereign debt in the secondary market and in total, the potential negative impact on the liquidity of the financial sector as a whole. Members of the Economic and Financial Sub-Committee on EU Sovereign Debt Markets have stated that the introduction of the FTT would have a significantly negative effect on Sovereign Debt Markets and may impair the good-functioning of secondary markets for sovereign debt resulting in reduced liquidity, reduced investor demand and therefore higher financing costs for States.

Our concerns are widely shared amongst the Member States, including some of the participating countries. These concerns have led to the issuing of a communique by the participating Member States, announcing that they have agreed to implement a financial transaction tax in a progressive manner, with the first step being a charge on shares and some derivatives. However, significant technical and legal discussions will continue to be required at the Council Working Party before the text of the proposed Directive can be finalised. With this in mind, the targeted implementation date for the FTT has been rescheduled to 1 January 2016.

As the Deputy will be aware, Ireland already has a tax on financial transactions, a Stamp Duty on transfers of shares in Irish incorporated companies, which currently stands at 1%. I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the provisional yield from this charge in 12014 was €283.67m.

Ireland was one of the first Member States to introduce a Carbon Tax on fossil fuels which as well as providing for much needed revenues also went some way towards addressing environmental concerns. The tax was introduced, at an initial rate of €15 per tonne of CO₂ emission, on a phased basis in Budget 2010 and applied to petrol and diesel from budget night 2009 and to all other fossil fuels (except solid fuels) from 1st May 2010. The rate was increased to €20 per tonne of CO₂ emission in Budget 2012. It was extended to solid fuels from May 2013 at a rate of €10 per tonne which increased to €20 per tonne in May 2014. The provisional carbon tax receipts for 2014 are €385.2m.

An Air Travel Tax with a general rate of €10, and €2 for shorter journeys, was introduced in the 2009 Budget, effective from 30 March 2009. The Finance Act 2011 provided for a single rate of Air Travel Tax of €3 for all passengers with effect from 1 March 2011, replacing the €2 and €10 distance related rates. Following the success of the ‘The Gathering’ in 2013, Budget 2014 provided for the removal of the Air Travel Tax from 1st April 2014. This was to encourage the development of new routes, increasing capacity and traffic flows which in turn would boost tourism and lead to the creation of jobs. This built on the success of the 9% VAT rate for tourism related services that was introduced in 2011 as part of the Jobs Initiative. Employment in the accommodation and food service sector has increased by over 20% between the period Q2 2011 to Q2 2014 an increase of 23,000 jobs in the sector.

I am generally not in favour of the hypothecation of taxes as it reduces the flexibility of the Government to prioritise and allocate funds as necessary at a particular time.

Tax Code

212. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to introduce a 1% billionaires’ tax as proposed by the UN in the World Economic and Social Survey 2012 the revenue of which could be used to aid Ireland in its commitment to a more carbon-efficient economy, particularly in view of the estimation by Princeton Environmental Institute director (details supplied) that the 500 million richest persons on the planet are responsible for about half of all global emissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3694/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have no plans to introduce a tax along the lines suggested by the Deputy.

Ireland was one of the first Member States to introduce a Carbon Tax on fossil fuels which as well as providing for much needed revenues also went some way towards addressing environmental concerns. The tax was introduced, at an initial rate of €15 per tonne of CO₂ emission, on a phased basis in Budget 2010 and applied to petrol and diesel from budget night 2009 and to all other fossil fuels (except solid fuels) from 1 May 2010. The rate was increased to €20 per tonne of CO₂ emission in Budget 2012. It was extended to solid fuels from May 2013 at a rate of €10 per tonne which increased to €20 per tonne in May 2014. The provisional carbon tax receipts for 2014 are €385.2m.

I am generally not in favour of the hypothecation of taxes as it reduces the flexibility of the Government to prioritise and allocate funds as necessary at a particular time.

Tax Credits

213. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Finance if appropriate tax credit will be applied in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3741/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the person concerned has recently written to them on this matter. Based on the information provided in this communication, an amended Tax Credit Certificate including a Single Parent Child Carer Credit as claimed, will issue shortly.

Tax Credits

214. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Finance if a person (details supplied) in County Kildare is on their correct tax payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3775/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the 2015 tax credits of the person concerned have been reduced to collect underpayments of tax arising in prior years. The person concerned was advised of the amounts to be collected in the PAYE Balancing Statements (P21s) that issued to him on 1 April 2011 and 9 May 2014. Taking into account these reductions and based on the information available to Revenue, the person concerned is in receipt of the correct tax credits for the current year. A tax credit certificate confirming this position will issue shortly to the person concerned.

The Revenue Commissioners have also advised me that they have written to the person concerned requesting his P60 for 2014 so that his tax liability for that year can be reviewed.

Tax Collection

215. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Finance the reason under 18 year old persons who have a savings bank account must pay 41% DIRT tax on their savings interest; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3786/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Under Section 257 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 all deposit takers are obliged to deduct Deposit Interest Retention Tax (DIRT) from payments of interest made to an account unless the account qualifies as an exempt account. There is no specific exemption in the case of interest paid on deposit accounts held by children.

The wider tax code does not provide for an exemption from tax for children. Children could be liable to a range of taxes. Not many children have an income that exceeds the relevant thresholds, but those that do are taxable on it.

To provide an exemption from DIRT to children's accounts could be difficult to administer, from the point of view of establishing the beneficial ownership of the account.

A number of State Savings Products offered by the National Treasury Management Agency through An Post are tax free, subject to certain conditions.

Tax Collection

216. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Finance the reason a person (details supplied) is paying a high level of tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3791/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been advised by the Revenue Commissioners that according to their records, the person concerned ceased employment in August 2014 and is not currently employed.

The Revenue Commissioners are writing to the person concerned to confirm the position and will arrange for a tax credit certificate to be issued, if required.

Banking Sector

217. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Finance his plans for selling the State's interest in AIB; his plans to retain a shareholding in the bank; if so, the extent of the shareholding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3813/15]

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 was even a year ago. 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.

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 to the Department 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.

As I have previously stated on numerous occasions, Government policy is that we will not remain a holder of our banking investments in the long term. Given our high debt to GDP ratio, we do not have the luxury of holding all of these investments indefinitely and I envisage receipts from the gradual sale of these investments helping to play their part in reducing the State's overall debt burden in the coming years.

Mortgage Lending

218. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if new regulations on mortgages such as a loan-to-value ceiling would affect affordable housing schemes such as those run by county councils. [3816/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Central Bank that the proposed macro prudential regulations in relation to residential mortgage lending will not apply to local authority mortgages as they are not provided by "regulated financial service providers" within the meaning of Section 2 of the Central Bank Act 1942.

Pension Provisions

219. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the PFT-SFT threshold for divorced persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3830/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Tax legislation provides for a limit or ceiling on the total capital value of tax-relieved pension benefits that an individual can draw down in their lifetime from all of their supplementary pension arrangements. This is known as the Standard Fund Threshold or SFT and was introduced on 7 December 2005 and amended since (most recently in Finance (No 2) Act 2013 which, among other things, reduced the SFT from €2.3 million to €2 million from 1 January 2014).

A higher limit, known as a Personal Fund Threshold or PFT, may be claimed where the capital value of an individual's pension benefits exceeded the SFT on the date of its introduction or on the dates of its reduction.

The SFT regime was originally introduced mainly to deal with the abuse of the tax-relief arrangements for pensions which resulted in pension overfunding by individuals and was also subsequently amended to place a constraint on the cost to the Exchequer of tax relief for pension saving generally. The regime deals with these issues at the point of pension draw down in retirement rather than by applying specific restrictions to pension savings or accrual upfront. There is, therefore, no restriction or limit on the contributions that an individual can make to his or her pension savings on an ongoing basis or on the annual accrual of pension benefits (other than the standard earnings and age-related percentage limits that determine the annual level of tax-relieved contributions that can be made by an individual). Instead, a significant tax charge is imposed on the value of retirement benefits in excess of the SFT or PFT, as appropriate, when they are drawn down. In this way, the maximum allowable pension fund for tax purposes acts to discourage the building up of large pension funds in the first place or unwinds the tax advantage of funding for benefits above those limits by clawing back, through the tax charge, the tax relief granted.

Where an individual is a member of a pension scheme or arrangement on or after 7 December 2005 and the scheme or arrangement is or becomes subject to a pension adjustment order (PAO), then in calculating the capital value of any benefit drawn down at retirement from the pension scheme or arrangement (e.g. a pension, annuity, lump sum etc.) in respect of that individual for the purpose of establishing if their SFT or PFT has been exceeded, the benefits designated to a spouse or civil partner under the PAO are to be included in the calculation as if the PAO had not been made. Also, in calculating whether an entitlement to a PFT arises in the first place, the individual seeking the PFT includes the capital value of his/her pension benefits as if the PAO had not been made.

The PAO exclusion provision was introduced as an anti-avoidance measure, designed to prevent an individual with a PFT, whose pension was subject to a PAO, from taking the view that as part of his or her pension had been assigned to a spouse/civil partner, he or she was then free to avail of further tax relief in building their part of the pension fund back up to the level of their PFT. If this had been permitted, it would have allowed a situation to arise whereby the aggregate amount of the pension funds built up originally with tax relief (in respect of which the PFT was granted) and then built back up again (with further tax relief) to the PFT amount, following the PAO, to greatly exceed the original amount of the PFT, at significant additional tax cost to the Exchequer. For these reasons, the legislation requires a PAO to be ignored for the purposes of determining whether an individual's SFT or PFT has been exceeded. The corollary of this is that the designated benefit going to the non-member spouse or partner is not included

in determining the overall capital value of the non-member spouse or partner's supplementary pension benefits, if any, as to do so could result in double taxation.

Up to recently, the arrangements described above could also result (where a chargeable excess arose and a PAO was involved) in the pension scheme member being liable to the entire tax charge on the excess, notwithstanding that a significant part of his or her pension benefits may have been designated to a former spouse or partner. In section 19 of Finance Act 2014, on foot of representations made to me in this matter, I made provision so that, in such cases, the tax charge is shared more equitably between the affected individual and his or her former spouse or partner in relation to whom the PAO refers.

It has never been the case that the SFT, or a PFT if applicable, is shared between individuals whether married or divorced. The SFT has relevance and potential application only to individuals who are funding for or accruing pension benefits in pension saving arrangements approved by the Revenue Commissioners and who have relevant earnings out of which contributions to such arrangements are, or are capable of, being tax-relieved or tax subsidised. It has no direct application or relevance to individuals or taxpayers who are not in this position, including for example, the former spouses or partners of pension scheme members who are not in pension saving arrangements as described. I have no plans for further change in these arrangements.

Coastal Protection

220. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his attention has been drawn to the serious damage caused to the coastal protection and sea defences of a beach (details supplied) in County Donegal following recent adverse weather conditions; his plans to repair these sea defences and remedy this situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3750/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): Responsibility for identifying appropriate measures to address damage to coastal defence infrastructure at Maghera Beach, Glenties rests with Donegal County Council in the first instance.

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. However, the Office of Public Works (OPW) would consider an application for funding from the Council under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme for mitigation measures that meet the Scheme's eligibility criteria, including a requirement that the works have a cost/benefit ratio of at least 1.5:1 and are estimated to cost not more than €500,000. Proposals for larger scale works would require more detailed technical, environmental and economic assessment by the Council. The provision of funding by the OPW would also have regard to the OPW's overall allocation for flood risk management.

Public Procurement Contracts

221. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on lowering the turnover threshold which must be reached by small and medium-sized enterprises as part of the public procurement process; if a regulatory impact analysis has been carried out to ascertain the impact of the current threshold guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3819/15]

222. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of small and medium enterprises which unsuccessfully tendered for contracts under the public procurement process, because of their failure to reach the current threshold guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3820/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 221 and 222 together.

There are no centrally imposed requirements for a minimum turnover. The assessment of a tenderer's financial and economic standing is a key part of any procurement process. Establishing the appropriate suitability criteria that are relevant and appropriate to a particular contract is, of course, a matter for the contracting authority concerned. This is because the contracting authority is in the best position to gauge the appropriate levels of financial capacity that are appropriate to the needs of that specific contract. Therefore there are no centrally imposed requirements for a minimum turnover. Such requirements must logically be developed on a case by case basis with reference to the specific needs of the contract.

The Government recognises that the small and medium enterprise (SME) sector is very important to the economy and that public procurement can be a source of business for SMEs. In this regard, my Department has issued guidance (Circular 10/14) to public bodies aimed at facilitating greater participation of SMEs in public procurement opportunities. In relation to suitability criteria, the guidelines stress that public bodies must ensure that any criteria/turnover levels set by them must be both justifiable and proportionate to the needs of the contract. The Office of Government Procurement through its category councils and through its engagement with public bodies is ensuring that this message is being brought to the attention of buyers across the public service.

Pensions Levy

223. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding the public sector pension levy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3617/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The public service Pension-Related Deduction (PRD), which applies to the pay of pensionable public servants, was introduced in March 2009 under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009. It continues to provide very important revenue to the State, and as such remains a key constituent of the suite of financial emergency measures affecting public service pay and pensions which have been adopted in response to the financial crisis.

For information, I would point out that in relation to public service pension arrangements a succession of cost containment measures have been put in place over recent years affecting existing pensioners, serving staff and new recruits in the public service.

The most significant cost-saving reform has been the introduction in January 2013 of the Single Public Service Pension Scheme, also known as the Single Scheme, which is the default pension scheme for new-hire workers across the entire public service. This landmark reform targets very substantial long-run savings of about one third of pension outgoing, with those savings deriving mainly from career-average (not final-salary) pension accrual, inflation (not pay) linkage of benefits, and higher minimum pension age (effectively 68 years for most new joiners).

Several other measures have also been taken over recent years which help to curb public

service pension costs as follows:

- In 2004 minimum pension age for new-joiner public service workers was raised from 60 to 65 years.

- In 2010 public service pay cuts averaging approximately 7% were applied. Further pay cuts affecting public servants with annual earnings above €65,000 were applied in July 2013. In general, these various pay reductions act to reduce individual pension and lump sum awards to persons retiring from the public service.

- In January 2011 public service pensions in payment above €12,000 were reduced via a multi-band progressively structured Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR), which had an average impact of 4% on pensions.

- In July 2013, further cuts in public service pension payment rates, via adjustments to the rates and scope of the PSPR, and amounting to between 2% and 5%, were imposed on pensions in excess of €32,500.

It should also be noted that the great majority of public servants hired since 1995 make an explicit contribution to their pensions, comprised of 3% of pay and an additional 3.5% of net pay, where net pay is defined as salary less twice the rate of Contributory State Pension.

With regard to the future of PRD, I have already put on record my view that, subject to a continuation of our fiscal recovery and to the necessary economic conditions being in place, I envisage a future orderly wind-down of the financial emergency measures legislation. In planning for the eventual ending of the financial emergency and for addressing the related legislative position, the Government will be concerned to ensure that a return to more normal pay setting arrangements in the public service is accompanied by pension arrangements which are clearly seen to be sustainable in the long term.

Public Procurement Contracts Data

224. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 73 and 74 of 15 January 2015, if the Office of Government Procurement holds data on all public works and capital projects awarded by the State. [3289/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As outlined in the response to PQs: 73 and 74 of 15 January 2015, 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 contract performance is managed locally and consequently all contract files are retained by the contracting authorities. The award information available from the eTenders is not a contract repository and the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) has not validated the data entered by contracting authorities.

The information requested by the Deputy, as entered by contracting authorities on etenders, is being collated and will issue directly to the Deputy. However, the information entered does not capture all award details for works contracts for the years 2011 to 2014. Circular 10/14 now places a further responsibility on contracting authorities to enter award information for works contracts above €25,000 with effect from 1st August 2014.

Ministerial Pensions

225. **Deputy Shane Ross** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if changes have been made since 2013 or are planned to be made to the pensions of Ministers, Ministers of State and officeholders in the Houses of the Oireachtas and the pensions of Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas; if so, the changes or proposed changes and the potential cost to the Exchequer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3392/15]

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

The Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and Other Provisions) Act 2012 introduced a new Single Public Service Pension Scheme for new entrants, including new Oireachtas Members, from 1 January 2013. This scheme has a new minimum pension age of 66, raised from 65 as applies to new entrant Public Servants from 2004, and linked to future increases in the age for the Contributory State Pension. Benefits under the new scheme are substantially revised, with pensions for all new entrant Public Servants, including new entrant Oireachtas Members and Officeholders, to be based on career average earnings rather than the current final salary basis.

Successive Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts have impacted on the pay and pensions of politicians. For example the pay reductions have substantially reduced the salaries on which pensions are calculated. A progressive Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR) was introduced from January 2011 on the pensions of those who retired before March 2012, and a new higher PSPR rate of 20% was introduced from January 2012 for pensions over €100,000. Further PSPR reductions were introduced for pensions of €32,500 and above from July 2013 which impacts on those retiring before the end of the current 'grace period'. This was deemed necessary and appropriate to ensure that higher-paid pensioners, including Oireachtas Members and Officeholders, would make a fair and proportionate additional contribution to the fiscal consolidation measures.

A further effective pension cut applies with effect from 1 September 2013 in the case of persons who receive two or more Public Service pensions which have a combined value in excess of €32,500. This further pension cut is based on applying the PSPR to the combined value of the multiple Public Service pensions held by such a person, rather than to each pension individually. This aggregation of pensions for PSPR purposes reduces the overall Public Service pension income of affected pensioners, including significant numbers of pensioners who receive both a TD pension and a Ministerial pension.

Other measures introduced in recent years which have impacted on the pensions of politicians include the exclusion for pension purposes of long service increments and the bar on serving Oireachtas or European Parliament Members from receiving Ministerial pensions. In addition, although not a pension issue, severance payments for Ministers and other Officeholders were abolished under the Oireachtas (Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices) (Amendment) Act 2014 and no member of the current Government will receive such payments upon leaving Office.

There are no plans at present to further reduce Public Service pensions. However, I would like to assure the Deputy that pay and pension costs will be kept under review as part of the Government's ongoing strategy to bring the public finances to a sustainable level.

226. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the expected eventual cost of the fence which is to be erected by the Office of Public Works around the Castletown Demesne, Celbridge, County Kildare. [3525/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): At present there are no plans to erect a fence around the Castletown Demesne, Celbridge, Co Kildare.

Office of Public Works Projects

227. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount of funding his Department and-or the Office of Public Works has allocated for a court case regarding the right of way at Castletown Demesne, Celbridge, County Kildare to be taken by an organisation (details supplied); and the specific purposes or beneficiaries of such funds. [3526/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): I am advised that the Commissioners of Public Works are not aware of any court case regarding a right of way at Castletown Demesne, Celbridge, County Kildare.

Legislative Measures

228. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the current position regarding FEMPI (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3621/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I refer to my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 207 of 18 November 2014. The position remains unchanged.

Valuation Office

229. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a not-for-profit sporting club may apply for a revision of a rateable valuation in respect of a premises they are now using and which was previously used by a business; the way such an application may be made; the timeframe for deciding on such an application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3689/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Under section 28 (4) of the Valuation Act 2001, a Revision Officer, appointed by the Commissioner, may carry out a revision of valuation in relation to a particular property only if a material change of circumstances (MCC) has occurred since the property was last revised. MCC is defined in section 3 of the Act as a change of circumstances, which consist of a new building, a change in value due to structural alterations of an existing building, total or partial demolition of a building, a sub-division or amalgamation of relevant property or the happening of an event whereby any relevant property begins, or ceases, to be treated as property falling within Schedule 4 of the Act i.e. exempt from rates. Should the foregoing MCC criteria be satisfied, the appointed Revision Officer will consider the application and determine and issue a valuation for the subject property within a period of six months from the date of his appointment.

The procedure for making an application for a determination of valuation is that an occupier of a property, a rating authority, a person as respects a property to which he/she is an interest holder or an occupier of a property that appears on a valuation list may apply in writing to the Commissioner of Valuation for a revision of an existing valuation or for a new valuation to be determined in respect of a new building. The statutory fee prescribed for the service is €250 which should accompany the application to the Valuation Office.

Public Procurement Regulations

230. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide in tabular form the number of instances where a Department or agency has enforced the contractual remedy of non-payment or deduction of sums that were legally due to employees arising from non-compliance of the requirement set out in clause 5.3 of public works contracts; and the total amount withheld for the years 2011 to 2014, inclusive. [3704/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The information being sought by the Deputy is not collated by my Department. Clause 5.3 ‘Pay and Conditions of Employment’ of the public works contracts contains provisions which apply to all workers engaged on the site. Clause 5.3.6 makes specific provision where the Contractor has not complied with Clause 5.3, that the Employer shall be entitled to estimate the amount that should have been paid to workers and contributions that should have been made on their behalf, and the Employer may deduct the estimated amount from any payment due to the Contractor, until the Employer is satisfied that all proper amounts have been paid.

The management of the tendering process for a public contract and the administration of the contract once awarded is a matter for each contracting authority. The data sought by the Deputy is held only by the contracting authority concerned.

Public Sector Pensions

231. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of persons who have had their pension entitlements over-calculated by PeoplePoint; the options open to pensioners who because of a miscalculation of their pension entitlement have received a demand for repayment of part of their lump sum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3756/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): PeoplePoint is the HR and Pensions Administration Shared Service for the Civil Service. It was established in March 2013 and currently provides services to employees across 21 Civil Service organisations. Once all remaining inscope organisations transition, PeoplePoint will provide services across 38 organisations.

PeoplePoint began calculating retirement benefits and instructing the Pay Master General (PMG) in the Department of Finance to make pension payments on 15 April 2013. Since then, PeoplePoint has processed more than 3,000 retirement cases.

When setting up a pension benefit for a scheme member, new information can come to light occasionally after the retirement date, e.g. additional periods of service that requires confirmation. Rather than delay a pension payment leaving a retiring scheme member without any income, it is standard practice to set up the pension benefit based on the information known at the time, and revise the benefits as soon as possible thereafter. This can result in a benefit increase

or decrease, depending on the nature of what has been confirmed. Since 15 April 2013, 38 cases of retirement benefits have been revised.

In these exceptional cases where retirement benefits need to be revised, PeoplePoint works directly with the retiree to accommodate any reasonable repayment arrangement. Individuals who find themselves in this situation are asked to make contact immediately with Pensions@peoplepoint.ie or 076 107 1000.

IDA Data

232. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 258 of 14 January 2015, the number of visits by potential investors-IDA Ireland to north and south Tipperary in 2014; the way this compares with other counties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3334/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am informed by IDA Ireland that in 2014 there were three site visits to Co. Tipperary. As the Deputy will see from the following tabular statement, which sets out on a county-by-county basis the number of IDA Ireland-sponsored site visits during 2014, one county had the same number of visits as Tipperary while 11 counties had a lesser number of visits and 13 counties received more visits. Dublin received the most visits. In this connection, I must point out that, while IDA Ireland does try to influence the location, the final decision on where to visit is made by the investor. IDA Ireland is currently in the process of finalising its new strategy for the coming 5 years and is conscious of the need to secure investments and jobs for all regions of the country over the lifetime of the strategy.

Growing both Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and indigenous enterprise is key to Ireland's economic recovery. I am glad to inform the Deputy that 2014 was a record year for both IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland in terms of investment wins and job creation, with 7,131 net new jobs being created in IDA Ireland client companies and 8,476 net new jobs being created in Enterprise Ireland client companies.

As Minister for Jobs Enterprise and Innovation, I introduced a collaborative, cross government approach to advancing job creation in the State. The Action Plan for Jobs is an annual plan designed to drive action across all Government Departments and Agencies in a collective effort to put in place the conditions needed to support and grow enterprise in the State.

As I have said on more than one occasion, 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, which I hope to publish shortly.

It is my intention that 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.

Number of IDA Ireland sponsored Site Visits by potential investors on a county by county basis in 2014

County	Site Visits
Carlow	2
Cavan	1
Clare	9
Cork	30
Donegal	6
Dublin	205
Galway	19
Kerry	3
Kildare	1
Kilkenny	4
Laois	0
Leitrim	2
Limerick	22
Longford	0
Louth	10
Mayo	4
Meath	2
Monaghan	0
Offaly	1
Roscommon	0
Sligo	7
Tipperary	3
Waterford	11
Westmeath	12
Wexford	1
Wicklow	4

Economic Growth Initiatives

233. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the structures that will be put in place to rebalance economic development in regional areas such as County Carlow and the south east which have a higher percentage of unemployment than other areas; and his plans to use empty commercial properties as advance factories to attract foreign direct investment to these areas. [3410/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Action Plan for Jobs continues to be the Government's main policy instrument to support employment in all regions of the country. Since the start of the Action Plan for Jobs process in 2012, employment nationally has increased by approximately 80,000.

Employment in the South East region has increased by 21,300 since Quarter 1 2012, and the unemployment rate for the region has fallen from 20.1% to 13.7%, the largest decrease of all regions. While this represents good progress, the unemployment rate for the South East is still above the national average of 11.1% in the latest Quarterly National Household Survey published by the Central Statistics Office. The Government is now placing an increased emphasis on supporting job creation at a regional level to ensure a balanced share of the recovery.

The 2014 Action Plan for Jobs contained a number of measures to support competitive regions, including the development of a framework for Regional Enterprise Strategies and the commencement of building works by the IDA in a number of regional locations, including Wa-

terford in the South-East region.

We will intensify our focus on the regions in 2015 and, as I have announced previously, we will develop Enterprise Strategies for each region on a phased basis. In a manner similar to the Action Plan for Jobs, the Regional Enterprise Strategies will identify measures that can be taken to enable each region as a whole to realise its economic potential and create jobs, building on its existing competitive strengths and opportunities.

The first Regional Enterprise Strategy to be published will cover the Midlands region. This will be followed by an Enterprise Strategy for the South East, which includes County Carlow, and will build on the South East Employment Action Plan which I published at the end of 2011. I anticipate that the process of developing the Regional Enterprise Strategy for the South East will commence in February. It is my intention that 6 of the Regional Enterprise Strategies will be launched by July with a further two in development.

The availability of suitable property solutions for businesses is likely to be an issue for both indigenous and potential foreign investment companies, and will be among the matters to be considered and addressed as we develop the Regional Enterprise Strategies.

Consumer Protection

234. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will amend the relevant legislation to ensure consumers' 14 day cooling off period begins at the commencement of the service rather than the finalising of the contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3448/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The provision in the European Union (Consumer Information, Cancellation and Other Rights) Regulations 2013 that the cooling-off or cancellation period for distance and off-premises contracts for the supply of services expires after 14 days from the day on which the contract was concluded is in accordance with Directive 2011/83/EU on Consumer Rights to which the Regulations give effect. As the Directive is a maximum harmonisation instrument, it is not open to Member States to alter the rules on the commencement and expiry of the cooling-off period. The Regulations and the Directive provide, however, that consumers may cancel a service contract where the service has commenced but has not been fully performed provided that they pay the trader an amount proportionate to the service provided up to the time of cancellation. Under previous EU and Irish law, consumers could not cancel a distance or off-premises contract whose performance had already commenced. If, furthermore, the trader does not provide the consumer with information on the right to cancel in accordance with the Regulations, the cooling-off period is extended by up to 12 months.

Company Registration

235. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will request of the Companies Registration Office to remove the inappropriate job description, "married woman", from the list of occupations on the online form when registering online as a director of a company or charity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3476/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am informed by the Companies Registration Office (CRO) that the job description 'Married Woman' is a legacy item on an extensive list of occupations available on the online forms.

The CRO e-Filing systems have undergone a major modernisation in recent months. The new portal for the e-Filing system went live on Friday 23 January and modernised e-Forms will begin to be rolled out in the coming weeks. The updated list of occupations, which no longer includes the description 'Married Woman', will appear in the new e-Forms as they become available.

Job Creation Data

236. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide in a tabular form the annual number of new jobs announced by the Government between 2011 and 2014, inclusive; and the number of these jobs that were delivered in the same period. [3485/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am informed by IDA Ireland that in the 4 year period 2011 to 2014 inclusive, there were a total of 298 investment announcements with the potential to create in excess of 40,000 jobs. Similarly, in the case of Enterprise Ireland there were 58 investment announcements in the same 4 year period with the potential to create almost 14,000 jobs. In the same four year period there were 59,763 jobs (both full and part time) created in IDA Ireland client companies and 56,865 jobs (both full and part time) created in Enterprise Ireland client companies.

It is important to note that in any given year the numbers of jobs created always exceed the number of jobs announced.

In a great many cases a new investment project progresses without any public announcement. It is a matter for the individual company whether or not to announce an investment project publicly. While some jobs come on stream immediately following an announcement it can take up to 3 to 5 years for jobs to come on stream in other cases. This time lag is necessary to enable premises to be acquired or constructed and for staff to be recruited.

The following tabular statement sets out the number of IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland jobs announcements, potential job creation figures and actual job creation figures for each of the years 2011 to 2014, inclusive.

Table showing the number of IDA Ireland announcements in each of the years 2011 to 2014, inclusive, together with figures for potential job creation along with actual job creation figures

Year	Number of Investment announcements	Number of potential jobs associated with those announcements	Actual number of jobs created (both full time and other)
2011	79	5,875	14,432
2012	84	8,287	15,215
2013	69	5,408	15,104
2014	66	6,508	15,012

Table showing the number of Enterprise Ireland announcements in each of the years 2011 to 2014, inclusive, together with figures for potential job creation along with actual job creation figures.

Year	Number of Investment announcements	Number of potential jobs associated with those announcements	Actual number of jobs created(both full time and other)
2011	10	2,638	13,191
2012	14	3,891	12,224
2013	19	4,103	15,315
2014	15	3,364	16,135

Visa Numbers

237. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of visas that have issued to non-EU nationals employed in the meat industry here for each of the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3529/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Firstly I would like to point out that The Department of Justice and Equality retains legal and policy primacy with regard to immigration and residency whereas this Department's function concerns employment access to the labour market.

My Department's preference is that the industry needs are met without recourse to the employment permit regime. In framing policy regarding employment permits, thought is given to wider policy instruments that are also available in meeting the challenges presented by skills shortages. Migration in itself is not a sustainable long-term overall solution to skills shortages. It is intended to complement the primary policy objective of Government, the up-skilling of the resident population at all levels. We are cognisant that migration can, in some circumstances, help to perpetuate skills shortages in the economy, by reducing latent demand for such skills. Ensuring an uninterrupted flow from the domestic and EEA economies of high quality specialist skills in de-boning is critical. The Department of Education and Skills will comment on opportunities for training operatives in the meat industry including butchers/boners.

My Department reviews and updates the Highly Skilled Eligible Occupations List (HSEOL) and Ineligible Categories of Employment List for employment permits bi-annually. This review is predicated on a formalised and evidence based process. Such a process involves obtaining and considering advice from the Expert Group on Future skills Needs (EGFSN) and the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU-SOLAS) with the EGFSN's National Skills Bulletin contributing principally to the Department's ongoing monitoring of the labour market. The 2014 National Skills Bulletin had just over 8,000 butchers and fishmongers of which almost 40% are non-EEA nationals. Few occupations have a share of non-EEA nationals higher than butchers. The number of non-EU national visas that have been issued to the meat industry for each of the past ten years are listed in the following table. The SLMRU's analysis of labour market transitions in 2013 indicated a high turnover for food operatives and suggests an issue regarding retention of staff. The National Skills Bulletin concluded that while no shortages of meat processing skills had been identified, it recognised that many food processing companies are experiencing difficulty in attracting and retaining skilled butchers/de-boners.

My Department has had ongoing engagement with the meat industry since 2013 to resolve the issue of a sufficient supply of de-boners. In May 2013 my Department convened an inter-Departmental group Chaired by Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and comprising, Department of Social Protection (DSP) and Department of Education and Skills (DES) and Enterprise-Ireland, to see how the issue might be addressed. Arising from this Interdepartmental Group DSP held two recruitment events in 2014 and also assisted the meat companies, through its EURES service, to identify skilled persons in the EEA countries. The DSP continues to be available to the industry to advise on its recruitment needs.

In June 2014 my Department again met with the meat industry in advance of their preparing a comprehensive submission, requested by the Interdepartmental Group, regarding the difficulty they are still experiencing in attracting and retaining skilled de-boners. My Department is awaiting the final submission from Meat Industry Ireland (MII) following discussions with MII on their draft submission.

Number of Non-EU national visas that have issued to the meat industry for each of the past ten years

Year	New	Renewal	Total
2014	17	14	31
2013	11	23	34
2012	30	108	138
2011	31	75	106
2010	33	238	271
2009	34	93	127
2008	224	98	322
2007	109	322	431
2006	107	751	858
2005	154	989	1143

Jobs Data

238. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the policy changes he plans to implement to encourage greater job opportunities for counties Longford and Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3576/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Action Plan for Jobs continues to be the Government's main policy instrument to support employment in all regions of the country.

Employment has increased nationally by approximately 80,000 since the start of the Action Plan process in 2012. However, not all regions are yet fully experiencing the benefits of economic recovery. That is why the Government is placing an increased emphasis on supporting job creation at regional level.

The 2014 Action Plan for Jobs contained a number of measures to support competitive regions, including the development of a framework for Regional Enterprise Strategies and the commencement of building works by the IDA on advanced manufacturing facilities and office space in a number of regional locations. We will intensify our focus on the regions in 2015 and, as I have announced previously, we will develop Enterprise Strategies for each region. In a manner similar to the Action Plan for Jobs, the Regional Enterprise Strategies will identify measures that can be taken to enable each region as a whole to realise its economic potential and create jobs, building on its existing competitive strengths and opportunities.

The first Regional Enterprise Strategy to be published will cover the Midlands region, which includes the counties of Longford, Westmeath, Laois and Offaly. Over the past number of months, officials from Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and my Department have been involved in a series of engagements with the main stakeholder groups in the Midlands to discuss the strengths and opportunities that can be built upon to support enterprise and jobs growth in that region.

All proposals received through these stakeholder engagements are being examined by my

officials who are currently finalising the preparation of the Regional Enterprise Strategy for the Midlands. The process is concentrated on identifying practical actions that can be taken in the short-to-medium term, and broadly within existing resources, to improve the operating environment for businesses.

In the last number of weeks, the Government stated its ambition to achieve full employment by 2018. Achieving this objective will be supported by each region realising its economic potential.

Job Trends

239. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation his plans regarding zero-hours contracts; and the timeline for same. [3582/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that in accordance with the Statement of Government priorities, my colleague the Minister of State with responsibility for Business and Employment, Deputy Ged Nash, issued on Monday 17 November a call for tenders to carry out a study into the prevalence of zero hour and low hour contracts and the impact of such contracts on employees. The evaluation of tenders received took place recently and the successful contractor will be appointed shortly. It is expected that the study will commence in February and conclude in early Q3 of 2015. The key objectives of the study are:

- To fill the gap that currently exists in terms of the hard data and information that is available concerning the prevalence of “zero hours contracts” in the Irish economy and the manner of their use.

- To assess the impact of “zero hours contracts” on employees.

- To enable the Minister to make any evidence-based policy recommendations to Government considered necessary on foot of the study.

All sectors of the economy, both public and private, will come within the scope of the study, including the retail, hospitality, education and health sectors in particular. The study will examine how zero and low hour contracts operate in practice and how they impact on employees. It will assess the advantages and disadvantages from the perspective of employer and employee and assess the current employment rights legislation as it applies to employees on such contracts. The study will also consider recent developments in other jurisdictions, including the UK in particular.

It is expected that a wide range of stakeholders will be canvassed to contribute to the study.

Jobs Data

240. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide a breakdown by county of the 19,705 new jobs created by Enterprise Ireland in 2014. [3641/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Enterprise Ireland’s mission is to partner with entrepreneurs, Irish businesses and the research and investment communities to develop Ireland’s international trade, innovation, leadership and competitiveness. The ultimate objective is increased employment and prosperity in Ireland.

The companies that Enterprise Ireland works with are a vital source of employment in every county and region across Ireland.

In 2014, EI assisted companies generated 19,705 new jobs. This resulted in a net increase of 8,476 in the total number of people employed by Enterprise Ireland supported companies, the highest net gain in the history of the Agency.

At the end of 2014, total direct employment (full and part time) in Enterprise Ireland client companies stood at 180,072 in 2014. Of these, 156,202 are full-time jobs, while 23,870 are part-time. These full-time employment and total employment levels are the highest recorded in the history of the agency.

This continuation of employment growth demonstrates clearly the direct impact that increasing exports has on jobs in Ireland. Enterprise Ireland supported companies now, directly and indirectly, account for more than 300,000 jobs in the Irish economy - 16% of total workforce.

Employment data for Enterprise Ireland is collected annually as part of the Annual Employment Survey which measures the number of jobs in Agency assisted clients.

Breakdown of employment by county for 2014

County	Full Time Jobs	Other Jobs	Total
Carlow	292	53	345
Cavan	394	249	643
Clare	354	131	485
Cork	2,277	506	2,783
Donegal	156	67	223
Dublin	4,702	1,788	6,490
Galway	532	183	715
Kerry	321	109	430
Kildare	827	113	940
Kilkenny	370	26	396
Laois	98	50	148
Leitrim	138	6	144
Limerick	583	106	689
Longford	258	129	387
Louth	305	99	404
Mayo	220	164	384
Meath	510	178	688
Monaghan	382	65	447
Offaly	248	89	337
Roscommon	129	39	168
Sligo	101	39	140
Tipperary North Riding	113	73	186
Tipperary South Riding	164	122	286
Waterford	663	96	759
Westmeath	223	141	364
Wexford	327	49	376
Wicklow	186	162	348
Total	14,873	4,832	19,705

Job Creation Data

241. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide a breakdown by county of the new jobs created by Enterprise Ireland in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013. [3642/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The question posed by the Deputy regarding a breakdown by county of new jobs created by Enterprise Ireland in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 requires a significant volume of information to be collated by the Agency and it has not been possible to provide the information within the time frame given. Consequently, I will provide this information to the Deputy as soon as possible in written format.

IDA Supports

242. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if a foreign direct investment unit building to accommodate between 200 and 300 employees will be supported by his Department; if Enterprise Ireland will support phase 2 of the Mill Enterprise Centre, Greenhills, Drogheda, County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3781/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): IDA Ireland is currently in the process of finalising its new strategy for the coming 5 years and is conscious of the need to secure investments and jobs for all regions of the country over the lifetime of the strategy. The provision of appropriate property solutions for enterprise is a fundamental part of the IDA Ireland offering and the new strategy will address the agency's property objectives for the period out to 2020.

Enterprise Ireland approved a Capital Grant in October 2008 to Drogheda Enterprise Centre Ltd to build an Enterprise Centre in Drogheda. Drogheda Enterprise Centre Ltd were approved the maximum grant allowable under the Community Enterprise Centre Scheme.

The building of the Centre was delayed for a number of years until Drogheda Enterprise Centre Ltd could come up with the balance of finance necessary. When they did come up with some of the balance, they built a smaller Enterprise Centre than what was originally approved, and referred to it as Phase 1.

I understand from Enterprise Ireland that the intention is to build Phase 2 on to the existing building. Phase 2 can be built using the balance of the Enterprise Ireland grant, provided the company have the additional finance required.

IDA Site Visits

243. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of Industrial Development Agency-sponsored visits to County Tipperary in the years 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014; and the number of planned visits for 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3866/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am informed by IDA Ireland that in the 4 year period from 2011 to 2014, inclusive, there were 13 IDA Ireland sponsored site visits by potential investors to Co. Tipperary. The number of site visits paid in each of those years is set out in the following tabular statement. For reasons of commercial sensitivity and client confidentiality IDA Ireland does not comment on upcoming site visits by

potential investors.

Statistics show that there are 11 IDA Ireland client companies in County Tipperary employing 3,370 people in full and part time employment.

IDA Ireland is currently in the process of finalising its new strategy for the coming 5 years and is conscious of the need to secure investments and jobs for all regions of the country over the lifetime of the strategy.

Growing both Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and indigenous enterprise is key to Ireland's economic recovery. I am glad to inform the Deputy that 2014 was a record year for both IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland in terms of investment wins and job creation, with 7,131 net new jobs being created in IDA Ireland client companies and 8,476 net new jobs being created in Enterprise Ireland client companies.

As Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, I introduced a collaborative, cross government approach to advancing job creation in the State. The Action Plan for Jobs is an annual plan designed to drive action across all Government Departments and Agencies in a collective effort to put in place the conditions needed to support and grow enterprise in the State.

As I have said on more than one occasion, 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, which I hope to publish shortly.

It is my intention that 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.

Table showing the number of IDA sponsored site visits by potential investors to Tipperary in each of the years 2011 to 2014 inclusive

YEAR	2011	2012	2013	2014
Number of site visits	1	5	4	3

IDA Site Visits

244. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide a breakdown in tabular form the number of Industrial Development Agency site visits to each county in 2014; and If he will identify the number of repeat visits. [3869/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I have been informed by IDA Ireland that in 2014 there were a total of 359 IDA Ireland-sponsored site visits by potential investors to various locations throughout the country. The following tabular statement sets out on a county by county basis the number of Ireland-sponsored site visits in 2014. For reasons of client confidentiality and commercial sensitivity, IDA Ireland does not differentiate between first time visits and repeat visits.

IDA Ireland is currently in the process of finalising its new strategy for the coming 5 years and is conscious of the need to secure investments and jobs for all regions of the country over the lifetime of the strategy.

Growing both Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and indigenous enterprise is key to Ireland's economic recovery. I am glad to inform the Deputy that 2014 was a record year for both IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland in terms of investment wins and job creation, with 7,131 net new jobs being created in IDA Ireland client companies and 8,476 net new jobs being created in Enterprise Ireland client companies.

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As I have said on more than one occasion, 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, which I hope to publish shortly.

It is my intention that 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.

Number of IDA Ireland sponsored Site Visits by potential investors on a county by county basis in 2014

County	Site Visits
Carlow	2
Cavan	1
Clare	9
Cork	30
Donegal	6
Dublin	205
Galway	19
Kerry	3
Kildare	1
Kilkenny	4
Laois	0
Leitrim	2
Limerick	22
Longford	0
Louth	10
Mayo	4
Meath	2
Monaghan	0
Offaly	1
Roscommon	0
Sligo	7
Tipperary	3
Waterford	11
Westmeath	12
Wexford	1
Wicklow	4

Rural Development Plan

245. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the proposed timetable for the implementation of the new national rural development plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3587/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The draft Rural Development Plan (RDP) 2014-2020 was formally submitted to the European Commission on 3 July 2014, a number of weeks in advance of the regulatory deadline. The Commission's formal observations on the draft RDP were received on 20 October 2014 with a total of 266 observations, incorporating a range of informational, technical and policy matters.

Negotiations in relation to the formal adoption of the RDP are currently underway between my Department and the Commission. It is, however, difficult to predict the exact timing of RDP approval given the capacity constraints experienced by the Commission in approving 118 RDPs across all Member States.

At present, Department officials are in ongoing and intensive discussion with the Commission in order to seek a speedy resolution of outstanding issues. The agreement of the new RDP and the subsequent roll-out of schemes is being pursued as a matter of priority.

Farm Retirement Scheme

246. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to introduce a new early retirement scheme for farmers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3259/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Farmers' Early Retirement Scheme was suspended in 2008 due to budgetary constraints. It was reopened briefly in September, 2009, with limited additional funding, to accommodate farmers who had applications completed or close to completion at the time of suspension. I have no plans to reopen this scheme or introduce another similar scheme at this time.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

247. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive their disadvantage area aid payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3292/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 30 March 2014, processing of which has recently been completed. Payment under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme is due to issue directly to the nominated bank account of the person named shortly.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

248. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) in County Mayo has been refused payment under the 2014 area-based compensatory allowances scheme. [3307/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2014 Single Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 1 April 2014. Following the processing of this application issues relating to the verification of compliance with the minimum stocking density were identified.

Under 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, there are two criteria to be satisfied in relation to those applicants availing of equines to meet the minimum stocking density requirement. First, the holding itself must meet the definition of an Equine Breeding Enterprise and second, horses, in order to be taken into account for stocking density purposes, must be aged one to five years and, where older, must be a breeding mare for the purposes of the Scheme and recorded as in the ownership of the applicant.

The person named submitted seven equine passports to my Department, of which two met the Scheme requirements. Of the remaining five equine passports; three were in respect of mares over the age of five of which there were no foals recorded in years 2011, 2012 and or 2013. The remaining two equine passports submitted, none of which were recorded as in the ownership of the person named, in addition to both being over the age of five of which there were no foals recorded in years 2011, 2012 and or 2013. Therefore, as the requirements of the Scheme were not met, no payment is due to the person named under the 2014 Scheme.

Forestry Grants

249. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the native woodlands scheme will be brought back; if so, the form of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3325/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Native Woodland (Establishment) measure is now an integral part of the recently opened Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme. It has a separate Grant and Premium Category (GPC) under the Scheme and applicants can either apply for approval to plant solely within that GPC or in combination with a mix of other GPCs. As regards native woodland conservation, my Department is currently awaiting EU approval of its Forestry Programme (2014 to 2020). Details regarding the opening of other measures, including native woodland conservation, will be announced by my Department shortly afterwards.

Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas

250. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the progress to date on the implementation of the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas, CEDRA, report; the status of each of its recommendations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3386/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): While statutory responsibility and funding for the CEDRA actions remains with the relevant lead Departments, implementation of the CEDRA report is underway and is currently being directed through the CEDRA Interdepartmental Group (CEDRA IDG) which was established last August. There have been three meetings of this group which is chaired by Minister Ann Phelan. The initial evaluation and assignment of each recommendation has been made in line with statutory responsibility and a multi-sectoral CEDRA work programme with specific actions is being finalised.

The 34 main CEDRA recommendations are sub-divided giving a total of 41 recommendations to be advanced. On the basis of information received from the lead Departments involved, the assessment of the CEDRA IDG is that 4 recommendations have been delivered, substantial and on-going action is being taken on a further 6; action has commenced and is progressing well on a further 16 while action on the remaining 15 recommendations is either at the commencement stage or awaiting updated information to enable an accurate evaluation be made.

Primary responsibility for co-ordinating the implementation of the CEDRA report will shortly fall within the remit of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Payments

251. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding a rural environment protection scheme payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3393/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): This REPS 4 contract commenced in May 2009 and payments were made for the first five years of the contract.

REPS 4 is a measure under the 2007-2013 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 a request to the Department for a change of name to the REPS Agri-environment Plan a letter issued from the Department in October 2013 and again in February 2014 requesting evidence of the legal status of the holding. To date this requirement has not been met by the herdowner.

Farm Inspections

252. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will review the policy of unannounced farm inspections. [3409/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In the context of delivering the Direct Payment Schemes and Rural Development measures my Department is required to carry out on-the-spot inspections on a number of farms covering such issues as eligibility under the Scheme and compliance with Cross Compliance requirements, as set down in EU legislation, and the standards for Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC), in the areas of the environment, climate change and good agricultural condition of land; public, animal and plant health and animal welfare. These inspections are mandatory and there are certain minimum numbers and types of inspections that must take place annually.

Rules regarding the advance notification of inspections are clearly laid down in the governing EU regulations and must be adhered to by officials in my Department. The regulations allow my Department to give notice for land eligibility and cross-compliance inspections involving SMRs other than those related to animal identification and registration, food, feed, and animal welfare. However this notice must be strictly limited to the minimum time period necessary and shall not exceed 14 days. For checks involving cattle and sheep identification and registration the maximum advance notice is 48 hours. For SMRs dealing with feed, food and animal welfare no advance notice may be given and these inspections must take place on an unannounced basis. Where it is considered that the purpose or effectiveness of any type of inspection may be

jeopardised by giving notice, the inspection will take place on an unannounced basis. In determining the type of notice to be given for an inspection a number of factors are considered so as to ensure that the inspection process is not jeopardised.

There is a comprehensive appeal system in place for applicants to avail of if they consider that the inspection has not been conducted in accordance with legislative requirements or if they are unhappy with the inspection findings. This appeal system incorporates an initial review by an officer more senior than the inspecting officer, with the option to appeal the outcome of any such review to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office. In the event that an applicant is not satisfied with the outcome of this review he/she has the right to pursue the matter further with the Office of the Ombudsman. The Department has established a Farm Advisory System under the Direct Payment Schemes to give advice to applicants and it is recommended any applicant with any inspection concerns whatsoever avail of this service, which involves Teagasc and private agricultural consultants, to allay any such concerns.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

253. **Deputy Dinny McGinley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment of a disadvantaged area premium for 2014 will issue to a person (details supplied) County Donegal. [3419/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 15 May 2014, processing of which has recently been completed. Payment under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme is due to issue directly to the nominated bank account of the person named shortly.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Eligibility

254. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the maximum age of a horse so that it will be eligible to be counted as a livestock unit under the area-based compensatory allowances scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3429/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The detailed requirements for the 2015 Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme form part of the Rural Development Programme, which is currently under negotiation with the EU Commission. Under 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, there were two criteria to be satisfied in relation to those applicants availing of equines to meet the minimum stocking density requirement. Firstly, the holding itself must have complied with the definition of an Equine Breeding Enterprise. Equine Breeding Enterprises are defined as follows: an applicant must, in the first instance, be an equine breeder and have bred a foal, from a mare registered as on the applicant's holding in 2013, in either 2011, 2012 or 2013, which was registered in a Stud Book approved by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, with pedigree recorded (sire and dam).

Where these criteria are met, the following horses were then eligible for inclusion in the stocking density calculation for the 2014 Scheme, where adherence to S.I. 357 of 2011, European Communities (Equine) Regulations 2011, and S.I. 189 of 2014 Equidea (Transfer of Ownership) Regulations 2014 is met. All horses aged one year to five years, (aged using 1 January), registered in the name of the applicant in accordance with EU Regulation 504/2008 and maintained on his/her holding; breeding mares, registered as having been on the applicant's

holding in 2013, that have bred an appropriately registered foal in either 2011, 2012 or 2013.

Furthermore, the premises of all who meet this criteria must be registered with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, in accordance with S.I. No. 8 of 2013, Diseases of Animals Act 1966 (Registration of Horse Premises) Order 2013.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

255. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) in County Limerick received payment for only one of nine entitlements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3523/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted an application for the 2014 Single Payment and Disadvantaged Areas Schemes on 14 May 2014.

My Department informed the person named on 21 July 2014 that unused Standard Single Payment Entitlements at a value of €207.98 each were reverting to the National Reserve as per the Terms and Conditions of the scheme. The remaining Single Payment Entitlements held were paid on 23 October 2014 and 1 December 2014.

No payment is due under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme as the person named had insufficient stocking density on his land per the Regulations governing the scheme.

Bord na gCon Administration

256. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there has been or will be testing of greyhounds for the new and reportedly widely-used drug stanozolol, particularly in view of the fact that despite the annual €2 million spent on regulation in the greyhound industry the Irish Greyhound Board has yet to identify a dog with stanozolol in its system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3542/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Bord na gCon is the statutory body responsible for the regulation of greyhound racing under the *Greyhound Industry Act 1958*. In addition Bord na gCon has specific statutory powers conferred on it in the *Greyhound Industry (Racing) Regulations 2007*, which relate to the conduct of greyhound racing.

Bord na gCon has confirmed to officials in my Department that its drug surveillance services test for the presence of stanozolol and that there have been no confirmed cases of stanozolol reported for Bord na gCon samples to date.

In July 2014 my Department published the findings from a study, commissioned by my Department and conducted by Indecon into "*Certain matters relating to Bord na gCon*". Indecon in accordance with its Terms of Reference considered the area of regulation and made a number of recommendations in this regard. The response of Bord na gCon to the Indecon report, which sets out a programme of action and a timeline for delivery, can be found on the Bord na gCon website.

Bord na gCon has recently completed a public consultation on proposed regulatory reform and intends to conduct further public consultations on this topic in the future. It has also launched a Review into Anti-Doping and Medication Control which is being led by Professor

Tim Morris, with a view to strengthening the regulatory systems within the industry.

In parallel, officials from my Department have already commenced the process of identifying the legislative changes that are required to give effect to the recommendations contained in the Indecon report.

It is my firm belief that the future of the greyhound industry is dependent on the stakeholders having trust and confidence in the industry, and this is contingent on the industry having the highest standards of integrity founded on strong regulatory systems. The Board and the Executive of Bord na gCon have assured me that they share my view and are doing their utmost to enhance the regulatory systems underpinning the industry to ensure that they are effective and fit-for-purpose.

I expect that Bord na gCon, who as I outlined at the outset is the state body responsible for the regulation of greyhound racing, will be happy to provide additional detail sought by the Deputy on this topic.

Bord na gCon

257. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his view on the move to replace five of the seven board members of the Irish Greyhound Board, IGB; if he will provide details of the five outgoing members of the IGB board; when they will be replaced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3543/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The legislative provisions governing the appointment of members to the Board of Bord na gCon are contained in the Greyhound Industry Act 1958, as amended by the Greyhound Industry (Amendment) Act 1993.

In summary Board Members are appointed by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine after consultation with the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. The term of office of an ordinary member of the Board of Bord na gCon is 3 years. Notwithstanding the expiry of a term of office Board members continue to hold office until such time as the Minister appoints a person to replace the out-going member.

The terms of office of Mr. Mattie Murphy, Ms Riona Heffernan, Mr. Timothy Gilbert and Mr. Tony McNamee were due to expire on 1 December 2014, however they remain in situ until they are replaced as provided for in legislation. In addition Mr. William O'Dwyer is set to complete his term of office 20 June 2015. Out-going Board members are eligible for re-appointment.

Since 2011, when the Government introduced new arrangements for appointments to State Boards, expressions of interest have been invited for vacancies arising on Bord na gCon through this Department's website. On 30 September 2014 the Government announced further changes to this system including that all appointments should be advertised on www.stateboards.ie (operated by the Public Appointments Service (PAS)), setting out specific and detailed criteria for the relevant role. The process of drafting the role specification for a Board position involves consultation between the Chairman of the State Board, the relevant Ministers and PAS, with the Minister having the final sign-off. All appointments will, under these arrangements, be processed by way of a transparent system in order to support the relevant Minister in making appointments to State Boards. The details of the new arrangements are to be found in the "Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards" on www.stateboards.ie.

I can confirm to the Deputy that the upcoming Board vacancies in Bord na gCon will be

filled in accordance with the Guidelines and have been advertised on the website of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The Chairman of Bord na gCon is currently considering role specification criteria for incoming members of Bord na gCon and I expect to hear from him shortly in this regard after which I will be in a position to liaise with PAS with a view to finalising the role specification and forwarding it for publication on www.stateboards.ie. Interested applicants will be invited to apply and the appointments process will then progress to finality, in accordance with the Guidelines. The Deputy will understand that it is not possible to put a timeline on when the process will be completed.

Rural Development Plan

258. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the rural development plan which was submitted to the European Commission in Brussels last July, and the latest developments from the EU regarding the Irish plan. [3561/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The draft Rural Development Plan (RDP) 2014-2020 was formally submitted to the European Commission on 3 July 2014, a number of weeks in advance of the regulatory deadline. The Commission's formal observations on the draft RDP were received on 20 October 2014 with a total of 266 observations, incorporating a range of informational, technical and policy matters.

Negotiations in relation to the formal adoption of the RDP are currently underway between my Department and the Commission. It is, however, difficult to predict the exact timing of RDP approval given the capacity constraints experienced by the Commission in approving 118 RDPs across all Member States.

At present, Department officials are in ongoing and intensive discussion with the Commission in order to seek a speedy resolution of outstanding issues. The agreement of the new RDP and the subsequent roll-out of schemes is being pursued as a matter of priority.

Grant Payments

259. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when 25% payment in respect of single farm payment and the agri-environment option scheme will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3573/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2014 Single Payment Scheme was received in my Department from the person named on 13 May 2014. The advance payment issued on 16 October following which, on foot of a land parcel review, overclaims were discovered in respect of two land parcels. This matter has now been resolved and the application has been processed for balancing payment which will issue shortly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Agri-environment Option Scheme, a comprehensive administrative check must be completed before payments can issue. A query has arisen in relation to supporting documentation submitted by the applicant in relation to their capital investment action. My Department has written to the applicant seeking further supporting documentation for this action and further payments cannot be processed until this issue is resolved.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

260. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason single farm payments were withdrawn in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3580/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted an application for the 2014 Single Payment/ Disadvantaged Areas Schemes on 8 May 2014. A dual claim arose on a land parcel to which the person named stated they did not have a right to claim. This overclaim resulted in an over 20% penalty reduction, which, based on the Terms and Conditions, results in no payment under both the 2014 Single Payment and Disadvantaged Areas Schemes. A penalty letter issued to the person named informing him of this fact and an official from my Department has also made contact with the person named to advise him of the position and of his right of appeal.

Teagasc Research Programmes

261. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide an update with regard to the establishment of a suckler research herd at a location (details supplied) in County Galway; the possible impact this may have on sheep numbers and sheep research at this location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3589/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): As I have stated in response to recent questions on this issue, the establishment of a suckler demonstration farm in Athenry is an operational matter for Teagasc and its governing Authority, which is representative of the main stakeholder groups in the agrifood sector, including the farm organisations.

Following stakeholder representations over a number of years, Teagasc intend to establish the farm in Athenry to serve farmers in the West of Ireland. It will be modelled on the well known Greenfield dairy demonstration farm in Kilkenny, which annually attracts large numbers of farmers and discussion groups. The Greenfield model is very highly regarded, and provides a public good demonstration service to all farmers in the dairy sector. The Athenry suckler project will operate along similar lines with the aim of demonstrating to farmers, the profit that can be obtained from a well run suckler beef farm. Teagasc will disseminate the research results to farmers through its advisory service. The farm is expected to attract large numbers of farmers and discussion groups, once established.

I understand that it will be located on land rented by Teagasc in Athenry, which is not required for the Teagasc sheep research programme.

Equine Industry

262. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has given consideration in consultation with Connemara Pony Breeders Association to initiating a specialist report on the future of the Connemara pony. [3590/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department has approved the Connemara Pony Breeders Society to maintain the studbook for the breed and the Society's role includes devising and implementing measures to promote, develop and conserve the breed.

The Connemara Pony Breeders Society is in receipt of funding from my Department under the Equine Infrastructure Grant Scheme for a range of projects, including breed improvement and promotion of the breed.

The Connemara pony is part of Ireland's heritage and has rare breed status according to criteria set out by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. My Department currently supports the conservation and preservation of our national rare equine breeds, including the Connemara pony through agri-environmental schemes - the Agri-Environment Options Scheme (AEOS), the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme (REPS), and under the proposed new Green Low carbon Agri-environmental Scheme (GLAS). GLAS is a scheme under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, which my Department submitted last July to the European Commission for approval.

The Connemara pony breed is renowned for its hardiness, docility and versatility. Individual ponies within the breed have also excelled at top levels in the FEI disciplines of showjumping, eventing and dressage.

I am very conscious of the contribution of the Connemara pony breed to the sport horse industry which, according to a 2012 report commissioned by Horse Sport Ireland, contributes in excess of €708 million per annum to the Irish economy and provides 12,512 full-time job equivalents.

Horse Sport Ireland, Teagasc and the Royal Dublin Society have been engaged during 2014 in producing a report outlining a ten-year strategy for the Sport Horse Sector. It is expected that the report will be launched shortly and will contain recommendations in regard to improving quality, delivering an education and training structure, improving the marketing and sales capacity across the entire industry, increasing participation in the sector and enhancing equine health and welfare.

The recommendations in the report will inform policy decisions taken in regard to the future development of the entire Sport Horse sector.

Equine Identification Scheme

263. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps being taken to ensure all horses are microchipped; his plans to impound all non-microchipped horses; the up-to-date position in this regard; the steps taken to ensure the owners of abandoned horses can be traced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3616/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The identification and registration of equidae is governed by EU Council Directives 90/426/EEC and 90/427/EEC and Commission Regulation (EC) No 504/2008 of 6 June 2008. The EU legislation has been transposed into national legislation via S.I. No. 207 of 2014 - European Union (Identification of Equidae) Regulations 2014.

Regulation 504/2008, which came into effect on 1 July 2009, requires three elements of identification to be fulfilled in respect of each equine – i.e. a single lifetime passport, a method to ensure the unequivocal link between the animal and the passport (transponder) and a database which records the identification details of the animal under a unique identification number which relates to the animal for which the passport was issued and the person responsible for identifying the animal. However, Regulation 504/2008 does not require horses which were identified in accordance with the legislation which preceded it to be micro-chipped.

In view of the foregoing, it would not be legally possible for my Department to impound all horses which are not micro-chipped. However, I strengthened equine identification legislation last year with the signing of S.I. 207 of 2014 European Union (Identification of Equidae) Regulations 2014, which consolidated previous secondary legislation in this area and further reinforced my powers in relation to the seizure and detention of documents and equine animals.

In addition, equine identification legislation has been complemented by mandatory requirements which I introduced in recent years requiring the registration of equine premises and notification of change of ownership. In this regard, persons acquiring ownership of equines after 1 July 2014 are required to notify the Passport Issuing Organisation which issued the horse passport of the transfer of ownership. The legislation also introduced a legal requirement on the PIO to record ownership details on the central equine database, which my Department established in 2013, when (a) a horse is first registered with it and (b) when ownership changes take place.

In conclusion, I am satisfied that the measures which I have introduced in recent years will facilitate the identification of ownership in cases where horses are found abandoned. In addition, there has been an increase in enforcement of legislation relating to the identification of equines at sales, marts, fairs, etc, and I acknowledge the successful collaboration between other agencies and my Department in this area. I would like to assure the Deputy that my Department will continue to maintain ongoing vigilance in relation to the implementation of official controls on the identification of horses.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

264. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 290 of 20 January 2015, when a single farm and disadvantaged areas scheme payment will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3635/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2014 Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Schemes was received from the person named on 22 April 2014. Payment under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme issued to the applicant on 15 October 2014 with a further payment due to issue immediately the holding of the person named is registered in accordance with the Diseases of Animal Act 1966 (Registration of Horse Premises). The person named was advised of this requirement and furnished with a registration form, to date no application for Registration of Horse Premises has been received by my Department. I have arranged for an official from my Department to reissue the form to the person named with a view to resolving the outstanding matter.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

265. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in granting a person (details supplied) in County Donegal the agri-environment options scheme payment for 2014; when payment will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3721/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was approved for participation in the 2012 Agri Environment Options Scheme (AEOS 3) with effect from 1 May 2013 and full payment has issued in respect of the 2013 Scheme year.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes,

a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. These checks have now been successfully completed in respect of the 2014 Scheme year and payment will issue shortly.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

266. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a 2012 single farm payment will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3748/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The 2012 Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Areas' Scheme application of the person named was selected for a ground eligibility inspection. This inspection identified discrepancies between the area declared and the area found, resulting in an over-declaration in area of between 3% and 20%. Based on the Terms and Conditions of the schemes, this resulted in the 2012 payments being based on the found area having been reduced by double the difference between the area found and the area claimed. Advance and balancing payments due under the 2012 Single Payment Scheme issued on 25 October and 3 December 2012 respectively.

The person named appealed the decision of the inspection and was notified of the outcome of the review, which was to uphold the original decision, on 18 January 2013.

The person named appealed this outcome to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office. The Agriculture Appeals Office upheld the decision of the Department and the person named was notified of this decision on 24 January 2014. The person named was also notified that if they considered that they had been unfairly treated the matter could be raised with the Office of the Ombudsman. My Department understands that the Office of the Ombudsman has not received any correspondence from the person named to date.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Appeals

267. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a person (details supplied) in County Cork whose agri-environment options scheme payment for 2013 was the subject of a penalty due to land parcel review on their single farm payment will have part of this penalty reimbursed arising from a partial success on appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3778/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was approved for participation in the 2011 Agri-Environment Options Scheme with effect from 1 September 2011 and full entitlements have issued in respect of the 2011 and 2012 Scheme years.

Following a review of the land declared by the person named under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme an area reduction was applied and the AEOS payment for 2013 was reduced accordingly. My Department notified the person named of the reductions/penalty amounts.

The person named sought a review of the decision to reduce the eligible area of the land parcel in question which resulted in the eligible area of the parcel being increased. The AEOS payment in respect of the 2013 Scheme year will be amended accordingly and reimbursement of aid totalling €83.64 will issue shortly.

Single Payment Scheme Eligibility

268. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a person (details supplied) in County Mayo is entitled to a payment under the single payment scheme for 2012 following their acceptance of the 3% cross-compliance penalty imposed. [3780/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The 2012 Single Payment application in respect of the person named is currently under review. An official of my Department has made direct contact with the person named on issues relating to this application. It is expected that the outstanding issues will be successfully resolved.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

269. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive a disadvantaged areas scheme payment for 2014; if a disadvantaged areas scheme payment was issued for 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3792/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 13 May 2014, processing of which has recently been completed. Payment under the 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme is due to issue directly, to the nominated bank account of the person named shortly. It should be noted that the 2014 Disadvantaged Areas payment will be liable to a land eligibility penalty of 1.4% further to a 2014 satellite inspection.

An application under the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 21 May 2013, processing of which has recently been completed. Payment under the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme is due to issue directly, to the nominated bank account of the person named shortly. It should be noted that as the closing date for applications was 15 May 2013 this application is liable for a 4% late application penalty. In addition, the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas payment will also be liable to a land eligibility penalty of 7.87% further to a 2013 ground inspection.

Green Low-carbon Agri-environment Scheme

270. **Deputy Brian Walsh** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when applications will be accepted under the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme, GLAS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3795/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): GLAS (the Green Low-carbon Agri-environment Scheme) is part of a suite of proposed measures under Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP) which was submitted to the European Commission in July. The Commission services have notified us of their observations on the Scheme, to which my Department has provided immediate and detailed replies. Discussions are now continuing with the Commission, with a view to gaining approval at the earliest possible date. Once approval is granted, my Department will move to open the Scheme for applications.

Green Low-carbon Agri-environment Scheme

271. **Deputy Brian Walsh** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the use of any 2015 funding allocated but unused for the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme to be redirected to farmers through the disadvantaged areas scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3796/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I expect 25,000 - 30,000 farmers to be approved into the GLAS scheme in 2015 and the estimated expenditure for the year is €20 million. Given the level of interest in the scheme I believe this estimate is realistic and that it will be fully utilised. I expect payments to commence in the last quarter of the year.

As a general rule, where allocated funding is unused under any Vote subhead its re-allocation would be considered in line with public financial procedures. However, as I said above, I do not believe that will be the case for GLAS.

Rural Development Plan

272. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the rural development plan (details supplied) which was submitted to Brussels by the Government in July 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3801/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The draft Rural Development Plan (RDP) 2014-2020 was formally submitted to the European Commission on 3 July 2014, a number of weeks in advance of the regulatory deadline. The Commission's formal observations on the draft RDP were received on 20 October 2014 with a total of 266 observations, incorporating a range of informational, technical and policy matters.

Negotiations in relation to the formal adoption of the RDP are currently under way between my Department and the Commission. It is, however, difficult to predict the exact timing of RDP approval given the capacity constraints experienced by the Commission in approving 118 RDPs across all Member States.

At present, Department officials are in ongoing and intensive discussion with the Commission in order to seek a speedy resolution of outstanding issues. The agreement of the new RDP and the subsequent roll-out of schemes is being pursued as a matter of priority.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

273. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the remaining 25% agri-environment options scheme payment will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow. [3803/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was approved for participation in the 2010 Agri Environment Options Scheme (AEOS 1) with effect from 1 September 2010 and payment has issued in respect of the 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 Scheme years.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. These checks have been successfully completed in respect of the 2014 Scheme year and 75% payment issued on 9 December 2014. The balancing 25% payment will issue at the earliest opportunity.

Fishing Vessel Licences

274. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding a licence held by a person (details supplied); the reason this licence was historically issued for in each year from 2004 to 2014, inclusive; the entitlements this licence allowed the owner to fish for in each of these years; if entitlements have been lost in these years; if the licence confines the owner to a certain method of fishing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3833/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Fisheries (Amendment) Act 2003 transferred the function of sea-fishing boat licensing from the Minister to the Licensing Authority for Sea-Fishing Boats which operates on an independent basis subject to criteria set out in section 3 of the Act and Ministerial Policy Directives. The Licensing Authority is the Registrar General of Fishing Boats, an official of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine or, under the superintendence of the Registrar General, the Deputy Registrar General of Fishing Boats.

The Act prohibits me as Minister from exercising *“any power or control in relation to any particular case or group of cases with which the Licensing Authority is or may be concerned”*.

I have made enquiries of the Registrar General who informs me that the vessel in question was registered and licensed in the Polyvalent Segment [≥ 18 metres length overall] Sub-segment to the named individual for the period from 17 November 2004 to 7 September 2006.

The Polyvalent Segment [≥ 18 metres length overall] Sub-segment is a multipurpose Sub-segment and vessels registered and licensed therein can fish for multi-species. However the vessel in question was precluded from fishing for herring and mackerel as it does not have the required track record in these fisheries.

The sea-fishing boat licences issued to the named individual did not carry a restriction on fishing methods.

The named individual transferred ownership of the vessel, inclusive of its fishing capacity in 2006, and the vessel was registered and licensed to its new and current owner on 3 October 2006.

In relation to fishing effort restrictions in certain areas, EU Regulation 1342/2008 introduced a management system for fishing effort to rebuild over exploited cod stocks. The Minister established a Steering Group in February 2009 consisting of representatives of the Irish Fishing Industry, the Marine Institute, the Sea Fishing Protection Authority, Bord Iascaigh Mhara and the Department to advise on the management arrangements for both the Irish Sea and the North West of Donegal. The full details of the scheme introduced to meet the requirements of the EU Regulation are set out in the Information note on the Department's website. In order to qualify for an effort allocation, all vessels registered and licensed must have a track record in a gear type and will receive fishing effort for that gear type. The qualification threshold in Area VIIa is one or more days in area VIIa in the period 2005 – 2008 using a regulated gear in Annex 1 to Council Regulation 1342/2008. The qualification threshold in Area VIa is one or more days in area VIa in the period 2006 or 2007 using a regulated gear in Annex 1 to Council Regulation 1342/2008.

In implementing the track record requirement, the Department is advised by the SFPA of the vessels which met the criteria for an allocation of effort. This is based on an analysis of logbook records during the relevant years. In order to qualify for an allocation of fishing effort for a particular gear type, vessels must have a record of fishing with that gear type in the area.

As recommended by the Steering Group, the Minister has introduced restricted entry for certain gear types and details are available on the Department's website.

If a vessel owner considers that its vessel qualifies as having used a regulated gear in the relevant year(s), but has not been granted effort, the owner should contact the SFPA to have its logbook records reviewed for the period to see if activity with the specific gear type was missed. If this turns out to be the case the SFPA will notify the Department and the vessel will be considered as having the necessary track record for that gear type.

Tuberculosis Eradication Programme Payments

275. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to review the compensation payment made to farmers who have tuberculosis reactors in their herds as same has remained unaltered for a number of years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3845/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The main compensation scheme for farmers whose herds are affected by TB is the On-Farm Market Valuation Scheme which provides, in general, for compensation for cattle removed as reactors to be paid on the basis of current "Market Value". Thus the level of compensation provided reflects the real market situation at any given time and is therefore self-updating. In addition to valuation payments, herdowners who experience a disease breakdown may also qualify for compensation under the Income Supplement, Depopulation or Hardship Grant Schemes, subject to the terms and conditions applying in each case. Payments under these schemes are designed to compensate herdowners for income losses or additional cost incurred by farmers who have animals removed as reactors.

Total expenditure on compensation paid to farmers in 2014 under the TB eradication scheme amounted to €15.2m. I am satisfied that the current arrangements, which provide a very comprehensive range of financial supports to herdowners whose herds are restricted as a result of a TB breakdown in their herd, are appropriate, particularly in prevailing budgetary circumstances.

Green Low-carbon Agri-environment Scheme

276. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide details of the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme farm scheme; if he will ensure that the scheme is up and running and implemented at an early date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3853/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): GLAS aims to deliver overarching benefits in terms of the rural environment and address issues of climate change mitigation, water quality and the preservation of habitats and species. It is designed to specifically target environmental priorities, but it also has provision for farmers with no such priorities, but who are committed to carrying out general environmental actions on their holdings. Access to the scheme is therefore by means of three Tiers, which will allow the most pressing environmental priorities to be addressed in order of importance, but also provides for a broad approach to delivering environmental benefits across all farming systems. In Tier 1, all farmers with Priority Environmental Assets (PEAs) get first priority access to the Scheme in year one and subsequent years. If any of the following PEAs are applicable to the holding, they must be chosen and the relevant actions planned.

- Farmland Habitat (private Natura sites)
- Farmland Birds (Twite, Breeding Waders, Chough, Geese/swans, Corncrake, Grey Partridge, Hen Harrier)
- Commonages
- High Status Water Area
- Rare Breeds

In the absence of any of the listed PEAs, a farmer (whether beef, sheep or dairy) with a whole farm stocking rate exceeding 140kg Livestock Manure Nitrogen per hectare produced on the holding, or any farmer with more than 30 hectare of arable crops, will be considered under Tier 1 if at least one of the following four mandatory actions is adopted:

Mandatory actions for farms with >140 kg Livestock Manure Nitrogen per hectare

- Low Emission Slurry Spreading Or
- Wild Bird Cover (grassland farms only)

Mandatory actions for farms with >30 ha or arable crops

- Catch Crops Or
- Minimum Tillage

Registered Organic farmers will qualify for priority access to the scheme under Tier 1, by selecting actions appropriate to the farm.

Under Tier 2, farmers who do not have Priority Environmental Assets but whose lands include a Vulnerable Water Area, may apply for access to the scheme. In such cases, the appropriate actions relevant to Vulnerable Water Areas must be selected. In the absence of a Vulnerable Water Area, an applicant may still qualify for Tier 2 access provided that one of the following actions are chosen and planned for:

- Low Emission Slurry Spreading
- Minimum Tillage
- Catch Crops
- Wild Bird Cover (grassland farms only).

Tier 3 sets out a list of actions which can be adopted in addition to actions laid down in Tiers 1 or 2, providing a means by which farmers can maximise their GLAS payment. However, Tier 3 also provides a mechanism by which farmers who do not fulfil any of the criteria for Tiers 1 or 2, can apply to join GLAS by committing to a series of general and valuable environmental actions. I can confirm that Tier 3 farmers are eligible to apply for GLAS in their own right.

The Scheme has been submitted to the European Commission as part of a suite of proposed measures under Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP). The Commission services have notified us of their observations on the Scheme, to which my Department has provided immediate and detailed replies. Discussions are now continuing with the Commission, with a view to gaining approval at the earliest possible date, so that the Scheme may be opened without delay.

GLAS Eligibility

277. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the criteria being considered for water vulnerable areas under the new GLAS scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3855/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): GLAS is an agri-environment measure under the proposed Rural Development Programme and as such aims to deliver overarching benefits in terms of the rural environment and address issues of climate change mitigation, water quality and the preservation of habitats and species. It is designed to specifically target environmental priorities, but it also has provision for farmers with no such priorities, but who are committed to carrying out general environmental actions on their holdings. Access to the scheme is therefore by means of three Tiers, which will allow the most pressing environmental priorities to be addressed in order of importance, but also provides for a broad approach to delivering environmental benefits across all farming systems.

Those applicants with Priority Environmental Assets or who choose Priority Environmental Actions compatible with a more intensive farming system will get first access to the Scheme under Tier 1. Under Tier 2 farmers who do not have Priority Environmental Assets or Priority Environmental Actions, but whose lands include a Vulnerable Water Area, may apply for access to the scheme and will be given priority. In such cases, the appropriate actions relevant to Vulnerable Water Areas must be selected.

These Vulnerable Water Sites have been identified using the EPA dataset for Low Status Water Sites intersected with the EPA Soils and Subsoils dataset. Those LPIS parcels which are within 15metres of a Low Status Water River Site and where the soil type is wet are eligible for carrying out a Vulnerable Water Site Action and will be identified on the on-line GLAS application system.

TAMS Administration

278. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide details of TAMS; if he will ensure that the scheme is implemented at an early date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3858/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Rural Development Programme for the 2014-2020 period was submitted to the EU Commission for approval in July 2014. The following investments have been identified as priority areas which will be targeted in the TAMS scheme :- (i) dairy equipment, (ii) low emission spreading equipment, (iii) animal welfare and farm safety (specifically beef and sheep handling facilities) farm nutrient storage and animal housing, (iv) pig and poultry investments in energy, water meters and medicine dispensers, (v) organic capital investment, and (vi) a young farmer capital investment scheme.

The new schemes can only be opened when EU Commission approval for the Programme has been received. That process is well underway but it is not possible at this stage to fix definitive dates for their introduction.

Common Agricultural Policy Reform

279. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he

will provide details of the areas of natural constraint; when this will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3860/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Agreement was reached during the reform of the CAP on the introduction of the Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) Scheme, which will replace the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme. The ANC Scheme forms part of the 2014 to 2020 Rural Development Programme, which is currently under discussion with the EU Commission. The proposal is that the existing requirements under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme will remain in place until the areas of natural constraint are delineated using soil and climatic criteria of which the following are relevant to Ireland:

- Soil, including Drainage, Texture & Stoniness, Rooting Depth;
- Soil & Climate, including Soil Moisture Balance;
- Terrain, including Slope.

An area (administrative unit) would be delineated as an Area of Natural Constraint, when it meets the proposed threshold set for one of the above criteria only. The Commission are suggesting the delineation be carried out at a LAU2 level – District Electoral Division (DED) in Ireland's case. To qualify under the new system, an area will need to show that at least two-thirds of its utilised agricultural land meets at least one of these criteria.

The resultant Areas of Natural Constraint would be subject to a fine-tuning process. These, so called, Second Stage Criteria are designed to remove areas which, although they meet the biophysical criteria, are deemed to have overcome the natural disadvantage and, therefore, should not benefit under the Scheme.

Following the finalisation of the Teagasc innovative Irish Soil Information System, which was designed to complete the national soil survey, it is now necessary to commence the comprehensive delineation of such areas in Ireland. My Department is commencing work on the initial stages of this process, which is likely to take some time before it is fully completed. As part of the agreement reached Member States must implement the new regime by 2018 at the latest.

Agriculture Scheme Administration

280. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide a mechanism for young trained farmers who were established prior to 2010 and who could not avail of installation aid to access the new national reserve scheme and the young farmers scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3861/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In accordance with relevant EU Regulations, priority under the National Reserve will be given to farmers meeting the definition of Young Farmer and New Entrant in the first instance. The Regulations also include an optional provision whereby Member States may use the National Reserve to allocate new entitlements or give a top-up on the value of existing entitlements for persons who suffer from a 'Specific Disadvantage'. The application of this optional use of the Reserve for non-priority categories will be dependent on the availability of funds within the National Reserve once the two priority categories have been allocated.

My Department is aware of the particular category of farmer referred to by the Deputy. In this regard, my Department is engaging with the EU Commission to examine the possibility of including this category of farmer under the "Specific Disadvantage" provision.

Beef Data Programme

281. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide details of the beef data genomics scheme; if he will ensure that the new scheme is implemented at an early date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3862/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In last year's budget, I announced a package of approximately €74 million for the beef sector in 2015, including a provision of €52 million for a proposed Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) which will place Ireland at the leading edge globally in the use of genomics in beef production. I have since proposed to increase the amount of money available to farmers within the scheme to €100 a head on the first ten animals. Further animals in the herd will be paid €80 per head.

The proposed BDGP will deliver an accelerated improvement in the environmental sustainability of the beef herd via the application of genomics technology. This will help farmers to manage their enterprises sustainably, cognisant of Ireland's climate change commitments, and will improve the quality of the national suckler herd. It will also cement our place as one of the most advanced, export focussed beef producing nations in the world.

Subject to the approval of the Rural Development Programme by the EU Commission, farmers will be paid for work carried out in a range of areas related to data recording and animal breeding policies. The actions being considered for the Programme include recording a range of data related to performance criteria and animal events, taking tissue (DNA) samples from selected animals and sending for laboratory testing, completing an on-farm Carbon Navigator, and selecting high quality replacement bulls and heifers over the 6 years of the BDGP contract.

All Rural Development Plans submitted to the European Commission are subject to Commission approval, following a detailed period of analysis and discussion. The Commission has provided observations on the BDGP and my Department has been engaged in intensive discussions to address issues raised and to provide the necessary clarifications. The scheme will be rolled out without delay following approval.

Agriculture Scheme Administration

282. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on revisiting his recent proposal for the application to the national reserve for young farmers because the five year rule excludes those young farmers who missed out on installation aid in 2007-08. [3870/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In accordance with relevant EU Regulations, priority under the National Reserve will be given to farmers meeting the definition of Young Farmer and New Entrant in the first instance. The Regulations also include an optional provision whereby Member States may use the National Reserve to allocate new entitlements or give a top-up on the value of existing entitlements for persons who suffer from a 'Specific Disadvantage'. The application of this optional use of the Reserve for non-priority categories will be dependent on the availability of funds within the National Reserve once the two priority categories have been allocated.

My Department is aware of the particular category of farmer referred to by the Deputy. In this regard, my Department is engaging with the EU Commission to examine the possibility of including this category of farmer under the "Specific Disadvantage" provision.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

283. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment of an agri-environment option scheme will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3874/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was approved for participation in the 2011 Agri-Environment Options Scheme (AEOS 2) with effect from 1 September 2011 and payments have issued in respect of the 2011, 2012 and 2013 Scheme years. Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. These checks have been successfully completed in respect of the 2014 Scheme year and payment will issue shortly.

Defence Forces Personnel

284. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question No. 1 of 14 January 2015 and his statement that medical assessment of Defence Forces personnel forms part of the training regime and that Defence Forces personnel, who are fit, strong, healthy young men and women, are still obliged to see GPs to ensure they meet the standards expected of them; the number of times on average per annum that a member of Defence Forces is referred to a general medical practitioner on this basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3470/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The provision of medical services within the Defence Forces is a combination of primary care and an occupational medical service designed to ensure that Defence Forces personnel are medically fit to undertake the duties assigned to them and to treat any medical conditions arising which would inhibit their capacity to undertake such duties. Occupational medicine focuses on a combination of preventative medicine, health promotion, medical supervision and medical assessment. Such medical oversight is necessary in order to maintain a Force that is operationally ready for the tasks assigned by Government.

The Defence Forces Medical Corps is responsible for the delivery of medical services to Defence Forces personnel. The Medical Corps, in addition to the administrative staff of the Central Medical Unit, comprises Medical Officers (i.e. qualified medical doctors, dentists and pharmacists) and other medical professionals who provide the services, augmented by contracted doctors, dentists, and other specialised medical professionals engaged to provide medical services to the Defence Forces.

In relation to primary care, a key element of the medical services provided to the Defence Forces is the daily surgery, referred to as “sick parade”. In an ideal world sick parades would be delivered by Defence Forces Medical Officers only. However, due to a shortage of Medical Officers within the Defence Forces in recent years sick parades are delivered by a mix of Defence Forces Medical Officers and civilian doctors engaged on a contract for services basis.

Additionally, in circumstances where a member of the Defence Forces requires the services of a GP after hours and he or she does not live in the vicinity of a Military Medical Facility, they may attend a local GP. Similarly, if a soldier is injured on a training exercise and requires immediate medical assistance, they can be sent to a local GP or hospital if necessary.

In relation to the occupational medical service, all members of the Permanent Defence Force are required to undergo a mandatory medical examination at least once in every twelve month period. Currently all annual medical assessments are carried out by Defence Forces Medical Officers. However again due to the difficulty experienced in recruiting doctors to the Defence Forces there was a need to identify alternative options for the provision of this medical service. In this context, a Request for Tender for the provision of Occupational Medical Examinations for military personnel issued in late 2014. It is anticipated that a contract to conduct these examinations will be awarded shortly. This contract is for the provision of 1,200 occupational medical examinations. This contract is not to replace the work of the Defence Forces Medical Corps, rather it is intended that it will supplement its work in this area.

It can be seen from the above that there are a number of different scenarios where a member of the Defence Forces may need to attend a general medical practitioner (be it a Defence Forces Medical Officer or a civilian doctor).

I have been advised by the Military Authorities that it is not possible to extract from the Medical Module of the Personnel Management System (PMS) the number of times per annum that a member of the Defence Forces is referred to a general medical practitioner. Therefore, there is no way of providing this information without examining every medical record of every member.

I am also advised that further development of the PMS or implementation of a new IT system is required to enable this level of data to be recorded. I understand that work on scoping such a future medical information system has been initiated recently.

Community Alert Programme

285. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will fund or part-fund community alert groups to cover their increased costs and in particular the costs of text messaging, in view of the value of the groups to local gardaí and the necessary work they are undertaking; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3684/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Community Alert groups are key partners in relation to the Garda Text Alert Scheme, which was launched in September 2013 and was piloted initially in a number of locations in cooperation with Muintir na Tíre, Neighbourhood Watch, the Irish Farmers Association and related stakeholders. It 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.

For many years my Department has provided funding for the Community Alert programme, which is operated by Muintir na Tíre in partnership with the Garda authorities, and supports over 1,300 local groups. My Department does not provide direct funding to local groups, but funding is provided in relation to the employment and associated costs of the national service, including regional Development Officers. The long-standing view has been that this is the best use of the resources available to my Department to support effective community crime prevention actions. I am currently providing the maximum possible funding to Community Alert that is open to me, having regard to the overall restrictions on my Department's resources and other

expenditure needs. I understand that funding for Community Alert is also received from the HSE.

More generally, I am advised that the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government supports the Community and Voluntary Sector through a suite of schemes with a particular focus on supporting communities that are vulnerable, disadvantaged or under threat. A community organisation may qualify for inclusion under one or more of these schemes, should it meet the terms and conditions of a particular scheme managed by the Department. Further details are available on the Department's website at www.envron.ie

Magdalen Laundries

286. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason she is not implementing the full recommendations (details supplied) of Judge Quirke's report in respect of the Magdalene scheme as originally promised; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3815/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Government is committed to full implementation of the Quirke Report.

Significant progress has been made on the implementation of the Magdalen Scheme. To date, a decision has been made on 87% of the applications received and 498 applicants have received their lump sum at a cost of over €18m.

Judge Quirke recommended that the women should have access to an enhanced medical card. He also specifically recommended that legislation be introduced to give effect to this recommendation.

As the Deputy will be aware, I am bringing forward the Bill (the Redress for Women Resident in Certain Institutions Bill 2014) later this week for consideration by the Dáil and I hope, with the cooperation of the Oireachtas, that the Bill will be enacted very promptly.

This Bill makes special provision for free access to health services for women who worked in the 12 specified institutions.

The women are already covered by section 21 (appointment of a care representative) under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act 2009. Judge Quirke recommended provision for a mechanism whereby a person can be appointed to act in the best interests of a woman who receives an *ex-gratia* payment under the scheme where she lacks capacity. This is being done through the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Bill, currently awaiting Committee Stage in the Dáil.

Judge Quirke's recommendation regarding top up pension type payments is being fully implemented. This recommendation proposes that eligible women should in addition and without regard to the "lump" sum payments receive weekly payments of €100 if under 66 and the equivalent of the State Contributory pension - €230.30 - if over 66 for the remainder of their lives. These payments are to be calculated net of other State benefits.

The Department of Social Protection have set up a separate scheme to give effect to this recommendation and they are continuing to process payments on a phased basis.

The Government decided that the commencement date for the Scheme was 1 August 2013 so therefore, regardless of when an applicant makes an application, if eligible for the scheme,

will have appropriate payments backdated to 1 August 2013.

The only issue of back dating mentioned by Judge Quirke is in his 7th Recommendation in which he states, *“Where a written “expression of interest” (or other written application for inclusion within the proposed Scheme) has been provided to the State by or on behalf of a Magdalen woman who was alive on or after the 19th of February 2013 then that woman will be eligible for consideration to be included within the Scheme. Additional income ex gratia payments (payable to women entitled to payments in excess of €50,000) will not accrue to the benefit of the estate of any Magdalen woman.”*

Legislative Programme

287. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding children’s legal rights; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3327/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I refer to my responses to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 352 of 16 December 2014 and 1,355 of 14 January 2015. As I indicated in those responses, the reason that the General Scheme requires the assisted reproduction treatment to be carried out in a clinical setting is because there is very clear case-law on the situation of a donor father where the treatment takes place outside a clinical setting to the effect that he has all the rights of a father to apply for guardianship and access. The requirement for the treatment to be carried out in a clinical setting will enable the respective rights of a child, a birth mother, a father or second female parent and any donor to be safeguarded as clear procedures can be put in place regarding the consent of the parties to the treatment.

As I also pointed out in that response, there are other provisions in the General Scheme which would enable a couple who have had a child through non-clinical assisted reproduction both to have a legal relationship with the child.

Naturalisation Applications

288. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed to extend residency to naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare who is married to an Irish national; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3331/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the situation remains as set out in my reply to the Deputy’s Parliamentary Question of 10 July 2014 in relation to the person concerned. To-date, the person concerned has still not submitted a valid Australian national passport to allow for their application for residency in the State, arising from marriage to an Irish national, to be finalised to conclusion. The person concerned has provided no evidence to INIS explaining why attempts to secure their Australian passport has failed to yield a result to-date.

INIS advises me that the person concerned was written to again on 22 January 2015 requesting that they provide a valid national passport in support of their application for residency arising from their marriage.

Detailed information surrounding any possible entitlement to Irish Citizenship through the

naturalisation process in respect of the person concerned which differs to that of an application for residency can be obtained from the INIS website at “www.inis.gov.ie”. It remains open to the person concerned to make an application for Irish Citizenship under the naturalisation process should they consider that they meet the requirements for same.

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 .

Legislative Programme

289. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on the possibility of legislation for harsher penalties for persons who issue threats specifically to public servants and local authority employees while they are carrying out their duties. [3383/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): It is not clear from the Deputy’s question what the nature or purpose of the threats to which he refers are.

There are already a number of provisions in the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act, 1997, which address the question of threats of violence and in serious cases they can attract penalties up to 10 years imprisonment. There are also relevant provisions in the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act, 1994, as amended, and in the Offences Against the State Act, 1939.

Special provision has been made in respect of certain public servants such as members of the Garda Síochána, the Defence Forces and the fire brigade, prison officers, persons providing medical services at or in a hospital and ambulance personnel because the nature of their work is such that they are at greater risk of being subjected to violence.

I have not seen any evidence that the existing provisions are inadequate or that providing for harsher penalties for threats against public servants and local authority employees is justified or will in fact affect the behaviour of those making such threats.

Deportation Orders

290. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason a person (details supplied) a Somalian national was deported to Tanzania; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3416/15]

291. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she has sought an explanation from the Tanzanian Government following the death of a person (details supplied); and if she has contacted the family of the deceased to apologise on behalf of the State; the steps she has taken to ensure a similar incident will not take place again; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3417/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 290 and 291 together.

In enforcing the law in respect of deportations, Ireland is no different to other countries who also remove individuals who have no lawful right to remain within their territory. Ireland, like

other EU member states, uses deportation of illegal immigrants and failed asylum seekers as the policy of last resort. The process leading to a deportation is extensive with many avenues of appeal, including judicial review in the High Court, open to persons subject to Deportation Orders. It should also be noted that a Deportation Order requires a person to remove themselves from the State and it is only where they fail to do so that the State is forced to remove them and enforce the rule of law.

Deportations take place within the provisions of the Immigration Act, 1999, as amended, and after each case has been fully considered with regard to the eleven considerations contained in Section 3 (6) of that Act and Section 5 Prohibition of refoulement) of the Refugee Act, 1996.

The safety of returning a person, or refoulement as it is commonly referred to, is fully considered in every case when deciding whether or not to make a deportation order i.e. that a person shall not be expelled from the State or returned in any manner whatsoever to a State where the life or freedom of that person would be threatened on account of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. My Department uses extensive country of origin information drawn from different independent sources in evaluating the safety of making returns to third countries, including Tanzania.

Each asylum application is considered on the basis of the facts, individual circumstances and merits of the case presented and a final decision is reached following a comprehensive examination and investigation of these facts, merits and circumstances taking full account of the political and human rights conditions prevailing in the Country and the latest reports of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

The enforcement of a Deportation Order is an operational matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau. In general, removals are either carried out using commercial flights which usually involves transit through other European airports as Ireland does not have direct flights to most of the countries of return.

It would be inappropriate of me to comment on individual cases. However, I can say that, as outlined above, the facts of each case are considered including all information available regarding the country of origin of the applicant, before a final decision regarding deportation is made. In the case in question the allegations that have been made continue to be treated with the utmost seriousness. In that respect my officials are making every reasonable effort to establish the true facts of the alleged incident. This includes contact with relevant organisations as well as utilising the services of the Irish embassy in the city in question.

Prison Security

292. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the unit to train attack dogs is gone from Wheatfield prison; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3422/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I wish to advise the Deputy that the Canine Unit remains in place at Wheatfield Prison and is fully staffed. Training of drug detection teams is ongoing with one course just completed and another course to be commenced in February. We envisage to have all training complete and to have passive teams fully operational by the end of May 2015.

Having assessed the position in relation to the use of and the need for conflict resolution dogs, the Irish Prison Service made a decision to remove these animals from service. This decision was based on animal welfare issues associated with this specific type of dog and also due to

the fact that these dogs had not been deployed at any prison in the previous four years. The Irish Prison Service has highly trained Control & Restraint teams in place across the prison estate to deal with serious incidents. The use of conflict resolution dogs were deemed unnecessary and they were removed from duty.

Immigration Status

293. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding long-term residency-eligibility to apply for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3428/15]

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 and a reminder issued on 22 January 2015 requesting certain information. Upon receipt of the requested information the case will be processed further and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

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

Immigration Status

294. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and-or expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 2; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3466/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that following the refusal of their asylum application, the person concerned proceeded to lodge an application for subsidiary protection. This application was considered and refused with the formal refusal decision having been issued to the person concerned by letter dated 8th December, 2014.

The case file of the person concerned will next be considered in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended). Any written representations submitted, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered in advance of final decision being made.

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

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

Referendum Campaigns

295. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to establish a referendum commission in view of the referendum on marriage equality provisionally proposed by the Government for May 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3489/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I understand that the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government will establish a Referendum Commission this week in respect of the Thirty-fourth Amendment of the Constitution (Marriage Equality) Bill 2015. Early establishment of the Referendum Commission will enable it to begin the preparatory work needed to carry out its function of preparing information on the referendum proposal and of publishing and distributing that information to voters.

Deportation Orders

296. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a review of a deportation order has been concluded in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Cork who has been in this jurisdiction since 2008; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3492/15]

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 the subject of a Deportation Order made on 29 July, 2011.

The person concerned initiated judicial review proceedings challenging the Deportation Order made in respect of him. Those proceedings were struck out in favour of the Department on 7 February, 2013 and accordingly, the Deportation Order stands.

Representations were received from the person concerned, asking that his Deportation Order be revoked. This application is under consideration at present. The Deputy might wish to note that any such decision will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Order. In the mean-time, the Deportation Order remains valid and in place.

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

Immigration Status

297. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current residency status and the procedure to be followed to regularise their family's residency position in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3495/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department to refer the Deputy to the replies to his previous Parliamentary Questions No. 133 of 4 December, 2014 and No. 126 of 11 December 2014 in which it was stated that the person concerned submitted a fresh application for residence in accordance with the provisions of the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2006 and 2008 (the “Regulations”) on 17 September 2014.

This application is currently under consideration and a decision will be made on the application within the six month statutory time limit based on the documentation on file. It is noted that the person concerned was requested by letter dated 2 December 2014 to submit certain relevant information in support of the application but has failed to do so to date. As the Deputy was previously advised on 4 December, 2014 it is incumbent on applicants to co-operate with our request for information which is a key part of their application.

It is also noted that applications in respect of the dependant family members of the EU citizen and the person concerned were submitted to the EU Treaty Rights Unit of INIS for consideration under the Free Movement provisions on 5 January 2015. I am advised that officials in INIS requested additional documentation in support of their applications on 22 January 2015 and are awaiting a reply.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The 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 Transport Provision

298. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to provide funding for the purchase of additional unmarked vans to An Garda Síochána; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3504/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Decisions in relation to the provision of Garda vehicles are a matter for the Garda Commissioner in the light of her identified operational demands and the availability of resources.

In that context, the Deputy will be aware that I recently secured a further €10 million for investment in the Garda fleet of which €7 million was made available in 2014. This funding brings the total investment in the Garda fleet in 2014 to €11 million. The remaining €3 million is being made available for the purchase and fit out of additional Garda vehicles during 2015.

Garda Expenditure

299. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount spent on fuel for An Garda Síochána vehicles in 2013 and 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3505/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the amount spent on fuel for Garda vehicles in 2013 was €10.71 million and €9.42 million in 2014.

Ministerial Meetings

300. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide an update on a case (details supplied) and the proposed inquiry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3522/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I met with family members of the victim in the case to which the Deputy refers and their legal representative to hear directly from them of their concerns surrounding the case and their call for an inquiry. The Deputy will be aware that this tragic case of murder was one which was inquired into previously by the late Judge Henry Barron. I am currently finalising a review of material which was provided to me subsequently by the family's legal representative and related material to do with this case. I anticipate that process will be concluded shortly and when it is concluded I will communicate directly with the family.

Proposed Legislation

301. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when she will publish the gambling control Bill; when the legislation is expected to be enacted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3524/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Government approved the General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill in July 2013. A copy of the Scheme is available on my Department's website. The Scheme was referred to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel in July 2013 for the purposes of drafting a Bill.

While it is my intention to proceed with this legislation at the earliest possible opportunity, it is not possible at this point to state when the Bill is likely to be published or enacted.

Firearms Seizures

302. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide by year the number of handguns recovered by an Garda Síochána during the years 2004 to date in 2015 which had been used in the commission of a crime and which had previously been recorded on PULSE as a licensed firearm; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3562/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have asked the Garda Commissioner for a report in relation to the matter and will write to the Deputy as soon as I have further information.

Legal Aid Service Reform

303. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to reform the criminal justice system to include a complete overhaul of the legal aid system and to address the issue of repeat offenders; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3601/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy is aware the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme is a vital element of the criminal justice system. 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.

Haddington Road Agreement Implementation

304. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 187 of 14 January 2015, the reasons specific to her Department the workforce de-layering has not yet been achieved within her Department, as it has in the Health Service Executive in line with section 3.11, workforce restructuring, of the Haddington Road agreement and section 4.2.1 - iii, develop options for workforce de-layering, start Q1 2014, end Q4 2014, of the action plan, appendix 1 of the Public Service Reform Plan 2014-2016; if she will initiate workforce de-layering with immediate effect; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3619/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform has overarching responsibility for human resource management policy in the Civil Service and his Department is currently considering options for advancing the objective of grade restructuring as one of a number of actions to strengthen Human Resource Strategy and resourcing policies. Action 16 of the recent Civil Service Renewal Plan also provides for the redesign of organisational and grade structures in order to simplify them so that all roles and responsibilities are clear.

I refer the Deputy to the reply of my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform on 14 January 2015 which indicated that implementation of this provision will take place during the term of the Renewal Plan and will be subject of discussions with Staff representatives. Commitments such as those referred to in the Deputy’s question apply to the Civil

Service as a whole and are implemented on a service-wide basis, rather than individually decided at the level of each individual Government Department and Office, and come, therefore, within the ambit of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. It has, however, been a particular priority for my Department to ensure that the human resources of the Department are used in an efficient and effective way to support the achievement of Government objectives.

Garda Data

305. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Gardaí currently assigned to the drugs unit in County Donegal; if she will provide a breakdown of the way these are assigned by district; and the number of Gardaí assigned to this unit in each of the past five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3679/15]

314. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda personnel in each Garda station in County Donegal for the years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and to date in 2015. [3745/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 305 and 314 together.

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.

Details regarding the personnel strength of each station in the Donegal Garda Division and the number of Gardaí assigned to the Donegal Divisional Drugs Unit are currently being collated and will be forwarded directly to the Deputy.

As identified in the National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016, drug law enforcement remains a key priority for An Garda Síochána and the Government as part of the overall comprehensive approach to tackling the problem of drug misuse.

I can assure the Deputy that An Garda Síochána continues to pro-actively and resolutely tackle all forms of drug crime. The Garda National Drugs Unit works closely with dedicated Divisional Drug Units and other national units, including the Organised Crime Unit and the Criminal Assets Bureau, in targeting persons involved in the illicit sale and supply of drugs. The Drugs Units are run on a Divisional and National basis and not by District.

Garda Misconduct Allegations

306. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide an update on a case (details supplied); if she will support the family concerned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3710/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The case to which the Deputy refers is amongst the complaints referred to 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, all selected

on the basis of their experience of the criminal justice system, was established for the purpose.

The independent review is well underway and 311 cases have been referred to the panel including the case referred to by the Deputy. The volume and complexity of cases has led to the review taking somewhat longer than originally anticipated, but it is important that counsel take the time necessary to consider each case fully and carefully. Counsel are making every effort to conclude their work as soon as is reasonably practicable.

The recommendations by the independent panel will be very carefully considered but, as a matter of general principle, in coming to a decision in each case I will be very strongly guided by the independent advice of counsel. Quite clearly, having engaged counsel for this review it would be entirely appropriate to be guided by their advice.

Garda Operations

307. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on the significant fall in the number of Garda checkpoints and the number of breath tests from 2008 to 2014; and, in view of the ongoing increase in crash fatalities and injuries, if she will commit more resources to An Garda Síochána for this function. [3730/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will appreciate that I have no direct role in operational road traffic enforcement which is a matter for the Garda Commissioner. I can, however, assure the Deputy that one of An Garda Síochána's strategic objectives is to provide a safe environment for all road users and enforcement remains high and determined throughout the country. I am informed that while the number of MAT checkpoints in 2014 is marginally down on 2013 it is higher than the number of such checkpoints conducted in each of the years from 2008 to 2012.

Insofar as the question of Garda resources is concerned, I can assure the Deputy that I have sought to secure as high a level of resources for the Garda authorities as possible and am fully committed to supporting them in providing a strong and visible community presence across the country, including with respect to road safety enforcement. I am pleased that the recent increase of €40 million in the Budget for Garda pay in 2015 has provided the scope for me to continue with my priority objective of recruiting new Gardaí. The Deputy may be aware that the first intake of Garda Trainees since 2009 to the Garda College took place in 2014. In September 100 recruits commenced training and a further 100 in December. I also recently announced that intakes will continue into 2015, with 100 planned for February and I will, of course, continue to monitor Garda staffing levels this year with a view to agreeing further intakes to the Garda College as required.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the deployment of resources and distribution of personnel is a matter for the Garda Commissioner and the allocation of Gardaí on completion of training will be kept under review and fully considered within the overall requirements of An Garda Síochána nationally.

It is also the case that the comprehensive package of Budget increases for the Justice Sector announced in November includes €10m to support the purchase, and fit-out, of 400 new Garda vehicles. This investment demonstrates the Government's commitment to ensuring the ongoing provision of a modern and efficient Garda fleet. There will be a particular focus on an increased provision of marked Garda vehicles to provide an enhanced visible policing presence in both rural and urban communities, and to support all policing functions including those relating to road safety.

Garda Strength

308. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to restore the Garda traffic corps to its full operational size in view of the continuing increase in crashes and loss of life and injuries. [3731/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel, including community Gardaí, among the Garda Regions, Divisions, and Districts. Garda management keep this distribution under continuing review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources.

I have however been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the personnel strength of the Garda Traffic Corps on 30 November 2014, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 763. As roads policing is the duty of every Garda member, this duty is not reserved for Garda members of the Traffic Corps. Similarly, members of the Traffic Corps are required to engage in the core activity of An Garda Síochána concerning the prevention and detection of crime.

An Garda Síochána carried out 57,326 MAT checkpoints in 2010 and 76,881 in 2014.

The Deputy will be aware that the first intake since 2009 of 100 new recruits entered training at the Garda College, Templemore, on 15 September 2014. As part of Budget 2015, a further intake of 200 recruits in two batches was announced. On 15 December 2014, the first 100 of these batches commenced their training with the remaining 100 to enter the college in February 2015. This will bring to 300 the number of recruits in the Garda College and is a measure of the Government's commitment to ensure that recruitment to An Garda Síochána continues seamlessly. The September intake will attest as members of the Garda Síochána in May 2015. On attestation they will be assigned to Garda stations throughout the country by the Garda Commissioner and the needs of the Garda Traffic Corps will be considered within the overall context of the needs of Garda Stations and Units throughout the country.

Gambling Legislation

309. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans for regulating online gambling providers; and the procedures in place for monitoring current unregulated gambling providers operating here. [3732/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Responsibility for the enforcement of the current gaming and betting legislation rests with An Garda Síochána. There is no provision in that legislation for the licensing of on-line gambling operators.

The Minister for Finance has legislation currently before the Oireachtas that will update the law as it pertains to betting only. The Betting (Amendment) Bill 2013 provides for the licensing of on-line betting operators, and contains provisions for dealing with unlicensed betting operators.

The Gambling Control Bill will, when enacted, update all existing laws on the regulation of gambling, including betting and gaming (but excluding the National Lottery). It will provide for the licensing of all forms of on-line gambling.

The Gambling Control Bill will confer responsibility for all regulatory matters on the Minister for Justice and Equality. The Minister's functions will include licensing, inspections and

prosecutions, and it is envisaged that these functions will be carried out by a body located within my Department. The Scheme provides for a dedicated inspectorate to ensure compliance by licence holders with the terms of their licences and with the new legislation generally.

While it is my intention to proceed with this legislation at the earliest possible opportunity, it is not possible at this point to state when the Bill is likely to be published.

Irish Prison Service

310. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide an update on the interventions put in place to address the number of women imprisoned here. [3733/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I wish to advise the Deputy that one of the key objectives of the Irish Prison Service (IPS) and Probation Service joint strategy is improving outcomes for women offenders and in 2014 both Services launched the Joint Probation Service/IPS Strategy 2014-2016 for women offenders called “An Effective Response to Women Who Offend”. The strategy reflects on current international research and practice which indicate that better outcomes can be achieved through utilising gender informed approaches in dealing with women. The support of the community and voluntary sector will be crucial to implementing the new interagency women’s strategy. Tús Nua is a residential project for women offenders funded by my Department through the Probation Service. Tús Nua works closely with the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service to support women offenders to reintegrate into the community on their release from custody.

To date the Probation Service has continued to work in partnership with the IPS to put in place targeted responses in relation to women offenders. This is undertaken under the auspices of the sentence management process. The Probation Service has provided an in reach service to work with women in Limerick prison. Dedicated Probation Officers in the community have been identified and introduced on a phased basis where there are significant numbers of women offenders. Gender informed guidelines for assessment have been drafted and training is due to commence. Women specific Community Service and Community Return options are being identified on an ongoing basis. Links have been established with the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and a joint PS/IPS visit has been undertaken to the INSPIRE project in Belfast.

Furthermore, the Strategic Review of Penal Policy Report which I launched in September 2014 recommends a greater focus on step-down facilities, supported accommodation and the use of more community based open conditions for female offenders. In November 2014, the Government gave its approval, in principle, to proceed immediately with the implementation of a number of key recommendations including pursuing options for an open prison for female offenders.

Finally, the Abigail Centre in Finglas, Dublin opened in December 2014 which is a new service to meet the needs of vulnerable women that require supported accommodation for a temporary period, some of whom will have moved there directly on release from prison.

Prisoner Releases

311. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if her Department is collaborating with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government to ensure that there is appropriate accommodation available to persons leaving prison;

and the measures that are being put in place to ensure that persons are not being released into homelessness or into emergency accommodation where there is active drug use if this person has undergone detox while in custody. [3734/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Irish Prison Service is represented on seven of the Regional Homeless Consultative Fora established under the provisions of the Housing (Miscellaneous) Provisions Act, 2009. Through these fora, the Irish Prison Service, in partnership inter alia with the Probation Service, has been working to ensure that the unique circumstances of homeless offenders are taken into account in the development and provision of preventative and other supporting actions for persons who are vulnerable to homelessness.

As a direct consequence, of the Irish Prison Service raising this issue, my colleague Alan Kelly the Minister of Environment, Community & Local Government has included an action (15) in the National Action Plan on Homelessness which states that ‘staff from the Department of Social Protection will work with housing authorities and the Irish Prison Service to provide an appropriate in-reach service to all prison settings to ensure that prisoners are assisted to find accommodation before release.’

In recent years, a weekly service was being provided in twelve prisons (all prisons and open centres excluding Cork and Limerick Prisons) by the Department of Social Protection Community Welfare Service through the Homeless Person’s Unit (HPU). Referrals to the Department of Social Protection service generally occur at the pre-release stage where emergency and other accommodation options, and income maintenance can be arranged by the Community Welfare Officers (CWOs). The Department of Social Protection in-reach service is invaluable for the successful resettlement of offenders and a vital component of pre-release planning. It is widely recognised across the prison estate that in order to provide this service to all inmates, an increase in service provision is required.

In the Homeless Strategy National Implementation Plan the Irish Prison Service was assigned a priority action ‘to improve discharge planning for all individuals leaving prisons to include identification of housing needs and follow up supports, through close links between those discharging institutions, housing providers and community based services’. I am happy to report to the Deputy that a new pre-release planning policy for the Irish Prison Service is at an advanced stage and will represent considerable improvements to current pre-release planning and practices in Irish prisons. It is envisaged that a new central information window on the Prisoner Information Management System (PIMS) will record a range of information with regard to post release concerns and plans for individual prisoners which will improve transition to the community and reduce occurrences of ex-offenders becoming homeless post release.

With regard to women prisoners specifically, a joint Women’s Strategy document for the IPS and the Probation Service was published in April 2014. The issues being addressed include rehabilitation, housing and reintegration to the broader community, and apart from the IPS include engagement with the HSE, the Department of Education (VEC), NGOs, the National Council for Women, and areas within the Justice family. The Abigail Women’s Centre in Finglas, Dublin opened in December 2014 and represents a major contribution to the realisation of the IPS/Probation Service joint women’s strategy. The Abigail Women’s Centre is a 40 bed, low threshold facility providing supported temporary accommodation for homeless women in Dublin.

As part of the National Drugs Strategy 2009 - 2016 a protocol was developed between the IPS and the HSE for the continuation of drug treatment services as a person moves between prison (including prisoners on remand) and the community.

Mortgage Arrears Proposals

312. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will report on the possibility of introducing a model of legal support similar to the services provided by the Housing Rights Service in Belfast which would adequately support borrowers facing repossession of their family home as outlined in a recent submission (details supplied). [3735/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I understand that the submission referred to in the Deputy's question has only recently been received in my Department and has not yet been evaluated. I will, of course, respond to the organisation regarding their report in due course.

This Government has put in place a number of legislative provisions regarding protection of the family home in cases where repossession of the property is being sought. *Section 2* of the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2013 provides that in repossession proceedings involving a principal private residence, a court may, where it considers it appropriate or on application by a borrower, adjourn the proceedings to enable the parties to consider whether a Personal Insolvency Arrangement (PIA) under the Personal Insolvency Act 2012 would be a more appropriate alternative to repossession. The intention is to ensure that lending institutions do not resort to repossession proceedings without considering the PIA option under the 2012 Act. The section will not apply to investment or commercial properties. In effect, section 2 provides a new, final, time-limited opportunity for court adjournment of repossession proceedings for the possibility of a Personal Insolvency Arrangement to be examined as an alternative to repossession.

A PIA may be entered into following a court adjournment as indicated above or through the main route set out in the Personal Insolvency Act 2012 via engagement with a Personal Insolvency Practitioner and the Insolvency Service of Ireland. In addition, I should point out that a PIA provides statutory protection to the borrower and may enable them to remain in their home while resolving the debt in a sustainable manner.

This Government has provided an enhanced range of information and guidance services for mortgage holders, including a dedicated information website, a mortgage arrears information and advice helpline and the provision of independent financial advice for mortgage holders who are being presented with long-term mortgage resolution proposals by their lenders. This advice is provided by qualified accountants drawn from members of the main accountancy institutes in Ireland who have agreed to participate and support this independent service. I would encourage people to avail of this service, where appropriate.

I think that it is also proper to reiterate that the Government's advice has always been that borrowers who find themselves in arrears should engage with their lending institution with a view to reaching a solution to their difficulties.

Mortgage Arrears Proposals

313. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if her Department is examining the possible collaboration of the Legal Aid Board and MABS to address the increasing numbers of borrowers losing their family homes and their subsequent difficulty in accessing their social housing entitlements; if consideration has been given to the necessity of a cross-departmental solution to this growing problem. [3736/15]

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

Legal Aid Board that their law centre staff engage regularly with the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS).

The Board also has an External Consultative Panel who meet quarterly and MABS are represented at these meetings which provide an opportunity for the Board and MABS to liaise at a senior level.

Law Centre support staff and solicitors “signpost” applicants and clients to other services including MABS before and at their first consultation with a solicitor when appropriate.

Question No. 314 answered with Question No. 305

Legislative Measures

315. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide an update on the progress that is being made on plans to introduce paternity leave and shared maternity leave; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3764/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin): As already announced, the Government has approved drafting of a Family Leave Bill which will consolidate into one piece of legislation the current provisions regarding maternity, adoptive, parental and carer’s leave. The Deputy will also be aware that in 2013 the Government agreed not to oppose a Private Members’ Bill introduced in Seanad Éireann by Senator Mary White, which provides for the sharing by the mother and father of the current maternity leave provision. At that time it was pointed out that while the Government supports the principle of such flexibility, significant detailed amendments will be required to the approach proposed in the PMB.

Work is ongoing on the examination of a range of options in that regard, including sharing of maternity leave and introduction of a period of paternity leave for fathers. My Department is currently engaged in consultations with relevant Government Departments and other stakeholders including employer and employee organisations. These consultations will be completed shortly and I anticipate that we will be in a position to submit precise proposals to Government before too long.

Departmental Correspondence

316. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will make direct contact with persons (details supplied) in Dublin 6; if she will provide details of the investigation of a case. [3800/15]

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.

Correspondence has also issued to the person referred to from my Department in relation to concerns which he raised, including in relation to Freedom of Information requests. I will make further contact with the relatives of Fr. Molloy when the consultations to which I have referred are concluded.

Legislative Measures

317. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality in view of the recent traumatic events in France and the recommendation of the Constitutional Convention, the plans the Government has to hold a referendum to exclude blasphemy from the Constitution Article 40.6.1°(i); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3864/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will be aware that the Government agreed last September to hold a referendum on removing the offence of blasphemy contained in Article 40.6.1.1 of the Constitution, in response to the 6th Report of the Convention on the Constitution.

The work necessary to prepare a Referendum Bill and a Bill to amend the current legislative provision for the offence of blasphemy is ongoing in my Department.

An appropriate date for the Referendum will be decided by Government when the legislation has been prepared. Earlier this month, the Taoiseach confirmed in the Dáil that the blasphemy referendum will not be held this year, as two referenda are already scheduled for this year.

In the meantime, my officials and I are working on preparing the necessary legislation which is included in the Government Legislative Programme for 2015, as announced on 14 January.

Community Policing

318. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide an update on Garda community policing (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3897/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel, including community Gardaí, among the Garda Regions, Divisions, and Districts. Garda management keep this distribution under continuing review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources.

The Deputy will be aware that all Gardaí have responsibility, inter alia, to deal with community policing issues as and when they arise. Community policing is the underpinning philosophy and ethos through which An Garda Síochána delivers a service across the country. In that context, I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that Howth Garda Station covers the area referred to by the Deputy. The personnel strength of Howth Garda Station on 30 November 2014, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 33. Howth Garda Station forms part of the Raheny Garda District. The personnel strength of which on the same date is as set out in the table below:

District	Gardaí	Community	Reserve	Civilians
Raheny (J)	163	11	14	8

Court Orders

319. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 150 of 21 January 2015 the extent to which it is permissible for members of the public to represent themselves as being a member of An Garda Síochána as has appeared to have happened at a recent eviction (details supplied) in County Kildare; if this is

regarded as a serious offence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3924/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Garda authorities that Gardaí attended the address referred to following telephone requests from both the tenant and landlord. On arrival at the location Gardaí found that the landlord was present but the tenant was not. Garda members remained at the scene to ensure there was no breach of the peace. I am further informed that Gardaí were present as observers only and took no active part in any of the landlord's actions.

In relation to concerns in relation to persons attempting to represent themselves as being members of An Garda Síochána, any information in this regard should be provided to the Gardaí for investigation. A number of relevant offences in relation to such actions are contained in section 60 and section 61 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005.

Firearms Licences

320. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will address a matter (details supplied) raised by her Dáil contribution of 15 January 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3936/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Firstly I would like to clarify to the Deputy that in answering a Parliamentary Question on 15 January, I inadvertently said 1,363 firearms applications were refused by the District Courts. The applications referred to, totalling 1,363 applications, were refused by An Garda Síochána and not by the Courts. I have arranged to have the Dáil record corrected to reflect that fact.

Section 8 of the Working Group Report on the review of firearms licensing, published for consultation in November 2013, sets out views expressed by members of the judiciary in relation to legislative provisions governing firearms. The Deputy will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to comment on individual cases before the Courts. However, I am advised that over the past four years, Judges in District Courts have commented that it is a matter for the legislature and not the judiciary to address the concerns of senior Garda Officers tasked with considering applications to licence, in particular, large calibre handguns and semi automatic centre fire rifles. For example, I am advised by An Garda Síochána that Judge Lucey, in various District Courts throughout the country, Judge O'Kelly in Limerick District Court and Judge Kennedy in Bray District Court have dealt with the issue that as the legislation currently allows for the licensing of such firearms, the law must be applied as it currently exists.

Furthermore, An Garda Síochána have advised that judges have raised issues in relation to interpreting Section 33 of the Criminal Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, which prohibits 'practical or dynamic shooting'. I am advised by An Garda Síochána that Judge Riordan in Cork District Court, Judge McNulty in Bandon District Court, Judge Larkin in Kilmallock District Court, Judge Neylon in Mullingar District Court and Judge Kelleher in Cork District Court have commented on the difficulties in interpreting what exactly constitutes 'a form of activity in which firearms are used to simulate combat or combat training', which was a central issue in appeal cases before these courts.

Additionally, Judge Durcan, in a written judgment in Ennis District Court on 5 November, 2014, addressed an issue relating to the interpretation of the legislation when he stated: "By way of casual initial observation, it must be said that the manner of amendment adopted by the legislature with respect to the Firearms Code is to be regretted. The 2006 Act amends substantially fourteen of the thirty sections of the Principal Act, six important sections of the Principal Act

being completely amended by substitution. The 2009 Act contains an additional 20 sections which effect considerable amendments to the code. It is highly unsatisfactory that the code must now be read by reference to a number of different statutes, when the opportunity could have been taken to provide a consolidating statute. Despite developments in information technology and the empowerment of computer consolidation, Statue Law should be easily accessible not merely to Lawyers and Legislators, but also to ordinary citizens in a comprehensible manner”.

The Deputy has also raised the question of the ability of the Garda PULSE system to produce figures on the number of cases which were appealed to the District Court and how many were granted. The Deputy will appreciate that firearms legislation provides for an appeal to the District Court where a firearms licence has been refused by An Garda Síochána. I am informed that the information sought regarding such cases is not readily available to An Garda Síochána or the Courts Service. The work required to collate this information could only be retrieved by way of a manual examination of each individual court record. This would require a disproportionate and inordinate amount of staff time and effort and could not be justified in current circumstances where there are other significant demands on resources. Furthermore, An Garda Síochána have advised that refused renewal applications for restricted firearms that were subsequently granted on appeal are no longer recorded on PULSE as refused or appealed. These applications are updated on the system to show the application as granted. I understand this new method of updating the licensing system on PULSE was introduced to address concerns of interest groups, so that licence holders granted a licence after an appeal do not have an initial refusal recorded on their licence record.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

321. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding Garda vetting; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3943/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Ensuring the safety of children and vulnerable adults is the primary consideration in any vetting process and accordingly such vetting processes demand rigorous procedures to ensure their integrity and to maintain the highest level of confidence by the public and organisations availing of the service. To that end full vetting checks are conducted by the Garda Central Vetting Unit (GCVU) for each new vetting application received to ensure that the most recent data available is taken into account.

The current procedures for Garda vetting ensure the integrity of the system. This is because once there has been any significant lapse of time between one employment and another, the original Garda Vetting Disclosure would not include information regarding any recent criminal convictions, and the second employer could not safely rely on it.

Furthermore, under the Data Protection Acts, any sensitive personal data which employers use in regard to their employees must be current, accurate and up-to-date and employers would be exposed to civil liability if they knowingly recruited staff based on out-of-date criminal records information where the person in fact had a more recent criminal conviction. Effectively, the non-transferability and contemporaneous nature of the current process protects against the risk of fraud or forgery and is a guarantee of the integrity of the vetting service and such procedures are in line with best practice internationally.

There are, however, certain limited circumstances where organisations can share a single vetting disclosure where this is agreed to by the vetting applicant. For example, persons in-

volved in voluntary work may be doing work with more than one voluntary organisation at the same time, and may agree with the vetting applicant to share a single vetting disclosure. Similar arrangements arise in the health sector in regard to persons working as locums, agency nurses or other temporary employees in a number of different organisations, or in the education sector where substitute teachers are on panels for substitute teaching in more than one school.

Finally, the current average processing time for vetting applications is four weeks. Any vetting process will take a certain minimum amount of time to complete and, taking into account the need to protect children and vulnerable adults while providing an effective and efficient service, I do not think that this time period is unreasonable.

School Completion Programme

322. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 749 of 17 September 2014, if the ESRI review of the school completion programme has been or is close to completion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3479/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The planned programme review of School Completion Programme, indicated in the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure 2012-2014 is underway. The objectives of the review are to examine the programme's structures, clarify roles and responsibilities, to analyse the interventions and supports provided and identify best practice and make recommendations for the future of the programme.

The plan for the review includes arrangements to capture the views of a range of stakeholders, including staff and all those involved in the organisation and administration of the School Completion Programme. It includes a survey to gather the views of project coordinators and chairpersons of the 124 local school completion programme projects throughout the country, case studies of projects involving staff and participating schools and interviews with national stakeholders who have a direct interest in the programme.

The review of the School Completion Programme is an important initiative in planning for the future development of the programme. It will assist in identifying the reforms necessary to consolidate the programme on a sustainable footing for the future. Preliminary information gathered in the review indicates that the School Completion Programme encompasses a broad and diverse range of measures and interventions that have been developed by local projects over the years. The intention is to learn more about the most successful of these, share the learning across the programme and ensure that available funds are targeted to those services that provide the greatest contribution to good educational outcomes for children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage.

Work is at an advanced stage and it is anticipated that the review will be completed during this current academic year.

Children in Care

323. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the Health Service Executive is referring or has referred children or young persons to a residential premises in Drumgowna, Muff, Stonetown, Dundalk, County Louth, which is currently being operated by Solis MMC; if the HSE has any relationship with the operators of this service; if the service

operators conducted a community consultation prior to operating this facility; and if the correct planning permission and fire safety regulations have been obtained. [3822/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): A child may be placed in a private children residential centre where a Child and Family Agency placement is not available and if it is assessed as meeting the needs of the child. Referrals by the Agency to a private children residential centre can be made where a centre has completed the rigorous registration process, a service level agreement is in place and the placement of a child is being made in accordance with the Agency's National Private Placement Protocols. The provider is responsible for completing the planning process with the local planning authority, including issues such as fire safety. Completion of the planning process is one of the standards set as part of the Agency's registration process.

The Child and Family Agency has advised that the children residential centre Stonetown House, operated by Solis MMC, has been registered with the Agency and is compliant with the required standards, including those relating to planning permission and fire safety certificates. There is a service level agreement in place between the operator and the Agency for this facility. Children are being referred to the centre in line with the National Private Placement Protocol. The Agency cannot comment on whether a public consultation was organised by the provider as it is not part of the registration process.

Early Childhood Care Education

324. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the cost of introducing a universal pre-school session of 3.5 hours per day, five days a week for all children aged between three and five years. [3328/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme provides a free pre-school year to all eligible children, in the age range 3 years and 2 months to 4 years and 7 months, before commencing primary school.

The programme is designed to be delivered for three hours per day, five days per week, over 38 weeks (183 days per year), and capitation fees are paid to participating services on the basis of this provision. The programme is based on the primary school model, under which primary schools are required to open on 193 days per year (equivalent to 38.6 weeks). There are no plans to increase the current provision within the pre-school year or to extend the age range for eligibility. It is estimated that increasing the number of hours to 3.5 per day for the current cohort of eligible children would cost in the region of €28 million.

There is an increasing body of Irish and international evidence quantifying the benefits of early years interventions in terms of improving outcomes for children and in delivering significant and societal return to the State. In this context, I believe that the introduction of a second free pre-school year would benefit children's educational and developmental outcomes.

The introduction of a second pre-school year would require considerable additional funding which is not currently available. In addition, all of the available evidence indicates that the quality of the pre-school provision is key to good outcomes for children. The actions contained in the Early Years Quality Agenda, which involves a range of measures in key areas aimed at improving quality within early years services and enhancing the regulatory regime, are currently being implemented.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, the national policy framework for children and young

people 2014-2020, recognises the value of early childhood care and education in supporting children's early cognitive, social and emotional development, and the Government is committed to the introduction of a second free pre-school year within the lifetime of the framework once the required quality standards are achieved, and subject to the availability of resources.

Early Childhood Care Education

325. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position regarding the funding of early childhood education; if this will be increased in the coming years; the amount of the increase; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3517/15]

326. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his plans for investing in the early childhood care and education sector in 2015; if plans are being considered for tax credits to assist working parents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3531/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 325 and 326 together.

There is clear evidence that investing in childcare services which provide quality care and education for children in their early years has significant dividends for both the children themselves and for society as a whole. Ensuring the best possible outcomes for children in their early years is therefore an important element in future economic planning.

The case for investing in children and young people on both social and economic grounds is supported by a body of international evidence. As the Minister with responsibility for this key area, I have established a cross-Departmental group at senior level to develop a whole-of-Government approach to future investment in early childhood care and education and after-school care. The group will undertake an economic and cost benefit analysis of policies and future options for increasing the supply, accessibility and affordability of quality childhood care and education services.

It is clear that accessibility, affordability and high quality childcare can play a critical role in achieving a number of Government priorities, including improving educational outcome for children, reducing poverty and increasing parents' participation in the labour market. The importance of this area is reinforced by continuing economic improvement and job growth and an increased focus on activation for those currently outside the labour market.

To ensure that all the potential benefits can be realised, future public investment in childcare must be evidence-based and strategically coordinated. It must look at the provision right across the 0 to 6 age group as well as consider the after-school needs of older school-going children. It is crucial, therefore, that we develop a coherent cross-Government approach to investment in childcare services.

The group which I propose to establish will include representatives of the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the Department of Finance and the Department of the Taoiseach and will be led and supported by my Department. I will be asking that the work of this group be carried out within a relatively short time frame and I expect that the group will be in a position to report to me in the Summer.

Early Childhood Care Education

327. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will support the Edenmore Early Education Centre, Dublin 5 with increased investment and a cohesive early childhood education and care strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3711/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): My Department implements a number of programmes to support parents with the cost of childcare. The pre-school service referred to by the Deputy is participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme.

The ECCE programme is a free and universal programme which provides a free pre-school year to all eligible children. For the academic year 2014/2015, based on the higher capitation rate payments of €73 per child per week and its current enrolment, this service will be entitled to total funding in the region of €83,000 under this programme.

In addition to this universal provision, there are targeted schemes in place to help parents on low incomes with childcare costs when participating in education, training and when moving from welfare to work. These include the three Training and Employment Support programmes. Together with the Community Childcare Subvention Programme (which is open only to community not-for-profit childcare services) and the ECCE programme, these programmes represent an annual investment of approximately €260 million and support the parents of more than 100,000 children. This service should engage with the local City/County Childcare Committee to establish if it is eligible to participate in any further childcare support programmes.

I recently announced a proposal to establish a cross-Departmental group at senior level to develop a whole-of-Government approach to future investment in early childhood care and education and after-school care. The group will undertake an economic and cost benefit analysis of policies and future options for increasing the supply, accessibility and affordability of quality childhood care and education services.

The group, which will be chaired by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, will include representatives from the Departments of the Taoiseach, Education & Skills, Social Protection, Jobs & Innovation, Public Expenditure & Reform and Finance. It is intended that the group will report to Government in the Summer.

Supported Residential Accommodation Provision

328. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if his Department is collaborating with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government to ensure that there is appropriate accommodation available to young persons leaving care given the current changes in accessing supported temporary accommodation. [3737/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Policy responsibility for homeless young people, insofar as it extends to my Department, relates to children under 18 and any child welfare and protection concerns that may arise in the context of the Child Care Act 1991. Children under 16 who present as being homeless to emergency services are taken into care. Children aged 16 and 17 may be taken into care, or provided a service under section 5 of the Child Care Act 1991. Young people who are homeless, either singly or as part of a family unit and not falling within this category are the responsibility of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and local authorities. Young people who were formerly in the care of the State and presently in receipt of aftercare services have their

accommodation needs identified as part of this support.

Last year, a protocol was established between the County and City Management Association and the Child and Family Agency in relation to the assessment of housing needs for young people leaving care, the interaction between interagency aftercare committees and local authority housing representatives and how to progress such accommodation related matters. The aim of the protocol is to make the assessment and allocation of social housing, where deemed to be the most appropriate response to the young person's need, more efficient and seamless. This protocol came about through the collaboration of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and the Child and Family Agency.

The protocol will see the relevant local authority housing representative attend aftercare planning meetings with social workers of the Agency in relation to those young people for whom social housing has been identified as the most appropriate form of accommodation support. This, it is hoped, will facilitate a more efficient service for those leaving care in obtaining social housing suitable to their needs.

During the course of discussions with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, the issue of the particular vulnerability of young people leaving State care, as highlighted in the first report to Government of the Homelessness Oversight Group, was considered. Discussions between the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government have been ongoing in relation to matters of accommodation for those leaving the care of the State and how they might be best supported.

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

It has been decided to strengthen the legislative provisions regarding aftercare. This is in response to concerns that there was insufficient focus in this area and that such planning was not taking place on a properly structured and consistent basis. The approach adopted is to impose a statutory duty on the Agency to prepare an aftercare plan for an eligible child or eligible young person. The aim is to create an explicit, as opposed to implicit, statement of the Agency's duty to satisfy itself as to the child's or young person's need for assistance by preparing a plan that identifies those needs for aftercare supports.

It is anticipated that the Aftercare Bill will be published in the early part of 2015.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

329. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the measures that are being put in place to prepare for the UN review of Ireland's records on children's rights in view of the number of children in emergency homeless accommodation, the lack of data available on children who are dependants of methadone users and the lack of after-

care support for young persons leaving care. [3738/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): In my capacity as Minister, I am scheduled to attend before the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in January 2016 to discuss Ireland's consolidated third and fourth Periodic Reports, submitted in August 2013. My Department, in the normal course of its work, has ongoing contact with Departments and Agencies on a range of issues relating to children. During the coming year such contacts will comprehend preparations for engagement with the UN Committee.

Aftercare is a term used to describe the planning and support put in place to meet the needs of a young person who is leaving statutory care at 18 years of age, to assist him/her in making the transition to independent living. It is essential that all young people leaving care are provided with the type of transitional support that their individual situation requires.

The Child Care Act 1991 provides that the core eligible age range for aftercare is from 18 years up to 21 years. This can be extended until the completion of a course of education and training in which a young person who has left care, or is leaving care, is engaged, up to the age of 23 years.

Current aftercare provision incorporates advice, guidance and practical (including accommodation and financial) support. Advocating on behalf of young people to support their development as fulfilled adults in their community and, when necessary, to link them to targeted adult services, are also crucial elements of an aftercare service.

Between 450 and 500 young people leave care annually upon turning 18. The Child and Family Agency advised that at the end of June 2014, 1,614 young people aged 18-23 years (inclusive) were in receipt of an aftercare service. Of those, 884 (55%) were in full-time education.

The Child and Family Agency has advised that they are in the process of establishing inter-agency aftercare committees at local level bringing together Local Authorities, HSE and other statutory and voluntary agencies. These committees will develop interagency wrap around aftercare plans for young people, particularly for those with complex needs, including housing requirements. The situation regarding the establishment of these committees varies nationally but it is expected that all committees will be operational by mid-2015.

As the Deputy is aware, the legislative provisions regarding aftercare are being strengthened to respond to past concerns that there was insufficient focus in this area and that such planning was not taking place on a properly structured and consistent basis. The approach adopted is to impose a statutory duty on the Agency to prepare an aftercare plan for an eligible child or eligible young person. The aim is to create an explicit, as opposed to implicit, statement of the Agency's duty to satisfy itself as to the child's or young person's need for assistance by preparing a plan that identifies those needs for aftercare supports.

It is anticipated that the Aftercare Bill will be published in the early part of this year.

Other matters raised by the Deputy in this instance come within the area of responsibility of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and the Department of Health, respectively. Should the Deputy wish to obtain information about these matters, it is open to him to direct his questions accordingly.

Youth Services

330. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide in tabular form all funding awarded for youth projects in County Waterford by year since 2011 to date in 2015, including awards made through the youth capital funding scheme, youth café capital funding programme and the child care capital programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3765/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The information requested by the Deputy is being compiled and will be sent to the Deputy shortly.

Special Educational Needs Staffing

331. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet with representatives of Meath Fight for the Future Campaign with regards the cutting of special needs assistants from preschools in County Meath. [3290/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): My office has no record of having received a request for a meeting from this particular group. If the group submits a meeting request to my office, it will be considered in line with normal procedures.

Speech and Language Therapy

332. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health the services and options available for children in need of speech and language therapy intervention from a school (details supplied) in County Kerry, especially those in junior infants, as there would appear to be no permanent service or hours available for these children. [3707/15]

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 Office and they will follow up the matter with it.

Accident and Emergency Services Provision

333. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will examine a proposal by the Irish Fire and Emergency Services Association that an integrated fire-based emergency medical services on a national basis would address many of the problems in the National Ambulance Service identified in a new Health Service Executive report on the services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3293/15]

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.

Health Services Provision

334. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a date for a medical procedure in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [3302/15]

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 it.

Parking Charges

335. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health if consideration will be provided to waiving car parking charges for family members and others who have to experience long delays in having loved ones seen at emergency departments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3303/15]

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.

Health Services Provision

336. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a date for a procedure in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3304/15]

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 Appointment Status

337. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a date for a medical procedure in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3305/15]

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.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

338. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a hearing aid in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3306/15]

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

HIQA Inspections

339. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the recent Health Information and Quality Authority reports into centres run by an organisation (details supplied) in County Cork; if a timeframe for rectifying issues that HIQA identified has been provided; the number of persons who may have been subject to assault in these centres; if there are plans to address staffing issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3309/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I am informed that the Health Information and Quality Authority has published a number of inspection reports on the organisation (as per detailed supplied), covering different designated centres within that organisation.

All HIQA findings are detailed in the reports as are the actions that must be taken by the provider or person in charge of a designated centre to ensure compliance with the Health Act 2007 (Care and Support of Residents in Designated Centres for Persons (Children And Adults) With Disabilities) Regulations 2013, Health Act 2007 (Registration of Designated Centres for Persons (Children and Adults) with Disabilities) Regulations 2013 and the National Standards for Residential Services for Children and Adults with Disabilities.

Symphysiotomy Reports

340. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Health the circumstances where the families of recently deceased victims of symphysiotomy can establish an entitlement to redress under the scheme of redress as announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3311/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Section 38 of the Terms of the Symphysiotomy Payment Scheme, states that the right to seek payment under the terms of the Scheme is personal to the Applicant and is therefore contingent on the Applicant being alive to accept the offer of any award. If therefore, an Applicant dies at any time after application and before she has accepted an award, the claim shall lapse and the Applicant's estate and her spouse and/

or members of her family shall not be entitled to any award or payment under this Scheme. In these circumstances, the Assessor retains discretion regarding payment of the costs of the Application where the Applicant has retained a solicitor. The Assessor's decision under this paragraph shall be final and not subject to appeal.

Section 39 of the Terms of the Scheme states that if an Applicant has accepted an award and has satisfied all the other conditions of acceptance but dies before payment of the award has been made by the Minister, then such award shall upon her death become payable to her estate and be recoverable in due course by her legal personal representative(s) as a simple contract debt due by the Minister to the Applicant's estate.

I hope this clarifies the matter for you.

Drugs Payment Scheme Administration

341. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the availability of a drug (details supplied) used for the treatment of multiple sclerosis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3312/15]

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

The decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer, are not political or ministerial decisions. These are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds by the Health Service Executive on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics.

The HSE received an application for the inclusion of Fampridine in the GMS and community drugs schemes. The application was considered in line with the procedures and timescales agreed by the Department of Health and the HSE with the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association for the assessment of new medicines.

In accordance with these procedures, the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics conducted a pharmacoeconomic evaluation of Fampridine and concluded that, as the manufacturer was unable to demonstrate sufficient effectiveness and a fair price for Fampridine in the Irish healthcare setting, it was unable to recommend the reimbursement of the product. The report is available on the NCPE's website (www.ncpe.ie).

On foot of this, the HSE decided that it was not in a position to add the drug to the List of Reimbursable Items supplied under the GMS and other community drug schemes.

It is open to the supplier, at any time, to submit a new application to the HSE for the inclusion of Fampridine on the community drugs schemes incorporating new evidence which demonstrates the cost-effectiveness of the drug, by offering a reduced price or both. A revised application was received by the HSE on 25th July 2014. The HSE has since been engaging with the company seeking an improved commercial offering. These engagements have been completed and the HSE is now considering the outcome of those commercial engagements. Fampridine will be assessed along with a range of other applications for reimbursement of medicines for multiple sclerosis and other diseases.

Generic Drugs Substitution

342. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details of generic substitution; if a doctor can dictate on a prescription that a certain medication is to be dispensed if it is felt that this is a more appropriate medication for a specific patient despite there being alternative generic medications; if these patients will have the higher cost met if they are medical card holders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3314/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health (Pricing and Supply of Medicines) Act 2013 provides the statutory basis for the introduction of a system of generic substitution and reference pricing.

Under the legislation, the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) has statutory responsibility for establishing and maintaining a list of interchangeable medical products. In doing so, the HPRA is required to have regard to a comprehensive set of qualifying conditions, all of which must be complied with before a decision is taken to make a medicinal product interchangeable.

Reference pricing involves the setting of a common reimbursement price, or reference price, for a group of interchangeable products. It means that one reference price is set for each group or list of interchangeable medicines, and this is the price the HSE will reimburse to pharmacists for all medicines in the group, regardless of the individual medicine's prices.

For any medicine that is listed as being interchangeable the legislation provides that a Pharmacist may offer a generic or alternative version of the branded medicine which is set at the reference price. Eligible patients using State drug schemes like the Medical Card or Drugs Payment Scheme will not face any additional costs for products priced at or below the reference price. If a patient would like to receive a particular brand that costs more than the reference price then the patient will have to pay the additional cost of that product.

Section 13 of the Act provides that where a branded interchangeable product is prescribed for a patient and the prescriber is satisfied that the medicinal product, should for clinical reasons, be exempted from substitution, the prescriber shall write 'Do not Substitute' on the prescription. In these cases, the pharmacist must dispense what is written on the prescription, i.e. is not permitted to substitute with any product in the same group of interchangeable products and patients will not face any additional costs if the prescribed product costs more than the reference price.

Orthodontic Service Waiting Lists

343. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to expedite orthodontic waiting times in County Tipperary; if his attention has been drawn to a specific case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3321/15]

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

Health Services Staff

344. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health the number of qualified nurses that remain on the graduate scheme introduced in 2013; and the number of hospitals included in the

scheme. [3329/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on the matter. 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 Staff Remuneration

345. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health the number of hospitals that have reversed cuts to nurses' pay under the graduate scheme and that have returned these nurses to a full first year staff nurse pay; and the number of nurses this reversal involves [3330/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on the matter. 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 Appointment Status

346. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Laois will get an appointment for an operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3382/15]

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.

Cancer Screening Programmes

347. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update regarding the extension of the BreastCheck programme to women aged between 65 and 69 years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3398/15]

384. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Health if resources will be available for the expansion of BreastCheck programme to women aged 65 to 69 years; when resources will be made available for this expansion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3700/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 347 and 384 together.

Planning for the age extension of BreastCheck to 65 - 69 year olds is underway and screening of the extended cohort will commence in Quarter 4 of 2015. The additional eligible population is approximately 100,000 and, when fully implemented, 540,000 women will be included

in the BreastCheck Programme.

The age extension will be implemented on an incremental basis in line with the capacity of the system to manage the additional screening and follow up workload. BreastCheck will need to recruit and train additional radiographers, medical consultants and administration support to accommodate the increased demand. Funding for this, and for additional mobile units and medical equipment will be made available across the implementation period. The age extension will be fully rolled out by 2021.

Women of any age who have concerns about breast cancer should seek the advice of their GP who will, if appropriate, refer them to the symptomatic breast services in one of the eight designated cancer centres.

Alcohol Pricing

348. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the introduction of a minimum unit price for alcohol; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3399/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Government has approved an extensive package of measures to deal with alcohol misuse to be incorporated in a Public Health (Alcohol) Bill. These measures are based on the recommendations contained in the *Steering Group Report on a National Substance Misuse Strategy, 2012* and include provisions for the introduction of minimum unit pricing for alcohol products. Work on developing a framework for the necessary Department of Health legislation is continuing and it is intended to publish a General Scheme of a Bill shortly.

National Treatment Purchase Fund

349. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the National Treatment Purchase Fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3403/15]

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.

Hospital Appointment Status

350. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Galway will receive an appointment to the National Referral Centre for Paediatric Gastroenterology at Crumlin Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3420/15]

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 with them.

Medical Card Administration

351. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he will outline each stage of the medical card application process, with particular reference to the recently introduced stage between the medical officer's evaluation and the deciding officer's final decision; and the length of time each stage lasts [3446/15]

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 Delays

352. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in the processing of a medical card application in respect of persons (details supplied) in Dublin 9; and when a decision will be made. [3447/15]

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 Waiting Lists

353. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Galway will receive an appointment for life-saving heart surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3467/15]

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.

Ambulance Service Provision

354. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1112 of 17 September 2014 regarding the reviews of the national ambulance service, if the national capacity review, the Health Information and Quality Authority audit and the Health Service Executive special performance and quality review have been completed; the changes to be made to emergency ambulance services as a result of these reviews; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3469/15]

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.

Home Help Service

355. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if the announced employment of additional home help staff will involve people from the current panel (details supplied). [3473/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on the matter. 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 Appointment Status

356. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3482/15]

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 Staff Recruitment

357. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health if a rheumatologist has been appointed to Mayo General Hospital; if not, when the appointment will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3483/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on the matter. 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

358. **Deputy Shane Ross** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has been left waiting for in excess of three months for a space in the National Rehabilitation Hospital; if he will arrange to have this matter reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3497/15]

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 Services

359. **Deputy Shane Ross** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the shortage of occupational therapists in Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore, County Offaly resulting in a person (details provided) receiving only 20 minutes of occupational therapy a day despite suffering a serious spinal and brain injury three months ago; if he will arrange to have the matter reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3498/15]

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.

Hospitals Data

360. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the amount that was generated through parking charges at Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9, for the years 2013 and 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3507/15]

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.

Nursing Home Inspections

361. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that emergency funding is secured for accommodation upgrades for public nursing homes whose future has been cast in doubt due to their failure to meet Health Information and Quality Authority's new accommodation standards; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that up to 21 of these facilities, including two in County Tipperary, may not be re-registered by HIQA this year due to their failure to meet this standard; the steps being taken to prevent any such closures; the cost to the State of carrying out these upgrades; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3516/15]

407. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Health the way it is planned to meet the Health Information and Quality Authority requirements in respect of a nursing home (details supplied) in County Tipperary; if a fully costed and funded plan has been submitted to HIQA; if not when it will forward a plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3873/15]

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

take Questions Nos. 361 and 407 together.

There are currently 119 public residential units providing a mixture of long-stay and short-stay residential care. All of these, including St Conlon's Nursing Unit, Nenagh and Dean Maxwell Community Nursing Unit, Roscrea are registered with HIQA. Notwithstanding the problems that some facilities face with structures and facilities, the vast majority of their residents receive excellent levels of care. Without these public facilities many older people would simply have nowhere to go, other than our acute hospitals which are already under pressure. It is therefore very important that the services provided by public facilities be maintained.

Demand for capital investment for the Community Nursing Unit programme far exceeds the funding available, and investment must therefore be allocated as effectively as possible based on the HSE's assessment of priorities.

HIQA has indicated that a number of units do not fully meet the standards one would expect to find in a modern nursing home. This is not surprising given the age and structure of many of our public nursing homes. However, there is adequate flexibility available within the terms of existing legislative provisions, and through ongoing discussions between the HSE and HIQA, for solutions to be found. In this context the HSE has been working with HIQA over the past number of months to meet the re-registration requirements of these units, and my Department is closely monitoring the situation.

Vaccination Programme

362. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the new vaccination against meningitis B, Bexsero, here; when a decision will be made as to whether this drug will be made available in this jurisdiction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3521/15]

404. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details of the decision of the national immunisation advisory committee on the new vaccine against meningitis B; and if he will act to ensure early adoption of this in our vaccine programme. [3865/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 362 and 404 together.

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.

My Department has recently received a letter from the Chairman of NIAC regarding the introduction of the Meningitis B vaccine into the Primary Childhood Immunisation Schedule. This matter will be considered by my Department.

Medicinal Products Supply

363. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health further to recent media reports,

when the investigation into the severe shortage in supplies of commonly used medicines, including Eltroxin, will commence; the expected timeframe for completion of the investigation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3550/15]

364. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the terms of reference for the Health Products Regulatory Authority investigation into the severe shortage in supplies of commonly used medicines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3551/15]

365. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his views on the practice of Health Products Regulatory Authority approved licence holders exporting medicines to the UK and other export markets; the reasons such exporting is taking place; his plans to ensure this practice does not continue to adversely affect the supply of medicines domestically; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3552/15]

366. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken to ensure that the supply of Eltroxin is adequately maintained prior to the completion of the Health Products Regulatory Authority investigation into severe shortage in supplies of commonly used medicines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3553/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 363 to 366, inclusive, together.

Eltroxin, which contains the active substance levothyroxine, is a long established medicine that is used to control hypothyroidism, congenital hypothyroidism and juvenile myxoedema. It is marketed in tablets containing 25, 50 and 100 micrograms and is the subject of a marketing authorisation in Ireland.

The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) became aware of shortages of Eltroxin tablets during the week of 1 December 2014. On becoming aware of the shortage the HPRA contacted the manufacturer. This was not however a formal investigation but part of the HPRA's activities in managing disruption in supply of a medicine. It is understood that this shortage was due to a regulatory non-compliance by the manufacturer. The non-compliance was that a registered in-process test was not being applied during manufacture of current batches of Eltroxin. Over the following days, a number of 'fast track' regulatory requests (variations), submitted by the manufacturer, were approved by the HPRA in order to allow for the release of batches of tablets onto the Irish Market.

As part of its routine post marketing activities, the HPRA continues to monitor and investigate issues relating to disruption in supply. In the event of a shortage of a medicine to patients, HPRA will attempt to minimise the impact on patients by:

- working with pharmaceutical companies to resolve manufacturing and distribution issues;
- sharing information with the HSE and international partners about alternative sources of supply;
- seeking input from the HSE, patient groups and healthcare professionals on the impact of medicine shortages, to support decision-making;
- taking measures to allow alternative medicines or suppliers to be used;
- having in place a fast track regulatory mechanism (known as 'batch specific request') to permit packs of a medicine intended for another market to be modified to meet the requirements of the authorisation to market the product in Ireland;

- operating a notification system relating to the sourcing by distributors of exempt (unauthorised) medicines to meet the special needs of patients. This can include the sourcing of an exempt alternative where there is a shortage of the authorised product.

Parallel exporting is the exporting of medicines intended for use in one market to other countries in the European Economic Area (EEA). EU law provides for the free movement of goods across borders within the EU so the practice of parallel import and parallel export of medicines is legal. Member States may restrict the free movement of goods only in exceptional cases, for example when there is a risk resulting from issues such as public health, environment, or consumer protection. In September 2011, the HPRA wrote to the majority of wholesalers regarding the public service obligations contained in the Irish Medicines Regulations. The HPRA closely monitors the situation and if it is found that a product shortage may have been due to parallel trading, the HPRA will investigate.

At present, the HPRA is not aware of any shortage in supply of Eltroxin in Ireland. It continues to work with the manufacturer concerned to ensure that sufficient stocks of this, and other of its products, are available for patients in Ireland. Based on the information available to the HPRA the shortage of Eltroxin tablets in December 2014 was not caused by parallel trade of the product.

Home Help Service Provision

367. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding home help service in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 13; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3556/15]

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.

Medical Card Eligibility

368. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has been refused an over-70s medical card even though he satisfies the financial assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3570/15]

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 Waiting Lists

369. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment for a hip replacement surgery from Cappagh hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3579/15]

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.

Nursing Home Services

370. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the proposals regarding St. Joseph's Hospital, Ardee, County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3585/15]

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.

Health Services Provision

371. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update for assistance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3591/15]

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

372. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3596/15]

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.

Hospital Appointments Administration

373. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a date for a medical procedure in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3597/15]

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 Investigations

374. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health his views on a file (details supplied) sent to him in June 2014 regarding the death of a person in Castlebar hospital on 15 February 2013; if he will refer this matter to the Health Information and Quality Authority and apologise to the person's family for the substandard care the person received between his admission on 7 February 2013 and his death in Castlebar hospital on 15 February 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3615/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I would like to extend my sincerest condolences to the family of Mr. Paige. However, as you can appreciate, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on an individual case. I have therefore, requested the HSE to issue a comprehensive response to this case.

Medical Card Drugs

375. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will re-examine the list of drugs that are available on the medical card for persons who suffer with multiple sclerosis; the drugs that are currently available; the further medications that are requested to be included and are under consideration or have been refused by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3630/15]

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

Disability Services Provision

376. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the arrangements being considered in respect of the provision of disability services at a location (detail supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3631/15]

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.

Nursing Staff Recruitment

377. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Health the average time the Health Service Executive national recruitment service processed applications for nursing positions of whatever scale and grade in the years from 2010-2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3638/15]

378. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Health the average time the Health Service Executive national recruitment service processes applications for nursing positions of whatever scale and grade; the action being taken to address processing times in the event of any delays; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3639/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 377 and 378 together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on the matter. 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 Staff Provision

379. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Health his views on delays in processing applications for nursing positions of whatever scale and grade and that this is an urgent matter in view of the current nurse shortage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3640/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): There are nearly 35,000 nurses currently employed in our health service. Each year approximately 1,500 nurses complete the nursing degree programme. This is the number seen as necessary to maintain nursing numbers at the level required to support service delivery.

There was a requirement to reduce public service numbers and maximise savings in the public service from the time of the downturn in the economy. The embargo on recruitment introduced by the HSE in 2007, followed by the moratorium on recruitment resulted in a fall of about 4,500 in nursing numbers between 2007 and the middle of 2013. Nursing numbers have increased by nearly 500 in the past 12 months. This increase can be attributed to the very posi-

tive initiatives undertaken by the HSE to reduce reliance on agency and to offer contracts of employment where agency can be replaced by full time posts. It is noteworthy that the number of nurses who have made requests for verification to the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland – a requirement if they intend leaving the country - fell by 400 in 2014, meaning that this additional number wish to remain in Ireland.

The HSE has the capacity to recruit where it is necessary to deliver front-line services. This is reflected in the current recruitment campaign where the HSE is actively recruiting to fill 1,600 approved nursing posts. These are across all grades and all divisions of the register spanning acute hospitals, community, ID and mental health.

Many of these posts are currently being filled on a temporary or an acting basis. Following a high profile online campaign at the end of 2014 the HSE is currently processing 3,700 applications for nurses (all divisions of the register across all areas) to meet current needs. These applicants will be interviewed and their applications processed over the next number of weeks.

However, there will always be certain posts that are difficult to attract suitably qualified candidates to and individual strategies are developed for these in conjunction with the line managers. Where front-line staffing shortages exist, the HSE makes alternative arrangements to ensure continued service provision, including recourse to agency cover. However, it is preferable that sufficient numbers of nurses are recruited to permanent posts to support the most efficient and effective delivery of services.

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland

380. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health his plans to intervene in the ongoing dispute between nursing unions and the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland regarding increased registration fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3677/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I am concerned regarding the implications for the health service and patient safety should the current impasse over the annual retention fee increase continue. I have therefore written last week to the President of the Board of NMBI and asking that options be explored to bring a resolution to issues surrounding the annual retention fee. I recognise that the Board must meet its obligations within the financial resources available. At the same time this demands that obligations are met on the most economic basis possible and all planned expenditure can be demonstrated as necessary.

I have again requested that the Board of NMBI re-engage in discussions with the staff associations, as a matter of urgency. An outcome must be found which secures the Board's minimum financial operating requirements but avoids a scenario where nurses and midwives are removed from the Register for non-payment of fees with potential consequences for service availability.

I will continue to monitor the situation closely in the interests of patient safety and continuity of care.

I have offered that both my officials and I are available to engage with the Board should that be of assistance.

The Board is an independent body, answerable to the Oireachtas, with the responsibility to ensure that it has the financial capacity to undertake all its legal obligations. The cost of enacting the additional requirements under the Nurses and Midwives Act 2011 was set out in the Regulatory Impact Analysis that was carried out prior to the enactment of the legislation.

It was also made clear at the time of the legislation that the Board would continue to be self-funding and needed to plan and cost how it would fulfil its legal obligations. Following detailed negotiations with the Executive and Board members in 2013 it was agreed in October 2013 that an initial once-off sum of €1.6m would be granted by the Department to the Board to cover 2013/2014 costs, but that the Board would have to increase its income in 2015 to undertake its commitments in the legislation. The Board of the NMBI made the decision to increase the annual registration fee at its meeting on 17 September 2014.

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland

381. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide the details of oversight and governance of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland, NMBI; if in view of the spending of State funds and unilateral increases in registration fees, the NMBI should be open to scrutiny to ensure financial appropriateness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3688/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Board is governed by the Nurses and Midwives Act 2011 and is a legal entity in its own right. Its accountability to the Minister for Health is set out in statute and in this regard the Minister may for example direct the Board to amend a statement of strategy submitted to him under section 18. Having regard to the relevant sections of the Act, there is a certain amount of accountability to the Houses for example the Act requires the Minister to lay a copy of the statement of strategy before each House of the Oireachtas. The Minister can also lay the business plan submitted to him before the Oireachtas and the annual reports are also laid before each House of the Oireachtas by the Board. Further all rules made under section 13 and approved by the Minister must be laid and annulled. It should be noted that the Board's accounts are also examined by the Comptroller and Auditors General's Office. In this regard the accounts for 2012 and 2013 were recently published and arrangements will be made to lay them before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The Board is an independent body, with the responsibility to ensure that it has the financial capacity to undertake all its legal obligations. The cost of enacting the additional requirements under the Nurses and Midwives Act 2011 was set out in the Regulatory Impact Analysis that was carried out prior to the enactment of the legislation.

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

I am concerned regarding the implications for the health service and patient safety should the current impasse over the annual retention fee increase continue. I have therefore written last week to the President of the Board of NMBI asking that options be explored to bring a resolution to issues surrounding the annual retention fee. I recognise that the Board must meet its obligations within the financial resources available. This also demands that obligations are met on the most economic basis possible and all planned expenditure can be demonstrated as necessary. I requested that the Board of NMBI re-engage in discussions with the staff associations, as a matter of urgency. I have offered that both my officials and I are available to engage with the Board should that be of assistance.

An outcome must be found which secures the Board's minimum financial operating requirements but avoids a scenario where nurses and midwives are removed from the Register for non-payment of fees with potential consequences for service availability. I will continue to monitor the situation closely in the interests of patient safety and continuity of care.

Nursing Staff Provision

382. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the agency nursing staff provided for care under home care packages; the position regarding cases where agencies lack the required staff; the way suitable replacement staff are provided in such cases; if there is a lack of nursing staff experienced with tracheotomy care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3691/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I wish to thank the Deputy for the question raised.

As this is a service issue it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply within 15 days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Primary Care Centre Provision

383. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date on primary care centre projects in County Waterford, including St. Joseph's in Dungarvan, Waterford city and Tramore; the timeframe for completion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3695/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The development of primary care is central to the Government's objective to deliver a high quality, integrated and cost effective health care system. Supporting infrastructure, procured through a combination of public and private investment, will facilitate the delivery of multi-disciplinary primary health care.

The primary care centres for Dungarvan and Waterford city are two of the locations included in primary care centre PPP project. Considerable progress has been made in progressing this project. Planning permissions for both locations have been awarded. Tender documentation has been issued to the pre-selected bidders and tenders are due to be returned in February 2015. It is expected that the primary care centres at both locations will be delivered by early 2017.

Your question has been referred to the HSE to provide an update on Tramore and other Waterford locations which the HSE may have at earlier stages of development. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up on the matter.

Question No. 384 answered with Question No. 347.

Health Services

385. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (de-

tails supplied) regarding accommodation needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3714/15]

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

Pension Provisions

386. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health if he will review a pension case in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 24; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3716/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on the matter. 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 Homes Support Scheme Applications

387. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a fair deal scheme application will be approved in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3717/15]

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.

Health Services Expenditure

388. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide the overall health spend here per capita and also as a percentage of GDP and of GNI in tabular form over the past five years and also with estimates of private expenditure on health, including but not limited to private health insurance and out of pocket expenses; the comparison that his Department has made with other European countries or similarly developed countries; Ireland's health spend compared to similar countries; if Ireland has above or below average health spend according to various analyses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3718/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The latest data available for health expenditure in OECD countries are for 2012 and are given in the following table. In 2012, Ireland's total health expenditure on health was 8.9% of GDP and 10.9% of GNI. This compares with the OECD averages of 9.3% and 9.8% respectively. Comparable data for Ireland for the years 2008-2012 are also provided.

Health Expenditure per capita and as a % of GDP and GNI by financing agent, Ireland 2008-2012

Financing Agent	per capita, Euro	% gross domestic product	% gross national income
2008			

Financing Agent	per capita, Euro	% gross domestic product	% gross national income
General government	2,721	6.8	7.8
Private sector	889	2.2	2.6
Total expenditure	3,610	9.0	10.4
2009			
General government	2,584	7.2	8.7
Private sector	976	2.7	3.3
Total expenditure	3,560	9.9	11.9
2010			
General government	2,223	6.4	7.6
Private sector	969	2.8	3.3
Total expenditure	3,192	9.2	11.0
2011			
General government	2,100	5.9	7.3
Private sector	995	2.8	3.5
Total expenditure	3,096	8.7	10.7
2012			
General government	2,143	6.0	7.3
Private sector	1,029	2.9	3.5
Total expenditure	3,172	8.9	10.9

Sources: OECD and EUROSTAT.

When expressed in US\$ purchasing power parities, Ireland's total health expenditure in 2012 of US\$ppp 3,890 per capita was above the OECD average of US\$ppp 3,493 per capita. Comparable expenditure data using Euro per capita for Ireland for the years 2008-2012 is also provided.

Total health expenditure per capita (US\$PPPs) and as % of GDP and GNI for selected OECD countries, 2012

Country	Per Capita	Per Capita	Per Capita	% GDP	% GDP	% GDP	% GNI
-	Public	Private	Total	Public	Private	Total	Total
Australia*	2,733	1,264	3,997	6.2	2.9	9.1	n/a
Austria	3,716	1,180	4,896	8.4	2.7	11.1	11.2
Belgium	3,323	1,096	4,419	8.2	2.7	10.9	10.9
Canada (e)	3,224	1,378	4,602	7.7	3.3	10.9	n/a
Chile	776	801	1,577	3.6	3.7	7.3	n/a
Czech Republic	1,745	332	2,077	6.3	1.2	7.5	8.2
Denmark	4,029	669	4,698	9.4	1.6	11.0	10.7
Estonia	1,139	286	1,447	4.6	1.2	5.9	6.2
Finland (e)	2,669	889	3,559	6.8	2.3	9.1	9.0
France	3,317	971	4,288	9.0	2.6	11.6	11.4
Germany	3,691	1,120	4,811	8.6	2.6	11.3	11.0
Greece	1,617	759	2,409	6.2	2.9	9.3	9.2
Hungary	1,128	675	1,803	5.0	3.0	8.0	8.4
Iceland (e)	2,847	689	3,536	7.3	1.8	9.0	10.1
Ireland	2,628	1,261	3,890	6.0	2.9	8.9	10.9
Israel	1,377	890	2,304	4.4	2.8	7.3	n/a
Italy	2,481	728	3,209	7.1	2.1	9.2	9.2

Country	Per Capita	Per Capita	Per Capita	% GDP	% GDP	% GDP	% GNI
Japan (e)	2,997	652	3,649	8.4	1.8	10.3	n/a
Korea	1,248	1,043	2,291	4.2	3.5	7.6	n/a
Luxembourg	3,846	762	4,578	6.0	1.2	7.1	10.5
Mexico	531	517	1,048	3.1	3.0	6.2	n/a
Netherlands*	n/a	n/a	5,219	n/a	n/a	12.1	12.1
New Zealand* (d)	2,623	549	3,172	8.3	1.7	10.0	n/a
Norway	5,222	918	6,140	7.9	1.4	9.3	9.1
Poland	1,065	467	1,540	4.7	2.0	6.8	7.1
Portugal*	1,718	924	2,642	6.7	3.6	10.2	10.6
Slovak Republic	1,468	637	2,105	5.7	2.5	8.1	n/a
Slovenia (e)	1,907	761	2,667	6.7	2.7	9.4	9.5
Spain*	2,190	808	2,998	6.9	2.5	9.4	9.6
Sweden	3,336	770	4,106	7.8	1.8	9.6	9.3
Switzerland (e)	4,001	2,078	6,080	7.5	3.9	11.4	11.1
Turkey	756	228	984	4.1	1.3	5.4	n/a
United Kingdom	2,762	527	3,289	7.8	1.5	9.3	9.3
United States	4,160	4,585	8,745	8.0	8.9	16.9	n/a

Sources: OECD, EUROSTAT.

Notes:

(i) Per Capita Expenditure is expressed in Purchasing Power Parities (US\$PPPs).

(ii) GDP: Gross Domestic Product.

(iii) GNI: Gross National Income.

(iv) n/a: indicates 'Not available'.

(v) * indicates data for 2011.

(vi) e indicates estimated.

(vii) d indicates difference in methodology.

(viii) As PPPs are statistical constructs rather than precise measures, minor differences between countries should be interpreted with caution.

Medical Card Applications

389. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date in the determination of an application for a medical card in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3722/15]

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 Procedures

390. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when the parents of an eight year old child (details supplied) in County Clare will be provided with the results of an EEG exam which took place in Crumlin Hospital, Dublin 12, on 13 November 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3726/15]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Data

391. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Health the number of homes under the fair deal scheme which are being rented out privately; the number of homes under the fair deal scheme which remain unoccupied once the owner moves to a nursing home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3727/15]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

392. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the Health Service Executive occupational therapy services in Dublin north; the circumstances under which a child with a lifelong disability would be discharged from these services; his plans to ensure that every child who requires assistance from these services receives treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3742/15]

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 Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Hospitals Policy

393. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his plans for St. Patrick's Hospital, County Waterford. [3746/15]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

394. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Health when the review of the fair deal, or nursing home support scheme, is due to be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3766/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): When the Nursing Homes Support Scheme commenced, a commitment was made that it would be reviewed after three years. The reason for allowing this period to elapse was to ensure that the Scheme had bedded in and that established trends would be available in order to inform the work of the Review. The Review is being carried out by my Department in collaboration with the HSE, with analysis and recommendations provided by an external service provider on specific issues which required specialised expertise.

A call for written submissions to inform the review was made on the 16th June 2012. In total 61 submissions were received from a broad range of individuals, nursing homes, statutory bodies, groups representing the interest of older people, private/commercial bodies and organisations in the community and voluntary sector. A summary report of the submissions was published on the Department's website in December 2012.

The Terms of Reference for the Review are:

Taking account of Government policy, demographic trends and the fiscal situation:-

1. To examine the on-going sustainability of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme,
2. To examine the overall cost of long-term residential care in public and private nursing homes and the effectiveness of the current methods of negotiating/setting prices,
3. Having regard to 1. and 2. above, to consider the balance of funding between long-term residential care and community based services,
4. To consider the extension of the scheme to community based services and to other sectors (Disability and Mental Health),
5. To make recommendations for the future operation and management of the scheme.

The elements of the Review that relate to the Nursing Homes Support Scheme itself are well-defined, but an effective assessment of the Scheme for the future requires consideration of where it fits within the spectrum of services and supports for older people, and of how the make-up of and balances within this spectrum may change over time. This exercise is broader than was first envisaged and the various issues arising are now being systematically considered with a view to completion and publication as early as possible. It is expected that the Review will be completed by the end of this quarter and the report will then be made publicly available.

Nursing Home Inspections

395. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on

the situation regarding public nursing homes that are at risk of failing to meet Health Information and Quality Authority national accommodation standards; if the Health Service Executive is working with the 27 homes identified as potentially being unable to meet its standards; if funding is being put aside to ensure the standards are being met and if so, the amount, the plans in place to cater to clients, should any or all of these homes be closed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3767/15]

416. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on reports that up to 21 of the largest publicly-run nursing homes are at risk of closure due to the State's failure to invest in bringing them up to national accommodation standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3942/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 395 and 416 together.

There are currently 119 public residential units providing a mixture of long-stay and short-stay residential care. All of these are registered with HIQA. Notwithstanding the problems that some facilities face with structures and facilities, the vast majority of their residents receive excellent levels of care. Without these public facilities many older people would simply have nowhere to go, other than our acute hospitals which are already under pressure. It is therefore very important that the services provided by public facilities be maintained.

Demand for capital investment for the Community Nursing Unit programme far exceeds the funding available, and investment must therefore be allocated as effectively as possible based on the HSE's assessment of priorities.

HIQA has indicated that a number of units do not fully meet the standards one would expect to find in a modern nursing home. This is not surprising given the age and structure of many of our public nursing homes. However, there is adequate flexibility available within the terms of existing legislative provisions, and through ongoing discussions between the HSE and HIQA, for solutions to be found. In this context the HSE has been working with HIQA over the past number of months to meet the re-registration requirements of these units, and my Department is closely monitoring the situation.

Hospital Appointments Administration

396. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Offaly will receive a hospital appointment with the pain management clinic, Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9. [3784/15]

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.

Medical Card Eligibility

397. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Health the reason there are still cases of persons, and especially young children, being refused discretionary medical cards, despite being extremely ill and in view of the Health Service Executive stating in November 2014, that the process would be enhanced to make it more sensitive to people's needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3785/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the Deputy will be aware, eligibility for medical cards is set out in the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The Act provides that persons, unable without undue hardship having regard to their overall financial situation to arrange GP services for themselves and family, qualify for a medical card. The Deputy will also be aware of the publication of the *Report of the Expert Panel on Medical Need for Medical Card Eligibility* and the *Medical Card Process Review* in November 2014. A key recommendation of the Expert Panel was that a person's means should remain the main qualifier for a medical card.

The HSE has discretion, exercised in accordance with the legislation, to grant a medical card where a person's income exceeds the income guidelines. The HSE is obliged to operate within the legal parameters as set out in the Health Act, while also responding to the variety of circumstances and complexities faced by individuals who apply for a medical card.

In the light of the conclusions of the two reports a range of actions have been identified to improve the operation of the medical card system, particularly for people with significant medical needs. The HSE has appointed a senior manager to lead the reform of the systems for handling medical card application and reviews. Under one of the actions, the HSE is taking steps to establish a clinical advisory group to develop a methodology and guidance for the assessment of applications involving significant medical conditions so as to take account of the burden involved and the needs arising from the condition and to ensure that appropriate services are provided to people who need them. The HSE is also putting arrangements in place for a more integrated and sensitive processing of medical card applications involving significant medical conditions to ensure greater interaction between the central office regarding the assessment of a person's eligibility and the local health office regarding the person's medical condition and the services that they may require. Consequently, the number of medical cards issued, where the HSE has exercised discretion, has increased from approximately 50,300 at the start of 2014 to approximately 76,700 at the start of 2015.

The Minister and I have also asked the HSE to examine, with the Department of Health, the best way to meet the needs of people with significant medical conditions who need the support of the public health system. This work includes considering the best way to make medical aids and appliances available to persons who do not hold a medical card, the provision of services to children with severe disabilities, and to enable people with particular needs to have these met on an individual basis rather than awarding a medical card to all family members.

Mental Health Services Provision

398. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Health his views on implementing recommendations (details supplied) regarding residential care. [3798/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Like others, I was shocked and distressed by the revelations of extremely poor and unacceptable standards of care and mistreatment of vulnerable adults in Áras Attracta. Every person who uses our disability services is entitled to expect and receive supports of the highest standard and to live in an atmosphere of safety and care.

The safeguarding and protection of vulnerable people in the care of the health service is of paramount importance and the Director General of the HSE has written to all staff instructing them to take personal responsibility for ensuring that individuals supported by the HSE in any setting are treated with dignity and respect.

In December 2014 the HSE initiated both an expert investigation chaired by Mr. Christy Lynch, and an independently chaired review of services at this facility led by Dr Kevin McCoy.

Mr. Lynch's investigation team is working independently of the HSE and its findings will be a precursor to any disciplinary process consideration at which the HSE will undertake. Mr. Lynch is both nationally and internationally recognised as a champion for people with a disability and a leader in the implementation of innovative supports. His independence in relation to this issue should not be questioned, as his proven track record in fighting for people with a disability speaks for itself.

Dr McCoy is undertaking an Assurance Review of the services at Áras Attracta and the final report will include an individual plan for improvement in each bungalow within the complex. The review will identify system wide learning involving engagement with relevant expertise as well as input from staff.

A Garda investigation into allegations of abuse at the centre is ongoing and the Garda had requested that a stay be placed on HSE investigations until such time as the Garda investigation is completed. However, the HSE has informed me that gardaí have now cleared the way for the investigation to commence. Following the lift of a Garda stay, I have asked the HSE to keep me informed of progress.

On 16 December 2014, the Director General of the HSE announced the appointment of Ms Leigh Gath as Confidential Recipient in respect of complaints or disclosures of abuse of vulnerable persons in receipt of HSE funded services. Ms Gath has been a fearless advocate and a champion for people with a disability for many years and will, no doubt, provide a strong and independent voice in her role. I am informed by the HSE that Ms Gath took up her duties with effect from Monday 22 December 2014

In line with Government policy, disability providers are delivering an increasing proportion of services and supports which are individualised and person-centred and the HSE is actively working with disability providers towards the migration of more services in 2015 to this person-centred supports model.

Further work is necessary before decisions can be taken on the form or forms which individualised budgeting will take, but the essence of it will be that the individual is given more choice and control over how the money allocated to meet their needs is utilised.

In the meantime there are demonstration projects underway which are looking at all aspects of providing more person-centred and accountable supports for people with disabilities and these projects are providing a valuable insight into the issues arising.

The other points made in the details attached by the Deputy touch on the responsibilities of a number of my colleagues as well as myself, and I will make sure that my colleagues are made aware of these.

I can assure the Deputy that my Department will monitor progress on the initiatives and processes commissioned by the HSE in relation to Áras Attracta, to ensure that the learning from this incident is promulgated throughout our health system.

Nursing Home Inspections

399. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to include private nursing home care agencies under the remit of the Health Information and Quality Authority, or any other regulatory bodies, in view of the absence of any effective remedy for persons who currently have complaints. [3802/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Information and Quality Authority is the independent authority established under the Health Act 2007 to drive continuous improvement and to monitor safety and quality in Ireland's health and personal social care services.

Since 2009 all nursing homes - public, voluntary and private - have been registered and inspected by HIQA. During the course of this Government HIQA's function has been extended to residential services for those with disabilities and child protection services.

As regulator, HIQA's remit operates at the level of facilities rather than that of individual complaints, but the requirements at facility level impact very directly on how individual cases are dealt with.

All nursing homes are required to have an accessible and effective complaints procedure, including an appeals process. They must investigate all complaints promptly, and following investigation put in place any measures required for improvement. Records of complaints made are required to be kept. These are available for inspection, thus enabling the HIQA inspector to determine whether the complaints system is sufficiently robust.

HIQA takes into account and uses all information received to inform and plan its regulatory activity, and information on individual cases can provide useful pointers in this context. HIQA's programme of both scheduled and unannounced inspections helps to ensure that standards are maintained and where issues of non-compliance arise, that these are addressed and rectified. If a nursing home is found not to be in compliance with the Regulations it may either fail to achieve or lose its registration status. HIQA also has wide discretion in deciding whether to impose conditions of registration on nursing homes.

My Department, in consultation with both HIQA and the service providers, is working on an ongoing basis to improve and update the requirements that apply to nursing home care. Any request from HIQA for an extension of their remit on the lines suggested by the Deputy will be carefully considered.

Magdalen Laundries Report

400. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the reason he is not implementing the full recommendations (details supplied) of Judge Quirke's report in respect of the Magdalen scheme as originally promised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3815/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): In his report, Judge Quirke was of the opinion that Magdalen women should be provided with access to a comprehensive suite of health services. He specified GP services, prescribed drugs, medicines, aids and appliances, dental, ophthalmic, aural, home support, home nursing, counselling, chiropody and physiotherapy services and formed the opinion that the health provisions should operate in a manner similar to the scheme made available to certain persons under the Health (Amendment) Act 1996.

Judge Quirke's recommendation that the women should have access to the range of services under the Health (Amendment) Act 1996 is being given effect in the Redress for Women Resident in Certain Institutions Bill 2014.

Motorised Transport Grant Eligibility

401. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the findings of the interdepartmental group on the mobility allowance and motorised transport grant; the timeframe in place for this group's recommendations; if those persons who had their allowance cut in 2013 will now have the opportunity to reapply for it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3817/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Inter-Departmental Group considered matters such as eligibility criteria and administrative arrangements for individual payments to people with severe disabilities who require additional income to address the cost of their mobility needs. The Government decided that the preparatory work required for a new travel subsidy scheme should be progressed by the Minister for Health. Work is ongoing on the policy proposals to be brought to Government for the drafting of primary legislation for a new scheme. Once policy proposals have been finalised and approved by Government, the time frame for the introduction of a new scheme will become clearer.

Pending decisions on a new scheme, monthly payments will continue to be made by the Health Service Executive to 4,700 people who were in receipt of the Mobility Allowance at the time that the scheme closed. The Motorised Transport Grant is closed.

Infectious Disease Screening Service

402. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if patients are tested for MRSA as a matter of routine when admitted to Mayo General Hospital; the number of patients tested positively for MRSA on admission to Mayo General Hospital in 2013 and 2014; the number of patients being discharged from Mayo General Hospital in 2013 and 2014 who tested positive for MRSA; the number of patients in this hospital that have had complications related to MRSA infection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3823/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for attention and 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.

Community First Responders Network

403. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide the interface which has been developed by the National Ambulance Service, the command and control centre and the community first responders; the number of CFR groups and persons that are currently hooked up to the new system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3854/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Last Thursday 21 January I was delighted to be able to launch the CFR Network. It is rare that pre hospital care in Ireland is recognised for the hard work that goes into it. So it was great to be part of such a positive development.

However 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. 404 answered with Question No. 362.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

405. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Carlow will have a fair deal scheme application approved. [3867/15]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

406. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Carlow will have a fair deal application approved. [3868/15]

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.

Question No. 407 answered with Question No. 361.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

408. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health when additional beds will open in Dingle Community Hospital, County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3880/15]

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.

Disease Incidence

409. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 468 of 20 January 2015, if he will specify the incident which is under investigation which led to the decision to suspend the indemnity of a person (details supplied). [3889/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I wish to thank the Deputy for the question raised.

As there are 2 investigations ongoing into this case, I am not in a position to discuss service

delivery issues at this time. It is expected that the investigations will be completed at the end of the first quarter and further disclosure may then be available.

Respite Care Services

410. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding respite care in respect of persons (details supplied) in Dublin 3; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3894/15]

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.

Disability Services Provision

411. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the reason Prader-Willi syndrome which is a severe condition that affects approximately 200 adults and children here is not provided the appropriate funding and services to support parents and family such as the case of family (details supplied) in Dublin 9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3895/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Government is fully committed to ensuring the on-going delivery of vital services and supports to people with disabilities within available resources.

The Health Service Executive's (HSE's) 2015 National Service Plan, including its disability services programme for children and adults with disabilities is detailed in the HSE's 2015 Operational Plan.

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.

Prescription Charges

412. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 679 of 25 February 2014 and the subsequent reply under Standing Order 40A, if his attention has been drawn to the anomalous situation which results in medical card holders on mixed dosage medication being charged for each millilitre size as an individual item; his plans to address this problem; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3918/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Medical card holders are required to pay a €2.50 charge per item for medicines and other prescription items

supplied to them by community pharmacists, subject to a cap of €25 per month for each person or family.

Where a drug or medicine is required to be dispensed in different strengths and different containers, a prescription charge applies to each claimed strength of the product.

This raises policy issues surrounding the implementation of prescription charges which is still under review.

HSE Complaints Procedures

413. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been brought to a complaint (details supplied) made to the Health Service Executive; the actions taken to ensure such a situation does not arise again; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3919/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Both the Health Service Executive and the Carers Association have comprehensive complaints procedures in place. It is suggested that this matter should be taken up directly with the HSE in the first instance.

HSE Correspondence

414. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health his plans to have correspondence which has been furnished to the Health Service Executive in relation to a personnel matter in respect of a person (details supplied) and which has not been addressed to date immediately replied to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3920/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on the matter. 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.

Hospitals Building Programme

415. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 126 of 27 November 2014 if he will confirm the design team has been appointed to this project and is working on stage 1 design; if the tendering process has begun; if the tendering documents have been forwarded to the construction industry seeking a reputable builder to complete the project; if so, when a builder will be selected; the estimated timeframe for completion once work begins; if the necessary funds have now been ring-fenced for the project; the reason for the delay in the progression of this project in view of the fact that this project has been promised since 2008 and at numerous meetings the Health Service Executive south has indicated to both this Deputy and local councillors in the County Waterford area that it is a priority; the position regarding the assurances that the project would be completed prior to the last local election six months ago; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3940/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): It is Government policy to support older people to live in dignity and independence in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. Where this is not feasible, the health service supports access to appropriate quality long-term residential care, including the provision of financial as-

sistance under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme. Providing public residential care for older persons forms a significant and crucial part of the services provided. Our overall objective is to protect the viability of as many units as possible, within the funding and staffing resources available. Therefore improving the supports available for older persons is a significant commitment in our Programme for Government.

All developments must be addressed in the light of the resources available and based on priority of need. HIQA has indicated that a number of units do not fully meet the standards one would expect to find in a modern nursing home. This is not surprising given the age and structure of many of our public nursing homes. Currently the funding for the Community Nursing Unit (CNU) programme focuses on the upgrade and refurbishment of existing facilities to achieve HIQA compliance.

The Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of health and personal social services. This includes provision of the appropriate infrastructure which supports service delivery, such as the facilities at this particular location. Given that demand for capital finance for the Community Nursing Unit programme alone far exceeds the funding available, investment must be allocated as objectively as possible, based on the HSE's assessment of priorities of needs.

The HSE has identified this location as a priority location for a new Community Nursing Home unit. The design team has been appointed. Currently it is projected that a planning application could be lodged with the local authority in Q2 2015. Following the award of planning it is expected that the project will progress to the tendering / construction phase in late 2015. In advance of the award of planning permission it is not possible, at this point in time to be definitive about a time frame for completion once work begins, other than to say that it is possible that the construction of a CNU could be completed within twelve months of appointing a contractor. All Government Departments and agencies, including the HSE, that are funded from the Exchequer must comply with EU Directives and national guidelines on procurement and in this regard the HSE's selection of a contractor will be in accordance with this process.

As with all capital projects, the CNU infrastructure programme which includes this project, must be considered within the overall capital envelope available to the health service. There will always be more projects than can be funded by the Exchequer. There is limited funding available for new projects, over the next multi-annual period 2015-2019, given the level of commitments and the costs to completion already in place. Therefore the reason capital funding is not ring-fenced by project is to ensure that the HSE has flexibility to manage within its voted capital allocation in the event that one or more of the hundreds of construction projects underway at any time do not progress as scheduled. Indenting rather than ring-fencing enables the HSE, to leverage its capital allocation efficiently, so that it delivers the maximum number of priority projects for the funding available.

Question No. 416 answered with Question No. 395.

Passport Applications

417. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the reason only two-year passports were issued in respect of persons (details supplied) with Irish citizenship; and if the persons will be expected to pay the full application fee when applying for replacement passports. [3468/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Passports belong-

ing to a mother and her four children were declared lost in October 2012. The Passport Office has referred the circumstances of the loss of these passports to An Garda Síochána and investigations are still ongoing regarding this matter. Pending the outcome of these investigations passports with a restricted validity were issued in accordance with section 9(1) and (2) of the Passports Act 2008. A decision on issuance of any further passports and fees required to the people in question will be made on conclusion of the investigation

Trade Missions

418. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to undertake a trade mission to Japan; the way a company can apply for a position on such a delegation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3519/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Japan is a priority market under our Government Trade, Tourism and Investment Strategy. In December 2013, An Taoiseach Enda Kenny visited Japan where he met with Prime Minister Abe. Together they launched the Japan-Ireland Partnership for Innovation and Growth. The Taoiseach was accompanied for part of this visit by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Marine, Mr. Simon Coveney, T.D. During this visit it was also announced that Japan was lifting its ban on Irish beef imports, which was a very positive development for our beef industry.

There have been a number of Ministerial visits to Japan with a trade dimension in recent years. In 2011, then Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Mr. Éamon Gilmore T.D., visited Japan where he attended a series of trade-related events. In 2012, Minister of State Sean Sherlock, in his then role as Minister of State for Research and Innovation, visited Japan as part of an Enterprise Ireland Ministerial-led trade mission.

Enterprise Ireland Ministerial-led overseas trade missions and events, with the involvement of EI client companies and organised with the active support of my Department's Embassy network, are an important element of the Government Trade, Tourism, and Investment Strategy, which recognises the valuable role they play in developing and creating new trade, tourism and investment opportunities for Ireland.

Early each year I agree the annual programme of Enterprise Ireland Ministerial-led overseas trade missions and events with the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, based on the proposals submitted by Enterprise Ireland and focused on the priority markets of interest to their client companies. The programme for 2015 has not yet been finalised but I expect it to be launched in the coming weeks.

I am advised that companies interested in participating in Enterprise Ireland trade missions should make their interest known to the International Sales and Partnering Division of Enterprise Ireland directly.

Debt Restructuring

419. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade in view of the UN General Assembly vote on 5 December 2014 to establish the modalities for the implementation of a multilateral legal framework for sovereign debt restructuring, the reason for Ireland's decision to vote against the resolution; the extent the Government consulted with Global South governments, or other heavily indebted governments in Europe, in coming to its decision; and the factors that explain the Government's move from abstaining on the same sub-

stantive issue at the Human Rights Council on 26 September 2014 (A/HRC/27/L.26) to voting “No” at the General Assembly on 5 December 2014. [3821/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Sean Sherlock): Ireland, in common with all other EU Member States, was unable to support the UN General Assembly resolution on the modalities for the implementation of General Assembly Resolution 68/304 on the establishment of a multilateral legal framework for sovereign debt restructuring processes. The decision to vote against the Resolution was taken on the basis of its substance and the procedural issues involved. 128 UN member States voted in favour of the resolution, 16, including 10 EU member States voted against and there were 34 abstentions.

In the lead up to the vote, the EU had made extensive efforts and engaged with the proponents of the resolution in the informal negotiation process, coming forward with a range of substantive ideas on moving the process forward.

Despite these efforts, the text of the resolution, which was tabled by Argentina, did not reflect any of the progress made in the informal discussions, and failed to take account of any of the EU proposals. This made it impossible for the EU to support the draft resolution.

The earlier Human Rights Council resolution, “Effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights: the activities of vulture funds”, which was also tabled by Argentina, was wider in scope than the UN General Assembly resolution. This broader scope enabled Ireland to abstain. Among the 9 EU member states on the Human Rights council, six abstained and three voted against.

Together with many other UN member States, Ireland is actively engaged in ongoing processes to address the issue of sovereign debt restructuring. Ireland considers that the work being undertaken at other levels, including in the IMF and at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development to be held Addis Ababa in July, offer more appropriate and established means for meaningful dialogue on the matter. Ireland will play our full role in working for the success of this crucially important meeting in Addis, which is central to the ongoing negotiations on a new framework for global development to follow on from the Millennium Development Goals. These major international negotiations at the UN are being co-chaired by Ireland and Kenya.

Ireland continues to support processes aimed at resolving global debt issues through dialogue, in the most appropriate forum and using the most appropriate and effective mechanisms to support the countries most seriously affected.

Air Navigation Orders

420. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 617 of 20 January 2015 the reason his Department gave for refusing each of the 19 permits under the Air Navigation Carriage of Munitions of War Weapons and Dangerous Goods Order 1973 and the countries from which the refusals were given. [3946/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The regulation of civilian aircraft is governed by the *Convention on International Civil Aviation (the Chicago Convention)* which came into force on 4 April 1947. Ireland’s rights and obligations under the Convention have been incorporated into Irish law through the *Air Navigation and Transport Act 1946*, as amended. The legislation provides that the Minister for Transport has primary responsibility for the regulation of civilian aircraft, including chartered flights.

Under the *Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973*, as amended in 1989, civilian aircraft are prohibited from carrying weapons or munitions through Irish airspace and airports unless an exemption has been obtained in advance from the Minister for Transport.

In considering the requests made by commercial carriers for exemptions, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport seeks the advice of relevant Government Departments and agencies. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is consulted in relation to any foreign policy issues which may arise.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade reviews the applications forwarded by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and, based on the information available, provides observations to that Department. While it is not the practice to comment on individual applications, I can advise that the recommendations made against applications for exemptions in 2014 related in the majority of cases to munitions that are non-discriminatory in their effects. However, the decision to authorise or refuse applications for exemptions is a matter for the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Apprenticeship Programmes

421. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a matter (details supplied) regarding SOLAS; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3752/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): This is an operational matter for SOLAS and I have asked them to contact the Deputy directly to clarify the position.

Public Sector Allowances Review

422. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will review the decision made when the honours degree allowance was abolished that teachers, who were not working on the 5 December 2011, lost the allowance which equals €3,076 per annum; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3818/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): In 2012 a public service-wide review of allowances was carried out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. As a result of the review, qualification allowances were abolished with effect from 1st February 2012. Department of Education and Skills Circular 0008/2013 outlines the effect of this decision on teachers.

In Paragraph 12 of Circular 0008/2013 an exception is made in the case “where as at 5 December 2011, a teacher in employment on that date and eligible for receipt of a qualification allowance in respect of the post they held on that date, was actively undertaking a course of further study leading to an additional qualification, provided that the teacher does not cease to be a registered student on that course before its completion. Such individuals may apply to the Department/VEC (now ETB) as appropriate for a derogation from the general position within 3 months of the date of receipt of the award.” Teachers who were not in employment in an Oireachtas funded post on 5 December 2011 and not eligible for receipt of a qualification allowance in respect of any teaching post on that date, do not qualify for payment of an allowance in respect of the qualification related to the course being undertaken at that time.

The issues raised by the Deputy have been brought to the Teachers' Conciliation Council (TCC) by representatives of the teachers concerned and it would therefore not be appropriate to comment further until the issues have been deliberated on by that forum. The TCC is part of the scheme of Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme for Teachers, the purpose of which is to provide a means of dealing with claims and proposals relating to the salaries and terms and conditions of teachers. The Council is composed of representatives of the teacher representative bodies, school management, the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and is chaired by an official of the Labour Relations Commission.

Food Industry Development

423. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she is satisfied that there are sufficient opportunities for training operatives in the meat industry, including butchers-boners; the details of the ongoing efforts by her Department to address the skill shortages in this industry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3529/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The National Skills Bulletin 2014 comments that there are just over 8,000 butchers and fishmongers employed in Ireland. Analysis of labour market transitions in 2013 indicated a high turnover for food operatives, suggesting retention issues. Evaluation of the recent training programme provided in the National Butchery Academy, referred to below, also indicated issues with attracting and retaining staff following completion of the course.

The conclusion outlined in the National Skills Bulletin 2014 was that while no shortages of meat processing skills have been identified, it is recognised that many food processing companies are experiencing difficulty in attracting and retaining skilled butchers/de-boners.

In 2011 the National Butchery Association (NBA) identified some skills gaps and employment opportunities in the primary meat processing sector in respect of beef de-boners and industrial butchers.

A FÁS-funded training course subsequently commenced in Ballinasloe, Co. Galway for 50 participants for 20 weeks. The course was independently evaluated and its principle findings included:

- The Programme did not achieve its outcome target of 90% of learners being placed in employment.
- The work placement module emerged as the weakest element of the Programme.

As a consequence of the pilot SOLAS currently does not offer any courses in this area. It is considered international best practice for such training to be industry led and some examples of employer-led initiatives through the Skillnets framework are below. However, if there were demand and an appropriate business case, local ETBs could offer such courses.

Skillnets, the State funded industry-led training facilitator, includes two networks who provide training for Meat Industry Operatives - the Taste4Success Skillnet and Food and Drink Industry Ireland Skillnet.

Taste4Success delivered the following courses in 2014 specifically for operatives in the meat industry, training approx 45 trainees, some of whom attended an intensive 20 week course in Food Industry Skills:

- General Knife Skills
- Food Industry Award in Beef and Pork Butchery Skills – FDQ/EQF – Level 3 Award
- Operative skills – various operative skills
- Supervisor Skills – Beef and Pork Butchery

During 2015 they plan to deliver further knife and technical skills at various levels for member companies and Job Seekers looking to get into the sector.

Food and Drink Industry Ireland (FDII) looked at developing a Knife and Boning Skills Traineeship under the Future Skills Needs Programme (FSNP) with initial training planned to be delivered before the end of 2014. However, the industry requested deferring the programme until 2015 as they explained they did not have the in-house resources to facilitate the programme in Q3 & Q4 2014. For 2015, FDII will progress the Knifing and Boning Traineeship as well as offering training in Animal Welfare, Conflict Management, Negotiation Skills, Train the Trainer Skills, MS Excel and HACCP. They are also looking at offering courses in leadership skills for people working in operative roles, all of which will be available to meat producers. Their Steering Group has representation from across the Food and Drink sector, with 3 companies from the meat sector represented.

Schools Building Projects Status

424. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a school extension project in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3258/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy, is currently at an advanced stage of architectural planning. The project has been authorised to proceed to Stage 2B of Architectural Planning, which includes the applications for Planning Permission, Fire Cert and Disability Access Cert and the preparation of Tender Documents.

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 or included in the most recent announced list of projects, 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

425. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide an update on the building work of a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3287/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The major building project for the school to which the Deputy refers is currently at an advanced stage of Architectural Planning. The planning application has been submitted to the Local Authority and a decision is currently awaited. When the final grant of planning permission is received the project will then be progressed to construction.

Schools Building Projects Status

426. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide in tabular form, details of new school projects, classroom developments and buildings that have been completed, have commenced or have been authorised by her Department in Cork North West since 2011; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3308/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the information requested is not available on a constituency basis. However, I can advise that the information concerned is held on a County basis and the current status of all projects, including those in County Cork, may be viewed on my Department’s website at www.education.ie and this is 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 County 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 focused 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 County 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 included below containing details of all County 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 County 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 County 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
1	20354A	Cara Jnr (Special) School, Mayfield	2014
2	20435A	St Joseph’s NS & St John’s NS, Kinsale	2014
3	17609N	Rathcormac NS, Rathcormac	2013
4	20006A	Gaelscoil Chloich na Coillte, Clonakilty	2013
5	20310D	Carrigaline ETNS, Carrigaline	2013
6	81008W	Ashton Comprehensive School, Blackrock Road	2013
7	13450F	Rushbrooke NS, Cobh	2012

8	16746S	Ballygarvan NS, Ballygarvan	2012
9	17667E	SN Pádraig Naofa, Whitechurch	2012
10	19839R	Gaelscoil Uí Riordán, Ballincollig	2012
11	20001N	Gaelscoil Bheanntai, Bantry	2011
12	20105C	Star of the Sea Primary School, Passage West	2011
13	76090G	Bantry Community College, Bantry	2011

LARGE SCALE EXTENSIONS COMPLETED

-	Roll No	School	Year
1	17600S	SN na Scairte Leithe, Saleen, Cloyne, Midleton	2014
2	19351K	SN Cill Criodain, Ladysbridge	2014
3	62690E	Scoil Mhuire, 2 Sydney Place, Wellington Road	2014
4	91388S	Carrigaline CS, Waterpark Road, Carrigaline	2014
5	20106E	Scoil Nioclais, Frankfield, Grange	2014
6	20335T	Scoil Phadraig Naofa, Rochestown	2013
7	18279A	St. Mary's NS, Waterpark, Carrigaline	2012

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Schools Building Projects Status

427. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a building project in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Tipperary; the timeframe for completion of works; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3322/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy, is currently at an advanced stage of Architectural Planning Stage 2b – Detailed Design which includes the applications for Planning Permission, Fire Cert and Disability Access Cert and the preparation of Tender Documents. All relevant statutory approvals have been obtained and the Stage 2b submission has been approved by my Department.

As the Deputy may be aware, on 18 December 2014 I announced details of 70 school projects which are scheduled to commence construction in 2015. The building project for the school in question was included in this announcement.

My Department has recently authorised the school to proceed to prequalify a list of contractors for this project. Following the completion of this process the school project will progress to tender and construction. Until the tender process is complete and a Contractor has been appointed it will not be possible to give a definitive timeframe for the completion of the construction works. However, the Board of Management as the client in this project will be kept fully informed of progress by their design team.

Teachers' Remuneration

428. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to the anomaly which has arisen regarding allowances paid to primary teachers

who achieved degree qualifications during the 2011-12 academic year, with apparently a condition that a teacher would have to have been teaching on 5 December 2011 to qualify for the increased allowance (details supplied); if the rule will be re-examined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3326/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): In 2012 a public service-wide review of allowances was carried out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. As a result of the review, qualification allowances were abolished with effect from 1st February 2012. Department of Education and Skills Circular 0008/2013 outlines the effect of this decision on teachers.

In Paragraph 12 of Circular 0008/2013 an exception is made in the case “where as at 5 December 2011, a teacher in employment on that date and eligible for receipt of a qualification allowance in respect of the post they held on that date, was actively undertaking a course of further study leading to an additional qualification, provided that the teacher does not cease to be a registered student on that course before its completion. Such individuals may apply to the Department/VEC (now ETB) as appropriate for a derogation from the general position within 3 months of the date of receipt of the award.” Teachers who were not in employment in an Oireachtas funded post on 5 December 2011 and not eligible for receipt of a qualification allowance in respect of any teaching post on that date, do not qualify for payment of an allowance in respect of the qualification related to the course being undertaken at that time.

The issues raised by the Deputy have been brought to the Teachers’ Conciliation Council (TCC) by representatives of the teachers concerned and it would therefore not be appropriate to comment further until the issues have been deliberated on by that forum. The TCC is part of the scheme of Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme for Teachers, the purpose of which is to provide a means of dealing with claims and proposals relating to the salaries and terms and conditions of teachers. The Council is composed of representatives of the teacher representative bodies, school management, the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and is chaired by an official of the Labour Relations Commission.

Apprenticeship Programmes

429. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will permit students to go directly into apprenticeships after their junior cycle exams where such students, though gifted in certain fields, may be uninterested in pursuing further academic studies at that point; if she will leave open the option of their returning to sit the leaving certificate should they later change their minds; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3380/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The existing apprenticeship system is the recognised means by which people are trained to become craftspeople in Ireland. The standard based craft apprenticeship scheme was designed as a demand driven alternance programme in conjunction with all key stakeholders. The number of craft apprentices registered with SOLAS is determined by individual employers recruiting potential apprentices within a range of occupational sectors.

Currently, apprentices must be at least 16 years of age on entry to the existing apprenticeship trades. The entry requirements are set at a minimum of 5 Grade Ds at Junior Certificate or equivalent, or successful completion of an approved pre-apprenticeship course, or at least three years’ work experience approved by SOLAS. In practice at least 70% of apprentices registered with SOLAS in 2014 had attained Leaving Certificate standard. Employers often consider criteria beyond the minimum entry requirements and in many apprenticeship programmes the

standard of mathematics, science and or technology content has intensified in line with labour market expectations and demands. Furthermore, the majority of employers are less inclined to recruit apprentices at a relatively young age. For example, only 1% of apprentices registered with SOLAS in 2014 were 16 years of age, 78% of apprentices were 19 years of age and over and 58% were over 20 years of age.

The recent review of apprenticeship recommended that with respect to the current apprenticeship trades, “the minimum entry levels needed to successfully complete each programme should be reviewed, while ensuring appropriate pre-apprenticeship programmes are made available for those unable to meet the entry requirements.” With regard to apprenticeships in new areas, which are expected to be developed following a call for proposals in this regard by the recently established Apprenticeship Council, the Review recommended that “Entry levels may need to be raised to cater adequately for occupations with a high mathematics, science or technology content. However, care should be taken to ensure that opportunities for those with lower skills to progress are not eroded unduly. Entry levels should be set on an occupation by occupation basis.” These recommendations will be borne in mind when examining entry level requirements for apprenticeships into the future.

With regard to the option of returning to the Leaving Certificate, there are already a significant amount of opportunities for adults to return to education. Over the past few years a range of programmes has been developed to facilitate adults who want to return to education, including programmes leading to the Leaving Certificate examinations.

Industrial Disputes

430. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the actions being taken to resolve the junior cycle dispute with teachers; if a resolution is imminent; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3381/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Reform of the Junior Cycle is important and is a policy priority. One education partner cannot be allowed to block this important reform. The voices of parents, students, school management and other partners are equally important in this debate. They support the fair and reasonable proposal I tabled in talks last November. Their mandate and opinion deserves equal recognition in relation to Junior Cycle reform.

The current dispute with the teacher unions will not be resolved on the picket line. It will be resolved through meaningful negotiation. Dr. Pauric Travers has contacted the teacher unions and myself to propose further talks this week. I welcome this initiative and my Department will engage in these talks in a constructive manner.

Schools Building Projects Status

431. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide an update on the progress of a school (details supplied) in Dublin 18 which is planned to progress to construction in 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3390/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school to which she refers is included for funding in my Department’s Five Year Plan and is also contained in my Departments 2015 programme.

My Department is currently in the process of acquiring a suitable site for the school. A site has been identified and the acquisition process is in train. Due to commercial sensitivities attaching to site acquisitions generally, I am not in a position to give further details at this time.

Teachers' Remuneration

432. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding the honours allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3391/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): In 2012 a public service-wide review of allowances was carried out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. As a result of the review, qualification allowances were abolished with effect from 1 February 2012. Department of Education and Skills Circular 0008/2013 outlines the effect of this decision on teachers.

In Paragraph 12 of Circular 0008/2013 an exception is made in the case "where as at 5 December 2011, a teacher in employment on that date and eligible for receipt of a qualification allowance in respect of the post they held on that date, was actively undertaking a course of further study leading to an additional qualification, provided that the teacher does not cease to be a registered student on that course before its completion. Such individuals may apply to the Department/VEC (now ETB) as appropriate for a derogation from the general position within 3 months of the date of receipt of the award." Teachers who were not in employment in an Oireachtas funded post on 5 December 2011 and not eligible for receipt of a qualification allowance in respect of any teaching post on that date, do not qualify for payment of an allowance in respect of the qualification related to the course being undertaken at that time.

The issues raised by the Deputy have been brought to the Teachers' Conciliation Council (TCC) by representatives of the teachers concerned and it would therefore not be appropriate to comment further until the issues have been deliberated on by that forum. The TCC is part of the scheme of Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme for Teachers, the purpose of which is to provide a means of dealing with claims and proposals relating to the salaries and terms and conditions of teachers. The Council is composed of representatives of the teacher representative bodies, school management, the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and is chaired by an official of the Labour Relations Commission.

Teachers' Remuneration

433. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will address the anomaly whereby her Department granted allowances to teachers who completed a further degree course during the school year 2011-2012; if they were working on 5 December, which has meant that those working that academic year working both before and-or after that date, but not on that date, have been denied the allowance even though they may have more experience and qualifications than those who were awarded it. [3406/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): In 2012 a public service-wide review of allowances was carried out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. As a result of the review, qualification allowances were abolished with effect from 1st February 2012. Department of Education and Skills Circular 0008/2013 outlines the effect of this decision on teachers.

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The issues raised by the Deputy have been brought to the Teachers’ Conciliation Council (TCC) by representatives of the teachers concerned and it would therefore not be appropriate to comment further until the issues have been deliberated on by that forum. The TCC is part of the scheme of Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme for Teachers, the purpose of which is to provide a means of dealing with claims and proposals relating to the salaries and terms and conditions of teachers. The Council is composed of representatives of the teacher representative bodies, school management, the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and is chaired by an official of the Labour Relations Commission.

Student Universal Support Ireland Administration

434. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the annual budget the Student Universal Support Ireland has for advertising and for communications each year since its establishment. [3408/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): CDETB is allocated a budget on an annual basis in respect of SUSI Administration Costs which includes expenditure on activities for advertising and communications.

Details of actual expenditure by SUSI in respect of advertising and communications for 2012, 2013 and 2014 is attached for the Deputy’s convenience.

Details of SUSI’s annual expenditure for Advertising and Communications

-	2012	2013	2014
Communications	€6,190	*€59,699	€16,125
Advertising	€71,566	€65,823	**€123,248
TOTAL	€77,756	€125,522	€139,373

*The higher communication costs for 2013 were a result of a staff vacancy in this area. This vacancy was filled through the insourcing of communications services. SUSI appointed a new Communications and Customer Services Manager in 2014.

**In 2014, SUSI conducted a comprehensive national and local advertising campaign to create awareness around their opening and closing dates.

Irish Language

435. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the report Analysis of Bilingual Competence: Language Acquisition Among Young People in the Gaeltacht by an Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta; and

if she will make a statement on the matter. [46869/14]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The recent research published by an Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltacht agus Gaelscolaíochta provides a clear insight into the salient issues relating to Irish as a minority language and the acquisition of Irish by young native speakers in Gaeltacht areas.

The Department will consider the recommendations of the research in tandem with the examination of other research, both national and international, and also practice in schools as part of its review of Gaeltacht education which is currently being carried out.

The Department will be cognisant of the implications of implementing the research recommendations for the personal and social development of young native speakers as well as the feasibility of the recommendations, given the current fiscal climate and the dispersed location of the small population of native Irish speakers living in our Gaeltacht areas.

Religious Discrimination

436. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on the fact that national schools of all patronages, when seeking State recognition and thereby State funding, legally committed themselves to be bona fide open to children of all religious denominations and that requiring a commitment to not discriminating on religious grounds on entry to all of these schools remains the first part of the ethos of all national State-funded schools. [3450/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As part of the patronage determination process for new schools, prospective patrons must commit to enrolling pupils from the area to be served by the new school.

In relation to enrolment policies, it is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools, whether extant or newly established, to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998. In this regard a Board of Management may find it necessary to restrict enrolment to children from a particular area or a particular age group or on the basis of some other criterion. The criteria to be applied by schools in such circumstances are a matter for the schools themselves.

This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. Under section 15 (2) (d) of the Education Act 1998, each school is legally obliged to publish its enrolment policy.

Equality legislation, which also outlaws discrimination in relation to the admission of a student, makes provision for exemptions to apply in the case of single sex schools and in the case of schools where the objective is to provide education in an environment that promotes certain religious values. The legislation provides that any school that has this objective may admit a student of a particular religious denomination in preference to other students.

Section 29 of the Education Act 1998, provides parents with an appeal process where a board of management of a school or a person acting on behalf of the Board refuses enrolment to a student. Where a school refuses to enrol a pupil, the school is obliged to inform parents of their right under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 to appeal that decision to either the relevant Educational Training Board or to the Secretary General of my Department.

It is my firm view that all schools should be inclusive. It is with this spirit of inclusiveness that the proposed Admission to Schools Bill is designed. Drafting of the Bill is currently at an

advanced stage and the Bill is on the Government legislative programme for publication early in the Spring/Summer session.

The draft Bill does not propose changes to the existing equality legislation. However, the draft Bill will provide for schools to explicitly state in the school's admission policy that it will not discriminate against an applicant for admission on the grounds of disability, special educational needs, sexual orientation, family status, membership of the traveller community, race, civil status, gender or religion. The draft Bill will also provide for schools to publish an enrolment policy which will include details of the school's arrangements for students who do not want to attend religious instruction.

The Bill and its associated regulations should see improved access to schools for all pupils and ensure there is consistency, fairness and transparency in the admissions policies of schools and in the service they provide to parents.

Religious Discrimination

437. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason religious discrimination has been permitted in admissions to State-funded national schools. [3451/15]

438. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills in view of Article 42 of the Constitution only allowing for parents to avail of exclusive religious schools where they are privately funded according to their means, the reason schools in receipt of State funding have been allowed to exclude children on religious grounds. [3452/15]

439. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when she will fulfil her constitutional obligations and ensure that there is no religious discrimination in admissions policies in national schools (details supplied). [3453/15]

440. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views that the State made a constitutional commitment to admission of children of all religious denominations with equality to all schools in receipt of State funding or public moneys and did not make a constitutional commitment to support religious instruction in schools. [3454/15]

442. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills in view of the 1998 Education Act only allowing the patron a role in the manner of publication of admissions policies for schools, and that the board of management must create all schools' admissions policies, the action she will take to ensure that religious patrons stop acting outside the law by instructing boards of management under their patronage to introduce religious discrimination in their schools' admissions policy. [3456/15]

443. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the action she will take to clarify for boards of management their independence, and legal obligation, to be free to remove all religious discrimination from their admissions policies. [3457/15]

444. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on Section 7 of the Equal Status Act 2000 which bans religious discrimination on admissions to all schools, recognising that the exception in Section 7(3)(c) applies only to the totally privately-funded schools referred to in Article 42.1 of the Constitution, and does not apply to national schools or any school in receipt of State funding or public moneys as referred to in Article 44.2.4 of the Constitution; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3458/15]

447. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on Joint

Committee on Education and Skills conclusions (details supplied); and if she will cease creating schools of different patronage that can then discriminate on religious grounds in their admissions policy. [3461/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 437 to 440, inclusive, 442 to 444, inclusive, and 447, together.

Section 15 of the Education Act, 1998 provides that a board of management shall manage the school on behalf of the patron and uphold, and be accountable to the patron for so upholding, the characteristic spirit of the school as determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school. The Board of Management shall publish the enrolment policy of the school and that policy must be non-discriminatory and applied fairly in respect of all applicants.

This Department’s main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking school places in the area. Where new schools are needed, the model of provision is decided by an open patronage determination process, which is overseen by the New Schools Establishment Group. The criteria for awarding patronage place a heavy emphasis on parental choice and diversity of provision. Prospective patrons must also commit to enrolling pupils from the area to be served by the new school. Parents have the right to choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available the pupil should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice.

Existing equality legislation, which outlaws discrimination in relation to the admission of a student, makes provision for exemptions to apply in the case of single sex schools and in the case of schools where the objective is to provide education in an environment that promotes certain religious values. The Equality legislation provides that any primary or post primary school that has this objective may, where it has more applicants than places available, admit a student of a particular religious denomination in preference to other students.

The legislation also provides that a school whose objective is to provide education in an environment that promotes certain religious values can refuse to admit a student who is not of that religion only where the school proves that this refusal is essential to maintain the ethos of the school.

The Constitution provides that legislation providing State aid for schools shall not be such as to affect prejudicially the right of any child to attend a school receiving public money without attending religious instruction at that school. In this regard, Section 30 of the Education Act (1998), provides that no student can be required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent of the student. Therefore, parents have the right, if so desired, to ensure that their children do not receive religious instruction.

It is my firm view that all schools should be inclusive. It is with this spirit of inclusiveness that the proposed Admission to Schools Bill is designed. Drafting of the Bill is currently at an advanced stage and the Bill is on the Government legislative programme for publication early in the Spring/Summer session.

The draft Bill does not propose changes to the existing equality legislation. However, the draft Bill will provide for schools to explicitly state in the school’s admission policy that it will not discriminate against an applicant for admission on the grounds of disability, special

educational needs, sexual orientation, family status, membership of the traveller community, race, civil status, gender or religion. The draft Bill will also provide for schools to publish an enrolment policy which will include details of the school's arrangements for students who do not want to attend religious instruction.

The Bill and its associated regulations should see improved access to schools for all pupils and ensure there is consistency, fairness and transparency in the admissions policies of schools and in the service they provide to parents.

Religious Discrimination

441. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills in view of the constitutional review group 1996 (details supplied) indicating that religious instruction in national schools must be done separately to conform with the Constitution, and that this must be changed to allow for multiple religious denominations in all national schools, her views that separate religious instruction is immediately necessary to allow for children not of the patron's faith to attend their local national school; the steps she will take to ensure that this is in place for enrolments in 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3455/15]

446. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when she will implement the recommendations of the forum on patronage and pluralism in the primary sector which recommended that all national schools should be catering for children of all religious denominations by being open with equality to children of all religious denominations, having separate religious instruction classes and removing the obligation to have any religious programme in a school. [3460/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 441 and 446 together.

The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector was established to look at how schools can cater for diversity and ensure an inclusive and respectful environment for all their pupils. The Report of the Advisory Group to the Forum made a series of recommendations dealing with the creation of more inclusive schools. The Report took account of the findings and conclusions of previous groups and committees, such as those of the Constitution Review Group of 1996.

Religious education is one of the seven curricular areas of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum. However, under Article 44 of the Constitution, all parents have the right to withdraw their child from religious instruction in school. Furthermore, under Section 30 of the Education Act 1998, a student cannot be required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent of the student or, in the case of a student who is 18 or more, the student him/herself. The Education (Admission to School) Bill, which is currently being drafted, will require schools to publish an enrolment policy which will clarify the school's arrangements for upholding the constitutional right of parents that their children not attend religious instruction.

With regard to denominational religious education, the Forum Report did not recommend that religious instruction be removed from the school day. However, the Advisory Group had concerns about the amount of time which can be devoted to sacramental preparation in some schools and they recommended that it should not be allowed to encroach on time allocated for the general curriculum. They also recommended on-going discussion with parents and clergy in this regard.

The Report also noted that there are currently no non-denominational primary schools, but

that there is no objection to the establishment of such schools if sought by a sufficiently large number of parents. The Forum also concluded that the State has a responsibility to ensure that all children have the right to receive Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics and recommended that an ERB and Ethics programme be developed. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is developing a curriculum for ERB and Ethics for all primary schools.

A follow-up paper to the Forum Report entitled Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector: Progress to Date and Future Directions was published on 1 July 2014. The paper outlines good practice and options for promoting diversity in all schools and encourages school authorities to engage in consultation with stakeholders and to review their policies and practices on an ongoing basis to ensure that they remain suitable for the school population that they serve. It recognises that each school should arrive at solutions that suit its own particular context. It also notes that this is an evolving situation and that practices may evolve over time as circumstances change.

The paper was informed by a consultation with stakeholders and encourages school authorities to consider their policies and practices and to review whether they are taking the steps necessary to welcome all pupils and make them feel included.

Particular areas to be examined by schools relate to:

- The right to opt out of religion classes;
- Scheduling of Religion Classes and other Religious Activities;
- Options for Pupils in relation to Religious Ceremonies of the Ethos of the School;
- Celebration of Religious Festivals; and
- Display of Religious Artefacts.

Questions Nos. 442 to 444, inclusive, answered with Question No. 437.

Child Protection

445. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the changes made since the publication of a report (details supplied) regarding the enforcement of legislation and constitutional provisions in dealing with religious patrons. [3459/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Procedures for schools on the implementation of Children First in the school setting were updated and published in September 2011. This was done following the revisions in July 2011 to the national Children First guidelines. The updated procedures are intended to better ensure consistent and uniform implementation of Children First across all schools.

The updated child protection procedures for schools include additional oversight arrangements that involve the following:

- Specific reporting requirements by the School Principal to the Board of Management
- Standardised format for an annual review by the Board of Management of the implementation of its child protection policy

- Standard method for schools to report annually to parents associations (or parents generally) in relation to their implementation of child protection procedures.
- Confirmation of compliance with child protection procedures to be provided, if requested, to the School Patron and/or the Department.

In addition, any allegation of a child protection nature received by staff in my Department is dealt with in accordance with the Department's Procedures for responding to Child Protection Concerns brought to the attention of staff employed by the Department of Education and Skills. Under these procedures the Department does not make any judgment on the concerns brought to its attention and ensures that the details of the concern reported to the Department are immediately passed on to the relevant investigatory authorities, including the relevant school authorities, the Child and Family Agency and/or An Garda Síochána.

Question No. 446 answered with Question No. 441.

Question No. 447 answered with Question No. 437.

Religious Discrimination

448. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is a report that does not indicate that the Department's present policy of creating multi-denominational patronages will ultimately lead to a religious apartheid education system here whereby children of the majority religion will have schools exclusive to themselves, and all other children will be forced to concentrate themselves in a minority of schools which do not discriminate in admissions on religious grounds. [3462/15]

449. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she shares the views of her predecessor who indicated that he did not intend to discontinue the national school system here; schools are in receipt of State funding despite the obvious religious discrimination that has become prevalent over the past 40 years and more, particularly with religious discrimination in the past 15 years. [3463/15]

451. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills in view of reports (details supplied) which support the obligation on the State to ensure that every child can attend his or her local national school without any religious discrimination on entry, the steps she will take to end this practice. [3465/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 448, 449 and 451 together.

While our system of patronage has demonstrated a capacity to facilitate change and evolution, it is the case that the vast majority of primary schools are still under Catholic patronage. While recognising the role that Catholic schools have played in welcoming children from diverse backgrounds and the continuing role for Catholic schools, we have made changes to the patronage system with the model of provision for new schools being reflective of parental demand for the types of schools they want to send their children to. We are also making progress under the patronage divesting process.

The Deputy will be aware that the Programme for Government gives a commitment to move towards a more pluralist system of patronage for our schools. In this context, a Forum on Patronage and Pluralism was established to look at how schools can cater for diversity and ensure an inclusive and respectful environment for all their pupils. Work is continuing on the

follow-up to the Report of the Advisory Group to the Forum and its recommendations regarding diversity in society.

In relation to enrolment policies, it is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools, whether extant or newly established, to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998. In this regard a Board of Management may find it necessary to restrict enrolment to children from a particular area or a particular age group or on the basis of some other criterion. The criteria to be applied by schools in such circumstances are a matter for the schools themselves.

This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. Under section 15 (2) (d) of the Education Act 1998, each school is legally obliged to publish its enrolment policy.

Equality legislation, which also outlaws discrimination in relation to the admission of a student, makes provision for exemptions to apply in the case of single sex schools and in the case of schools where the objective is to provide education in an environment that promotes certain religious values. The legislation provides that any school that has this objective may admit a student of a particular religious denomination in preference to other students.

Schools Data

450. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide a copy of all school roll numbers from the introduction of such numbers; if she will include the name and position of the patron, the school address, the foundation date, the closure date, and the roll number of the school to which teachers and pupils moved at the closure of each school. [3464/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): It is not possible to provide the information sought by the Deputy in the manner requested because of the scale and detail of the information sought. The scale is evidenced by the fact that there were some 5,700 primary schools alone at the foundation of the State and today we have just over 3,000. It would be necessary to fully analyse all school openings, closures and amalgamations on a year-by year basis and identify school establishment dates, closure dates, patronage details and school address. Many of the records pre-date computerisation and are in the National Archives Office. My Department has never assembled information on where individual pupils transferred to when a school closed so this information is not available at all. In regard to teachers in schools that close due to amalgamation, if the teacher does not transfer to the amalgamated school, they may be redeployed. Redeployment details for a teacher are maintained on their personnel record and such records are not organised on the basis of school closures.

Question No. 451 answered with Question No. 448.

Visiting Teacher Service

452. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 877 of 4 November 2014, if her officials have completed their consideration of the review of the visiting teacher service; the changes she plans to make to the service as a result; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3484/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy

that the review of the Visiting Teacher Service was carried out in response to policy advice from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in May 2013, which recommended that the service should be reviewed. Accordingly, my Department commissioned an independent review of the service in line with the NCSE recommendations.

The review has now been concluded and a report has been submitted to my Department. The report is currently being considered by my officials. When this process has been concluded the question of the implementation of the Report's recommendations will be considered.

I can confirm however that my Department is committed to continuing to provide appropriate high quality resources to schools for the education of children with special educational needs, including children with hearing and visual impairment.

School Enrolments

453. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to the fact that offers of places in the only new autism spectrum disorder classes in the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown area, County Dublin, are being restricted due to the school's sibling and religious entry criteria; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3493/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998. In schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary. In this regard a Board of Management may find it necessary to restrict enrolment to children from a particular area or a particular age group or on the basis of some other criterion. For example, some schools give priority to applicants who have siblings in the school. The criteria to be applied by schools in such circumstances are a matter for the schools themselves. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, it may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in their school of first choice.

Existing equality legislation, which outlaws discrimination in relation to the admission of a student, makes provision for exemptions to apply in the case of single sex schools and in the case of schools where the objective is to provide education in an environment that promotes certain religious values. The Equality legislation provides that any school that has this objective may admit a student of a particular religious denomination in preference to other students. The legislation provides that such a school can refuse to admit a student who is not of that religion only where the school proves that this refusal is essential to maintain the ethos of the school.

As the Deputy may be aware, Government gave approval in March last year for drafting the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2014 and the bill is currently at an advanced stage of drafting. The objective of the Admissions to School Bill is to provide an over-arching framework to ensure that how schools decide on who is enrolled and who is refused a place in schools is more structured, fair and transparent.

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

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

454. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the efforts be-

ing made to increase the number of autism spectrum disorder places in mainstream secondary schools in south Dublin in view of the disparity between the number of places available at primary and secondary level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3494/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department’s policy focuses on ensuring that all children with special educational needs can have access to an education appropriate to their needs and abilities.

A range of placement options for pupils with special educational needs is provided, in order to ensure that all pupils can receive a school placement. Many pupils with special educational needs will be able to attend a local mainstream school, whereas for pupils who have needs which require more specialist interventions, special class and special school placements are provided for.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for establishing special classes in various geographical areas as required. The NCSE operates within my Department’s criteria in allocating such support.

SENOs engage with schools annually in order to plan for, and to open, new special classes each year, in order to ensure there are sufficient special class placements available at primary and post primary school level to meet demand in a given area.

Details of all of the special classes for children with special educational needs which are attached to mainstream schools are published each year on the NCSE website at www.ncse.ie.

The NCSE will continue to monitor and review the requirement for special class places in particular areas, including in Dublin south, and has capacity to open such new special classes where necessary.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

455. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a request for assistive technology has not been granted in respect of a child (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3502/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) is responsible for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports. SENOs also make recommendations to my Department where assistive technology is required. The NCSE operates within my Department’s criteria in making recommendations for support, which is set out in my Department’s Circular 0010/2013.

In order to qualify for equipment under the assistive technology scheme, a child must have been diagnosed with a physical or communicative disability and must also have a recommendation in a professional assessment that the equipment is essential in order to allow the child to access the curriculum. It must also be clear that the existing I.T. equipment in the school is insufficient to meet the child’s needs.

I can advise the Deputy that an application for assistive technology support for the child referred to in this question has recently been received by my Department. Further information has been requested from the school regarding the application form. The application will be considered further once this information has been received and a response will be issued to the school.

School Funding

456. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the board of management of a Catholic primary school will be made liable for the recent compensation award to a teacher; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3511/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The position is that my Department provides capitation funding to primary schools to cover their day to day running costs, including any costs associated with insurance. In general, it is the duty of the Board of Management (delegated by the Trustees) to put in place comprehensive insurance cover for the school. The Board shall ensure that all such insurances are effected and maintained as are necessary to safeguard the school, the Board and the Trustees against all public liability and against the consequences of negligence on the part of any person employed by the Board or any servant or agent of the Board, or any defect in the buildings, premises, furnishings or equipment of the school whereby loss or damage might result to any person in or upon the school premises.

Visiting Teacher Service

457. **Deputy Patrick O’Donovan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide an update on the review carried out into the visiting teacher service; when the review will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3518/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the review of the Visiting Teacher Service was carried out in response to policy advice from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in May 2013, which recommended that the service should be reviewed. Accordingly, my Department commissioned an independent review of the service in line with the NCSE recommendations. The review has now been concluded and a report has been submitted to my Department. The report is currently being considered by my officials. When this process has been concluded the question of publication of the report and implementation of the Report’s recommendations will be considered.

I can confirm however that my Department is committed to continuing to provide appropriate high quality resources to schools for the education of children with special educational needs, including children with hearing and visual impairment.

School Curriculum

458. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if consideration will be given to making computing a compulsory subject for the leaving certificate (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3530/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The development of ICT skills across all subjects and aspects of teaching and learning is critical. Such skills are not just confined to particular Leaving Certificate subjects such as in the study of Design Communication and Graphics where it is a core component of learning but such skills are a core component of the students learning experience right across senior cycle. ICT is seen as a cross curricular tool which enhances the learning experience and is required by students in everyday life. At Senior Cycle, the NCCA is currently working on the revision of a significant number of Leaving Certificate subjects, including Leaving Certificate Applied Mathematics. A background document was out for consultation before Christmas. It includes suggestions relating to

a proposed core and options. One of the options for consideration in the consultation paper is the inclusion of “computer programming”. Submissions have been received and are currently being considered. The next step is the production of a draft specification for Leaving Certificate Applied Mathematics and this is due by the end of the year for consultation. The inclusion of the “computer programming” option will form part of the NCCA’s deliberations. There are no plans currently for the NCCA to design a stand alone subject called Leaving Certificate computer programming. I would also note that the roll-out of 100 mbps high speed broadband to all post primary has been completed since 2014.

Teachers’ Remuneration

459. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills in respect of Circular 0008/2013 her views on a situation (details supplied) pertaining to a number of persons who are excluded from receipt of a qualification allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3554/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): In 2012 a public service-wide review of allowances was carried out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. As a result of the review, qualification allowances were abolished with effect from 1st February 2012. Department of Education and Skills Circular 0008/2013 outlines the effect of this decision on teachers. In Paragraph 12 of Circular 0008/2013 an exception is made in the case “where as at 5 December 2011, a teacher in employment on that date and eligible for receipt of a qualification allowance in respect of the post they held on that date, was actively undertaking a course of further study leading to an additional qualification, provided that the teacher does not cease to be a registered student on that course before its completion. Such individuals may apply to the Department/VEC (now ETB) as appropriate for a derogation from the general position within 3 months of the date of receipt of the award.” Teachers who were not in employment in an Oireachtas funded post on 5 December 2011 and not eligible for receipt of a qualification allowance in respect of any teaching post on that date, do not qualify for payment of an allowance in respect of the qualification related to the course being undertaken at that time. The issues raised by the Deputy have been brought to the Teachers’ Conciliation Council (TCC) by representatives of the teachers concerned and it would therefore not be appropriate to comment further until the issues have been deliberated on by that forum. The TCC is part of the scheme of Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme for Teachers, the purpose of which is to provide a means of dealing with claims and proposals relating to the salaries and terms and conditions of teachers. The Council is composed of representatives of the teacher representative bodies, school management, the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and is chaired by an official of the Labour Relations Commission.

State Examinations

460. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a student (details supplied) in Dublin 15 with a learning difficulty has been refused a waiver for the leaving certificate when a waiver was provided for the junior certificate; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3557/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations. In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

School Funding

461. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide the amount invested by her Department into schools in County Galway, broken down by year between 2011 and 2014 and by primary and post-primary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3569/15]

481. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount invested by her Department into schools in County Galway since 2011, broken down by school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3834/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 461 and 481 together.

The capital funding issued to schools in the primary and post-primary sectors in County Galway in the years 2011 to 2014 is as follows:

PRIMARY: 2011 - €12.6m; 2012 - €8.5m; 2013 - €12.8m; 2014 - €13.7m.

POST-PRIMARY: 2011 - €4.5m; 2012 - €5.2m; 2013 - €14m; 2014 - €11.6m.

If the Deputy wishes to nominate the level of capital funding issued to a specific school, I would be happy to provide such data.

Residential Institutions

462. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount that has been expended to date by Caranua and under which headings; and the number of persons that received payment, including administrative costs. [3571/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Caranua is an independent statutory body established pursuant to the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012. Caranua provides regular updates on its website (www.caranua.ie) in regard to the number of applications received and related matters. I understand that by 31st December 2014, Caranua had made payments worth €8,935,624 to 1,062 persons who had applied to it. That total amount is broken down under the following headings: Housing €6.42m, Health €2.16m and Education €0.35m. I understand also that administrative costs associated with the running of the organisation in 2014 amounted to just over €1m. I should point out that all of these figures are provisional and are unaudited. In accordance with the relevant legislative provisions, Caranua’s audited annual accounts will be laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas in the normal manner.

Schools Building Regulations

463. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the policy of her Department for new school buildings; and the provision of access for disabled children, particularly where the new building has more than one floor. [3581/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department’s Technical Guidance Documents – TGD-020 section 8, sets out the general principles of Universal Design in schools, which all design and construction professionals engaged on school building projects are obliged to follow. In addition all new school building projects are subject to compliance with the Building Regulations 1997–2014. Part M of the

Regulations deals with the subject of accessibility and the related Technical Guidance Document M – ‘Access and Use’ sets out the guidance requirements which design and construction professionals must apply in the design of all new buildings including schools. Allied to this, an application for a Disability Access Certificate is normally required for all new school building projects. All Design Teams engaged in the design of new schools, whether they are single or multi-storey buildings, must submit plans, documents and calculations to the relevant Local Authority, which will, in turn, issue a Disability Access Certificate once compliance has been demonstrated.

Institutes of Technology Staff

464. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of staff in each institute of technology employed in permanent wholetime posts; the number of staff in each institute of technology employed on contracts of indefinite duration; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3613/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The total number of Permanent Whole Time Equivalent Core Staff in the Institutes of Technology Sector is 4,567.53 and total Whole Time Equivalent Contracts of Indefinite Duration is 1,594.82

The following table shows the breakdown of these figures by Institute.

Institutes of Technology Core Staff: Permanent and CID - December 2014

Institute	Permanent	CID
Athlone IT	243.20	130.40
IT Blanchardstown	143.06	30.11
IT Carlow	189.87	62.84
Cork IT	534.52	235.35
Dundalk IT	288.55	83.52
IADT Dún Laoghaire*	117.44	38.86
Galway Mayo IT	286.60	170.50
Letterkenny IT	201.94	67.63
Limerick IT	281.17	94.67
IT Sligo	269.50	112.50
IT Tallaght	232.48	43.32
IT Tralee	203.67	46.30
Waterford IT*	378.64	229.35
Dublin IT	1124.43	242.85
Tipperary Institute	72.46	6.62
Total	4567.53	1594.82

*Figures for IADT and WIT are based on September Returns.

Schools Building Projects Applications

465. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide an update on the capital application in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Galway; if it will be included on the next five year capital programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3614/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy, is currently at an advanced stage of architectural planning. The schools Design Team is currently working on Stage 2b - Detailed Design, which involves obtaining planning permission, fire certificate and disability access certificate and the completion of tender documents. Final Grant of Planning was received in January 2015. As the Deputy will also be aware, the school in question is one of a number of schools which it was not possible to include in the 5 Year construction programme. However the school project is being progressed to the final planning stages in anticipation of further funds being available to the Department in future years.

Schools Building Projects Applications

466. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the construction of a school (details supplied) in County Roscommon will commence; the other schools to be included in the bundle; when these projects will be ready to commence construction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3636/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The major building project for the school in Roscommon referred to by the Deputy, is currently at an advanced stage of Architectural Planning Stage 2b – Detailed Design which includes the applications for Planning Permission, Fire Cert and Disability Access Cert and the preparation of Tender Documents. All relevant statutory approvals have been obtained and the Design Team is currently working on the preparation of the tender documentation. The Stage 2b Submission is expected to be submitted to my Department for review shortly. Following the review of the submission and subject to no issues arising, officials from my Department will contact the Board of Management with regard to the further progression of the project to tender stage. As you may be aware on 18 December 2014 I announced details of 70 school projects which are scheduled to commence construction in 2015. The building project for the school in question was included in this announcement.

Schools Health and Safety

467. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the external lighting in the internal road network within the school campus at Blacklion, Greystones, County Wicklow will be made operational; her views that the absence of functioning lighting in a campus containing two national schools and a secondary school represents a significant danger and hazard to children, staff and parents; if her Department has consulted with the Health and Safety Authority in relation to the absence of such lighting in a workplace under the ownership of her Department; the interim steps that will be taken to provide such lighting pending any permanent solution; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3690/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that none of the schools on the campus in question has raised this matter with my Department. I understand that the street lights referred to by the Deputy may be on the access road to the school campus. However, this road is outside the campus site boundary and is not under the ownership of my Department. The lights internal to the respective schools’ site boundary are functioning as intended. Officials from my Department will contact the schools in question to identify the issues and to determine what action may be required.

School Management

468. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding loco parentis in a classroom situation (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3699/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The supervision of pupils in classrooms is an integral part of a teacher’s professional duties and contract of employment with his or her school. The teacher is expected to take all reasonable steps in relation to the care of those pupils to ensure their safety and welfare. That responsibility remains with the teacher when an inspector, or any other visitor, is in the classroom. The work and conduct of members of my Department’s Inspectorate are governed by the principles set out in the Code of Practice for the Inspectorate, which include respectful engagement, responsibility and accountability. There is a well-established procedure whereby any teacher affected by an inspection may request a review of that inspection. This procedure facilitates teachers and inspectors to address concerns, complaints and misunderstandings as quickly as possible. Where an issue arises during a classroom visit, the teacher should raise the matter with the inspector immediately on the conclusion of the classroom visit. The Inspectorate’s Code of Practice and Procedure for Review are available on the Department’s website.

Teachers’ Remuneration

469. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding teachers’ pay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3702/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): In 2012 a public service-wide review of allowances was carried out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. As a result of the review, qualification allowances were abolished with effect from 1st February 2012. Department of Education and Skills Circular 0008/2013 outlines the effect of this decision on teachers. In Paragraph 12 of Circular 0008/2013 an exception is made in the case “where as at 5 December 2011, a teacher in employment on that date and eligible for receipt of a qualification allowance in respect of the post they held on that date, was actively undertaking a course of further study leading to an additional qualification, provided that the teacher does not cease to be a registered student on that course before its completion. Such individuals may apply to the Department/VEC (now ETB) as appropriate for a derogation from the general position within 3 months of the date of receipt of the award.” Teachers who were not in employment in an Oireachtas funded post on 5 December 2011 and not eligible for receipt of a qualification allowance in respect of any teaching post on that date, do not qualify for payment of an allowance in respect of the qualification related to the course being undertaken at that time. The issues raised by the Deputy have been brought to the Teachers’ Conciliation Council (TCC) by representatives of the teachers concerned and it would therefore not be appropriate to comment further until the issues have been deliberated on by that forum. The TCC is part of the scheme of Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme for Teachers, the purpose of which is to provide a means of dealing with claims and proposals relating to the salaries and terms and conditions of teachers. The Council is composed of representatives of the teacher representative bodies, school management, the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and is chaired by an official of the Labour Relations Commission.

School Curriculum

470. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide an update on discussions with teachers since the strike action on 22 January 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3703/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Reform of the Junior Cycle is important and is a policy priority. The current dispute with the teacher unions will not be resolved on the picket line. It will be resolved through meaningful negotiation. Dr. Pauric Travlers has contacted the teacher unions and myself to propose further talks this week. I welcome this initiative and my Department will engage in these talks in a constructive manner.

School Transport Eligibility

471. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a public transport route operated by Bus Éireann from Listowel to Tralee, County Kerry bus station only is considered as a school bus transport service for the calculation of mileage for the boarding grant element of the remote area grant scheme in respect of attending Irish-medium secondary education. [3705/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English): Under the Remote Area Boarding Grant scheme, provision is made for the payment of grants in respect of pupils whose normal place of residence is outside the range of public transport services to a school providing suitable free second-level education. To qualify for a boarding grant, an applicant must:

- (a) be normally resident in the state; and
- (b) be resident at least 4.8 km from a second-level school where suitable free second-level education is available and more than 3.2 km from a pick-up point on a transport service to such a school; and
- (c) be unable to obtain a place in a suitable second-level school within 25 km of his/her normal place of residence; and
- (d) be a pupil in a second-level school providing free second-level education.

The full terms of the scheme are available on the Department's website. Distance eligibility is determined by Bus Éireann by measuring the shortest traversable route from a child's home to the relevant education centre.

Schools Amalgamation

472. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress to date in the proposed amalgamation of the national schools in Kanturk, County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3723/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The delivery of a new 16 classroom school to facilitate this amalgamation has been devolved to the Office of Public Works and is at an early stage of architectural planning. A Stage 2a submission from the OPW is currently with my Department for review. Once the review is complete, subject to no issues arising, the project will progress to Stage 2b which includes applications for Planning Permission, Fire Safety Certification, Disability Access Certification and the preparation of tender

documents.

School Accommodation

473. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a planning decision will be made on temporary accommodation for a new post-primary school (details supplied) in County Kildare; when a decision will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3725/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I can inform the Deputy that Kildare Wicklow ETB is in the process of advertising for modular turnkey accommodation to provide temporary accommodation for the school in question. The application for planning permission will be addressed as part of this process. The school is scheduled to open in temporary accommodation in September 2015.

Schools Building Projects Status

474. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if approval for a new building project (details supplied) in County Kildare will be included in the Government’s five year plan or if a supplementary additional plan will be produced during the course of this year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3755/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that architectural planning to provide a new replacement school in the area in question has commenced. My Department met with the school and its Design Team last November and is awaiting submission of an addendum report by the Board of Management to address several design issues. Upon satisfactory completion of this report and subject to no issues arising, the project will be authorised to proceed to developed design stage. As the Deputy will also be aware, the school project in question is one of a number of school projects which it was not possible to include in the 5 Year construction programme. However the school project concerned is being progressed to the final planning stages so that it will be well placed for further progression in anticipation of further funds being available to the Department.

Teachers’ Remuneration

475. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will review the situation of a primary school teacher (details supplied) and 29 similar cases who, due to an anomaly, lost the payment of qualification allowance following the decision to remove same from new beneficiaries in the public service from January 2011; the reason this happened to these teachers while other graduates in the same year held the payment; if she will confirm the loss was €3,076 in gross pay per annum; the reason those teachers who studied for a fourth year to increase their skills set were targeted for the cut; the significance of working on 5 December 2011; the way the date was selected; the reason same was chosen; the logic behind it; the situation where teachers with 12 years less experience than the teacher earn €3,046 more per annum than they do; if this anomaly/injustice will be reversed or a commitment provided to so do; if this injustice has been challenged in the system or through the courts; if senior counsel opinion on the legality and injustice of same is available and will be provided; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3757/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): In 2012 a public service-wide review of allowances was carried out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. As a result of the review, qualification allowances were abolished with effect from 1st February 2012. Department of Education and Skills Circular 0008/2013 outlines the effect of this decision on teachers. In Paragraph 12 of Circular 0008/2013 an exception is made in the case “where as at 5 December 2011, a teacher in employment on that date and eligible for receipt of a qualification allowance in respect of the post they held on that date, was actively undertaking a course of further study leading to an additional qualification, provided that the teacher does not cease to be a registered student on that course before its completion. Such individuals may apply to the Department/VEC (now ETB) as appropriate for a derogation from the general position within 3 months of the date of receipt of the award.” Teachers who were not in employment in an Oireachtas funded post on 5 December 2011 and not eligible for receipt of a qualification allowance in respect of any teaching post on that date, do not qualify for payment of an allowance in respect of the qualification related to the course being undertaken at that time. The issues raised by the Deputy have been brought to the Teachers’ Conciliation Council (TCC) by representatives of the teachers concerned and it would therefore not be appropriate to comment further until the issues have been deliberated on by that forum. The TCC is part of the scheme of Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme for Teachers, the purpose of which is to provide a means of dealing with claims and proposals relating to the salaries and terms and conditions of teachers. The Council is composed of representatives of the teacher representative bodies, school management, the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and is chaired by an official of the Labour Relations Commission.

Schools Data

476. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason, when completing the primary online database forms, parents are being asked for their children’s PPS numbers and religion; the repercussions for pupils, parents and schools in circumstances where parents decline to hand over this sensitive information; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3758/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Department has developed an individualised electronic database of primary school pupils (POD – the Primary Online Database). The primary purpose of POD will be to monitor the education progress of primary pupils (in DES aided schools), throughout the primary system and onwards to post primary level and to help them develop their full educational potential. Once up and running other secondary purposes of POD will include becoming the basis for the allocation of teachers and capitation grants. Aggregated POD data will also be used for the production and publication of primary level statistics. A PPS number is an individual’s unique identification number for all dealings with the Public Service, including Social Welfare, tax, education and health services.

Having the PPSN on the database will help ensure that there are no duplicate records in the system i.e that two schools do not have the same child on their roll. In the future we will be able to track pupils from early childhood education, to primary school and onto post-primary, which will allow us to ensure that every child in the State of compulsory school age is in education. Religion is requested for statistical reasons only and parents have the option not to include the religion of their child on POD. Individualised data coverage has already been in place for a number of years at pre-primary, post-primary and third level education who collect individual information on each pupil, including their PPSN.

The current retention policy for Primary Online Database (POD) data is for records to be maintained for the longer of either the period up to the pupil's 30th Birthday or for a period of ten years since the student was last enrolled in a primary school. In future schools will no longer be required to keep the Clárleabhar therefore POD will be the official register of pupils in schools and data will be retained to allow pupils to obtain their records in the future. The retention policy facilitates the Department's requirement for audit and accounting purposes as pupil's data is used in the allocation of teaching posts and funding to schools. The policy also serves to trace retention trends in the education system, is important for longitudinal research and policy formation, as well as being an important statistical indicator nationally and internationally. Aggregate and not individual data is used for the majority of these purposes. The Department will continue to review its retention policy for pupil data in consultation with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner. The Department proposes in the future to share some of the personal data stored on POD with other State bodies. These are:

- Central Statistics Office, under the Statistics Acts to assist with the compilation of national statistics.
- The National Council for Special Education, under the Education Welfare Act, in order to assist in supporting resource allocation in relation to pupils with special educational needs.
- The Child and Family Agency, under the Education Welfare Act, to ensure that each child of compulsory school age is in receipt of an education.
- The Department of Social Protection to validate pupil identity.

The Department will put in place a data user agreement with each of these bodies, which includes the purpose for which the body requires the data, its storage, security and retention. The information on POD will, from the 2016-2017 academic year onwards, be used to underpin the payment of public funds and allocation of resources to primary schools, as is already the case at pre-primary, post-primary and third level education. If a child's data is not on POD at that time then they may not be counted for grant payment and teacher allocation purposes for the child's school.

Schools Building Projects Status

477. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will prioritise the building of a school (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [3768/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department is aware of the circumstances of the school referred to by the Deputy. In this regard, my Department will continue to liaise with the school in the context of addressing their accommodation needs.

Third Level Institutions

478. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans for a third level sub-campus or institution in Drogheda, County Louth particularly a concept of a Drogheda/Dundalk Institute of Technology; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3776/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I am currently leading a higher education reform programme. As part of the reform and modernisation of the system, Government policy is to consolidate the institute of technology sector to create institutes of

scale and significance operating in regional clusters with other higher education institutions. This is in line with the system configuration approved by my predecessor and published in 2013. This is the policy direction which my Department is implementing with the Higher Education Authority and it does not envisage any further publicly funded institutions in the system. In setting out their future strategic direction, Dundalk Institute of Technology intends to remain as a high quality stand-alone institute of technology serving their wider region with close collaborative links with other providers. This will ensure that the diverse needs of students and other stakeholders in the region will be well served.

Capitation Grants

479. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the reduction in capitation grants will be reversed as the cumulative effect of these cuts is placing serious strain on many schools' capacity to function. [3787/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The last Budget included an increase in spending on education for the first time in recent years, amounting to additional funding of €60m during 2015. As I have mentioned in response to previous parliamentary questions, that increase has provided funding for 1,700 additional teachers and SNAs to be recruited for our schools, as well as funding important reforms. However, it was not possible to secure the funding which would be required to also increase the rates of capitation paid to our schools. I am determined that education will be prioritised for further investment in future years, and I believe that increasing the staffing and funding of our schools should be priorities for such investment.

Advertisements in Schools

480. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views that it is appropriate for Irish Water to sponsor a poster competition for green schools, in view of the fact that the United Nations Special Rapporteur recommended the banning of all commercial advertisements in schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3788/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Deputy will be aware that the Board of Management is the body charged with the direct governance of a school and is therefore responsible for making decisions as to the types of activities in which the school gets involved. The decision as to whether to participate in activities, enter competitions or partake in any promotions is one for each Board of Management to take. In making such decisions, the Board of Management should only engage in activities that are in the best interests of their students. My Department's policy is that where an activity involves a link with a business or commercial interest, it is important that schools strike a balance between the potential benefit to be gained from the activity concerned while at the same time ensuring that children and their parents are protected from any inappropriate commercial marketing etc. In relation to the promotion and marketing of commercial products through schools, the approach in my Department's circulars - while entrusting school authorities with deciding which activities to engage in - is to require schools to ensure that undue pressure is not placed on parents to buy commercial products. The Green-Schools in Ireland programme, operated and co-ordinated by the Environmental Education Unit of An Taisce, is an environmental programme for schools aimed at raising students' awareness of a range of important environmental issues, including water conservation. The decision to participate in the programme, or any related initiatives or competitions, is a matter for each individual school.

Question No. 481 answered with Question No. 461.

Schools Building Projects Status

482. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress of a school (details supplied) in County Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3837/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The delivery of a replacement 20-classroom school plus Special Needs Unit for the school referred to by the Deputy has been devolved to the school authority. Galway/Roscommon Education & Training Board has agreed to provide assistance to the school in progressing the project. In August 2014, approval was given by my Department to proceed with Phase 1 of this 2-phase project. Phase 1 will comprise 7 mainstream classrooms, Special Education Tuition Room and 1 Classroom Special Needs Unit plus ancillary accommodation. I am informed that a Design Team is currently being appointed following a competitive tender process.

Teacher Data

483. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when an appeal to retain teaching posts in a primary school for 2015-16 will be accepted and decided upon by her Department; the full process and timeframes involved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3838/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing process also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board. Circular 0007/2014, which is available on the Department website, sets out the staffing and appeals process for the current school year. The staffing arrangements for schools for the 2015/16 school year, including the appeals process, will be published in the coming weeks.

Schools Building Projects Status

484. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding provision of a new primary school to replace the existing old school and prefabricated classroom accommodation of Listellick, Tralee, County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3846/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As the Deputy is aware, the OPW is in the process of acquiring a site for the provision of a replacement building for the school in question. In that regard, I understand that the OPW are currently addressing planning issues in relation to the site concerned. Once a greenfield site has been acquired, the school project can be progressed into the Architectural Planning process.

Education and Training Boards

485. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way the new education and training boards are selecting qualified trainer/trainer companies; the consideration that is being given to technical qualifications and experience, registration as approved national register of trainers; if there is a stipulation that all such qualifications be over five years; if it would be a disqualifying factor on an IT course that a more recent certification would be a grounds for elimination; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3875/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): This is an operational matter for SOLAS and I have asked them to contact the Deputy directly to outline the position.

Education and Training Boards

486. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will confirm that the supervising officers from the education and training boards are versed and experienced in the discipline on the courses they are overseeing; if previous trainers that have more than satisfied requirement as suitable trainers be it based on pedagogical qualifications and/or technical experience are not being excluded on the basis of the new and very narrow criteria; the position regarding FIT; their role and to whom do they answer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3876/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The experience of the officers assigned to monitor training is an operational matter for the individual Education and Training Boards in question and for SOLAS. However, I understand that Contract Training Procedures have not changed since they were first implemented in respect of tutor requirements. Fasttrack to IT (FIT) is an industry-led initiative which promotes wider access to in-demand technology skills with the support of government departments, national education and training agencies, local development organisations and community based organisations. FIT’s primary partners include SOLAS, Education and Training Boards (ETBs), Third Level Institutions, and private sector training organisations.

School Accommodation

487. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress in analysing demographic data to determine where additional school accommodation will be required; the basis upon which certain areas will be prioritised for the allocation of additional accommodation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3877/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My Department has recently completed a nationwide demographic exercise to determine where additional primary school accommodation might be needed from 2015 onwards. I will announce the details of any new schools arising out of this exercise in due course. A corresponding exercise at post-primary level is currently under way.

Funding under my Department’s five-year construction plan 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 accommodate increasing pupil numbers. This involves prioritising school building projects in areas where the demographic demand exceeds the level of accommodation available.

Home Tuition Scheme

488. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to correspondence sent to her by a person (details supplied) regarding the home tutorial scheme dated 6 October 2014; if she will respond to this correspondence; her views that the home tuition scheme was operated in a consistent and equitable manner; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3879/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The correspondence referred to by the Deputy was answered directly on 28 November 2014 and a further comprehensive response issued in respect of the matters raised on 12 December 2014. The correspondent has since acknowledged that the responses were received and has again written to my Department addressing matters raised in the response of 12 December 2014.

In previous correspondence the matters raised were fully addressed and explained to the correspondent. I am satisfied that the Home Tuition scheme was at all times operated in a consistent and equitable manner by my Department.

My Department has maintained a consistent position in relation to the development of group arrangements and direct payment arrangements for home tuition and that the scheme is operated in a consistent and equitable manner.

Schools Amalgamation

489. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 534 and 535 of 20 January 2015 regarding the proposed amalgamation of schools (details supplied), if she will confirm that funding will be allocated by her Department to provide these facilities, which are currently unavailable at the schools, as CEIST personnel have stated that her Department will be funding these facilities and CEIST will not be funding them; if an independent assessment of this site selection process has been carried out by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3888/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I can confirm to the Deputy that the Patron of the schools to which he refers has determined that the new amalgamated school should be located on the site and buildings of one of the schools in question. In reaching this decision, the Patron and schools had available to them an independent technical report that reviewed the curricular capacity of both school buildings and sites. Whilst deficits of accommodation in both buildings were identified, the report recommended that one of the school buildings was the location that “requires the least amount of re-modelling of the existing structure and has the potential for expansion to accommodate a combined curriculum and additional teaching spaces”. The Patron has advised my Department that they accept the report’s recommendation.

To support the amalgamation process, it is understood that a Steering Group is being established that will have nominees of parents, teachers and members of the Boards of Management of both schools. It is also envisaged that from September next, both schools will cooperate closely in terms of curricular provision. The Patron is continuing to engage with my Department in relation to the process including the need for additional accommodation.

School Enrolments

490. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which she has become aware of school enrolment difficulties at a school (details supplied) in

County Kildare and other locations throughout the country; if she will investigate the means that may be found to address the issue in the short term; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3898/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the matter of enrolment in individual schools is the responsibility of the patron/managerial authority of those schools.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is in contact with the patron of the three schools in the area in question, including the school to which the Deputy refers, in relation to enrolments for the forthcoming school year. My Department understands that the Patron is consulting directly with the schools concerned relating to the enrolment matters raised. My Department will continue to liaise with the Patron, who has ultimate responsibility for the governance and management of the schools concerned.

My Department’s Five Year Construction Plan outlines the major school projects, including those for the area in question, that are scheduled to commence construction over the duration of the Plan. These projects have been prioritised on the basis of meeting demographic needs to ensure that every child will have access to a physical school place.

My Department continuously analyses demographic trends and enrolments in all areas to ensure that any additional accommodation needs are addressed in a timely manner.

School Enrolments

491. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to address the issue of school enrolment difficulties throughout the country with particular references to areas experiencing demographic fluctuations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3899/15]

502. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which she remains satisfied that the current school building programme remains adequate to meet primary and second level accommodation requirements at all schools throughout County Kildare; her plans to deal with any exceptions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3910/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 491 and 502 together.

The Deputy will be aware that my Department’s Five Year Construction 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 County Kildare, 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 addition, my Department considers applications on an ongoing basis from individual schools for funding to meet an immediate accommodation requirement because of increased enrolments and where an additional teacher is being appointed.

My Department continuously analyses demographic trends and enrolments in all areas to ensure that any additional accommodation needs are addressed in a timely manner.

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

Schools Building Projects Administration

492. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which she can meet or enhance the school building programme at primary and second level with particular reference to locations of increased population; if she has identified such pressure areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3900/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department has recently completed a nationwide demographic exercise to determine where additional primary school accommodation might be needed from 2015 onwards. I will announce the details of any new schools arising out of this exercise in due course. A corresponding exercise at post-primary level is currently underway.

Funding under my Department's five-year construction plan 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 accommodate increasing pupil numbers. This involves prioritising school building projects in areas where the demographic demand exceeds the level of accommodation available.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

493. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which she expects pupil-teacher ratios and class sizes to improve in the current year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3901/15]

500. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which she has identified areas throughout the country currently experiencing class sizes in excess of the national average; if she has in mind a particular strategy to address this issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3908/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 493 and 500 together.

My focus in Budget 2015 was on obtaining the additional funding that was necessary to provide for demographic growth. The last Budget included an increase in spending on education for the first time in recent years, amounting to additional funding of €60m during 2015.

This funding will be used to provide 1,700 additional teachers and SNAs for our schools, as well as to fund prioritised reforms, such as implementation of the literacy and numeracy strategy, reform of junior cycle, and the introduction of education focussed pre-school inspections. It was not possible to also secure the funding which would have been required to change the staffing schedule for primary schools.

The Government's approach to restoring the economy has helped Ireland to return to a position where we are seeing economic growth. It is a continuing improvement in our economic growth over a sustained period that will enable us to move to a point where we can look again at

providing for additional teacher resources in schools which could bring about an improvement in PTR, class size and support for classroom teachers.

Gaelscoileanna Issues

494. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which she continues to examine the case put forward by promoters in Leixlip, County Kildare, for the provision of a Gaelcholáiste in the area; her views on the need for this much sought after coláiste as put forward by the proposals in view of the increasing population in the area and the demand arising from the feeder schools (details supplied); if she will address these issues in early date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3902/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My Department is currently examining the extent and location of additional post-primary places that will be needed on a nationwide basis from 2017 onwards. This will include an examination of the north Kildare area. A submission recently received from An Foras Pátrúnachta in relation to all-Irish provision in north Kildare will be taken into consideration as part of this examination.

In the meantime, my Department has clearly indicated that it is open to the idea of the establishment of an independent Gaelcholáiste for the north Kildare area. My Department has already committed to consider this if sufficient and viable demand for education through the medium of Irish in the Aonad in Maynooth is demonstrated over a four-year cycle.

Bullying in Schools

495. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which efforts continue to be made to combat school bullying; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3903/15]

501. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which she has identified school areas or regions throughout the country in respect of which there appears to be greater incidents of school bullying; if any specific action has been taken or is required in such circumstances; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3909/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 495 and 501 together.

The Deputy will be aware that my Department published new anti-bullying procedures for all primary and post primary schools at the beginning of the 2013/14 school year.

The procedures are designed to give direction and guidance to school authorities and school personnel in preventing and tackling school-based bullying behaviour amongst its pupils. They include specific requirements in relation to the use of prevention and education strategies and the consistent investigation, follow up and recording of bullying behaviour.

There is no requirement that schools report incidents of bullying behaviour to my Department. The procedures however include important new oversight arrangements that involve the school Principal reporting regularly to the Board of Management and a requirement for the Board to undertake an annual review of the school’s anti-bullying policy and its implementation. Confirmation that the annual review has been completed must be provided to the Parents’ Association and published on the school website.

Arising from commitments made in the Action Plan on Bullying, my Department's Inspectorate is placing a stronger focus on the actions schools take to create a positive school culture and to prevent and tackle bullying. For example, parent and student questionnaires issued as part of whole school evaluations, include, since January 2014, additional questions to get a clearer picture of how the school deals with bullying. Furthermore, the Inspectorate's plan for 2015 provides for collaborative research to be conducted in a sample of primary and post-primary on how schools provide for pupils' wellbeing. This will culminate in a research report which will highlight best practice.

Special Educational Needs Staffing

496. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which special needs teachers remain available to all schools throughout County Kildare in line with requirements; if any particular areas with requirements above the national average in this regard have been identified; her plans for same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3904/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that all State-funded primary and post primary schools have been allocated additional resources, including additional teaching support, to provide for children with special educational needs enrolled in school.

As part of Budget 2015, I announced that an additional 480 Resource Teachers would be provided in 2015, to take into account increased demand and demographic growth and to ensure that children can continue to have access to additional supports in school. In addition, over 130 new Special Classes have been established for the 2014/15 school year.

These increases, building on increases which have already been provided in recent years, have ensured that we now have more special needs support teachers in our schools than ever before, and will ensure that children with special educational needs can continue to participate in education and be supported in a manner appropriate to their needs. It will also ensure that where particular demand arises, due to demographic growth or to increased need, that this demand can be met.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) also allocates resource teaching hours to schools for children who have been assessed within the low incidence, or more complex, category of special need, as defined by my Department's Circular Sp Ed 02/05.

The NCSE also sanctions the opening of special classes where such classes are required.

The NCSE operates within my Department's established criteria for the allocation of Special Education supports and the staffing resources available to my Department.

The NCSE will continue to plan and coordinate the provision of education and support services to ensure that the educational requirements of children with special needs can continue to be met in all areas.

Details of Resource Teaching and Special Class allocations for Co. Kildare for the current school year are available on the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) website, www.ncse.ie.

Education Grants

497. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which Student Universal Support Ireland continues to deal adequately with the administration of higher education grants; the number and nature of any cases outstanding in respect of previous years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3905/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): SUSI has advised that it is fully up-to-date with the payment of all awarded grants that can be paid. SUSI has received 103,000 applications for the 2014/2015 academic year. Of these more than 100,000 applications have been finalised with over 72,000 grants awarded. The remaining applications will be finalised upon receipt of outstanding documentation from the applicants.

State Examinations

498. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which she continues to have ongoing dialogue with the teaching unions with a view to reaching agreement in respect of outstanding issues arising from the proposed reform of the junior certificate; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3906/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Reform of the Junior Cycle is important and is a policy priority.

The current dispute with the teacher unions will only be resolved through meaningful negotiation. In fact, Dr. Pauric Travers has contacted the teacher unions and myself to propose further talks this week. I welcome this initiative and my Department will engage in these talks in a constructive manner.

School Enrolments

499. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent of enquiries, section 29 appeals or other submissions received in connection with difficulties arising in respect of access and enrolment to a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; if cognisance continues to be taken of the wishes of the parents in the area in connection with their preferred options in regard to the proposed new second level school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3907/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As the Deputy will be aware, many representations have been received, and much consideration has been given to the matter to which the Deputy refers.

As previously outlined, for compelling educational reasons and to safeguard the integrity of the patronage determination process, both of the schools in question will operate as fully-vertical post-primary schools delivering both the junior and senior cycle. There is no change to this position.

My Department’s main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking places. This may result, however, in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice.

Both schools operate under the same Patron who appointed a single Governing Authority to guarantee to Parents/Guardians and Students a fair and equitable enrolment policy for both schools and to ensure that the overall management of the campus will be as cohesive and effective as possible.

I understand from my officials that there are two section 29 appeals being processed in relation to refused enrolment to this school.

Question No. 500 answered with Question No. 493.

Question No. 501 answered with Question No. 495.

Question No. 502 answered with Question No. 491.

School Patronage

503. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent of her ongoing dialogue with the authorities in respect of smaller urban or rural denominational schools with a view to meeting, in so far as is possible meeting the concerns of the school authorities involved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3911/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I am aware of the concerns of the authorities of the smaller denominational schools. There are many aspects to be considered in regard to school provision, apart from pupil enrolment. Among them are questions such as availability of diversity of provision, ethos of schools, parental choice, language of instruction, pupil travel distances, transport costs and the impact of schools on dispersed rural communities. I am mindful of the concerns of small schools and will take them into account in considering any planning framework for future provision of schools.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Administration

504. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will revise the valuations for the mortgage to rent scheme as with the increase in valuations in the housing market in 2014 in view of the €180,000 threshold being now too low for many mortgage holders particularly in the greater Dublin area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3310/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): In order for a property to be considered under the mortgage to rent scheme it must be purchased by an Approved Housing Body for less than €220,000 (per property) in the Greater Dublin Area and €180,000 (per property) in the rest of the country. These limits were determined by a working group which took account of available market data and the current social housing acquisition limits. These limits are considered to be reasonable in respect of the income bracket that is targeted by the scheme.

Proposed Legislation

505. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to re-establish the previous policy of rural proofing legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3385/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): I can advise the Deputy that where new legislation is proposed the current requirement is that a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA), which includes a rural impact assessment, should be carried out to assess the likely effects of the proposed legislation.

As I have been recently assigned to the role of Minister for Rural Affairs, I hope to examine the practical implementation of the rural proofing requirements to ensure that new initiatives and legislation are fully assessed in terms of their impact on rural communities so that the needs of those citizens are fully considered.

Noise Pollution

506. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the remedies that are made available to landlords whereby in an apartment building one resident, an owner occupier, is causing a continuous noise disturbance and is causing other residents to move out and is causing financial loss to landlords as a result, noting that section 108 of the Environmental Protection Agency Act 1992 provides for an application to the District Court for an order in respect of noise pollution but does not afford a landlord in the above situation locus standi to bring such an action even though their interests are directly affected; if he will amend the law to provide landlords a direct remedy in this situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3444/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Currently, a person experiencing noise nuisance may contact their local authority, which may initiate proceedings on grounds of noise nuisance under the Environmental Protection Agency Act 1992. This Act also provides for any person, or group of persons, to seek an order in the District Court to have noise giving reasonable cause for annoyance abated. The procedures involved have been simplified to allow action to be taken without legal representation. Furthermore, in the case of noise nuisance being caused by individuals in private rented accommodation, the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 imposes minimum statutory obligations on landlords and tenants of private residential tenancies. Tenant obligations under the Act include an obligation not to engage, or allow visitors to engage, in anti-social behaviour which is defined as including persistent noise that interferes with the peaceful occupation of other dwellings in the neighbourhood. The Act also imposes an obligation on landlords to enforce the tenant obligations.

A public information leaflet, A Guide to the Noise Regulations, outlining the legal avenues available to persons experiencing noise nuisance, is available to view and download on my Department's website: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/Environment/Miscellaneous/FileDownload,1319,en.pdf>.

The Programme for Government includes a commitment to take further steps to address noise pollution, inter alia, through consideration of the introduction of fixed payment notices (also known as on-the-spot fines). The development of new noise legislation by my Department is being considered in the context of this commitment, and this specific issue will be considered as part of this process. However, as indicated in the Government's Legislation Programme published on 14 January 2015, it is not possible at this time to indicate when such a Bill might be published, having regard to the broad range of legislative priorities to be progressed across my Department's remit.

Illegal Dumping

507. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the toxic dumping into the Dundalk, County Louth, water supply; if there will be immediate intervention from the Environmental Protection

Agency; if he has figures in relation to the amount of toxic dumping which is being dumped into the Fane river; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3549/15]

512. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding the illegal diesel laundering waste into the Fane river, County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3475/15]

537. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will request an Environmental Protection Agency test, assessment and report on the quality of water in Lough Muckno, Castleblayney, County Monaghan, and in the Fane river and in the domestic water supply source to the town of Dundalk, County Louth, following reports that diesel laundering waste has been either dumped in or allowed seep into these water courses; if he will arrange for these tests to be carried out without delay in view of the very understandable concern among the dependent community as a result of these claims; if he will undertake to publish the full findings and the steps, he is advised to take both immediately and, if acceptable, in the medium term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3706/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 507, 512 and 537 together.

I share the Deputies' concerns regarding the media reports about an alleged pollution discharge to Lough Ross in Co. Armagh entering the River Fane system which is the source of the drinking water supply for Dundalk.

It is the responsibility of Irish Water to assess the risk of contamination to public water drinking sources and to monitor any such risks. Monitoring occurs of the source water, the water after treatment and the water at the point of use within the water network and drinking water sample results for 2014 are fully compliant with the Drinking Water Regulations. If the supply becomes contaminated or fails to meet the minimum drinking water quality standards Irish Water must notify the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) promptly. The EPA investigates all such notifications to ensure that remedial action is taken to prevent any reoccurrence.

In this regard, I understand that Louth County Council, on behalf of Irish Water, has contacted the relevant authorities in Northern Ireland to investigate this specific allegation.

Lough Muckno is part of the EPA's national Lake Monitoring Programme network under the Water Framework Directive. Biological monitoring is undertaken every 3 years and monitoring of the general physical conditions is undertaken every year with samples analysed for 13 specific parameters.

The Local Government (Water Pollution) Acts carry a general prohibition on the entry of any polluting matter to waters. Any persons causing or permitting polluting matter to enter waters is liable on conviction on indictment, to a fine not exceeding €15,000,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years, or both. The primary enforcement responsibility in relation to water pollution rests with local authorities, which are in turn supervised by the EPA for this purpose. Local authorities issue a significant number of enforcement notices every year under the Local Government (Water Pollution) Acts. These enforcement notices require respondents to carry out actions to prevent or remedy water pollution, and are followed up by prosecutions where necessary.

Enforcement in relation to illegal diesel laundering activities is primarily a matter for the Revenue Commissioners from the point of view of avoiding loss of revenue to the Exchequer. My Department assists local authorities in carrying out their role as competent authorities under

waste legislation, which is to take the necessary measures, on behalf of the State, to ensure that any waste generated and left abandoned by the diesel launderers is disposed of without endangering human health and without harming the environment, in particular without risk to water.

Approximately 1,200 incidents of diesel laundering waste dumping have been dealt with by local authorities since 2008 and to date my Department has reimbursed all of the costs associated with such disposal on a case by case basis. Almost half of the clean-up operations have taken place in County Louth with 596 incidents having been dealt with at a cost of approximately €4.8 million.

Following discussions with An Garda Síochána, the Revenue Commissioners and Monaghan County Council who have also been seriously affected by this issue, my Department has agreed to fund a pilot sampling programme for abandoned fuel laundering waste material in order to generate improved intelligence. This exercise may result in linking dump sites to particular laundering processes as well as identifying the origins of the diesel based on the markers detected in the analysed material. The pilot programme will be carried out by a specialised contractor who will visit the sites, sample the waste, deliver these samples to the state laboratory and compile a report based on that analysis.

My Department, as part of on-going cooperation with the Northern Ireland authorities on repatriation of illegally deposited waste in Northern Ireland, has held recent discussions with the relevant Northern Ireland authorities on the need to develop a mechanism for dealing with waste from cross-border diesel washings which would be factored into the overall discussions on waste repatriation. These discussions are on-going.

There is strong and active co-operation on this and other waste management issues between the relevant enforcement authorities on both sides of the Border, involving An Garda Síochána, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and other enforcement agencies. However, I will be writing to my counterpart in the Northern Ireland Executive, Minister Mark Durkan, to highlight again the problems being faced by border counties exposed to the consequences of environmental crime and will also raise the issue at the next meeting of the North South Ministerial Council.

I believe that a complete solution to this problem must necessarily involve effective and co-ordinated enforcement of the law from both a revenue and waste management perspective. In that context, my Department continues to liaise with representatives of the Revenue Commissioners, the local authorities concerned and the EPA's Office of Environmental Enforcement to seek to identify more effective enforcement solutions.

National Lottery Funding Disbursement

508. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in view of the amendment accepted to the National Lottery Bill, including natural environment agencies, as potential recipients as of April 2013, the procedure for agencies and groups that qualify for funding under the amendment to apply for funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47713/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The inclusion of Section 41(1) of the National Lottery Act 2013, incorporating the new heading "natural environment" as one of the purposes for which the proceeds of the National Lottery may be applied, is to be welcomed. My Department is currently giving consideration to an appropriate mechanism for the disbursement of funds under this heading.

It is worth noting that my Department already provides funding to a wide range of environmental initiatives, including the Local Agenda 21 Environmental Partnership Fund which provides grants to small-scale environmental projects at local level. My Department provided €397,000 under this scheme in 2014 and this was matched with an equivalent amount from the relevant local authorities. This funding scheme is advertised in national and local papers and groups apply for funding through their relevant local authority. The 2015 scheme will be announced later this year.

My Department also provides core funding and capacity building funding to environmental Non-Governmental Organisations, including the Irish Environmental Network (IEN) and the Sustainable Water Network (SWAN). Funding of €867,000 was provided for IEN, Environmental Pillar and Environmental Law Implementation Group activities in 2014, of which €415,000 was provided for disbursement to IEN member organisations. Funding of €168,000 was provided to SWAN in 2014. It is also open to environmental NGOs to apply for National Lottery funding, for relevant projects, through the Heritage Council's National Lottery Scheme.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Administration

509. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of residential mortgages approved under the mortgage to rent scheme to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3779/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): There are currently two mortgage-to-rent schemes in operation through my Department. A scheme exists whereby a local authority (LA) can acquire ownership of properties with unsustainable local authority mortgages, thus enabling the household to remain in their home as a social housing tenant (LA- mortgage-to-rent). The other scheme provides for an Approved Housing Body (AHB) to acquire ownership of a property with an unsustainable private mortgage, which also enables the household to remain in their home as a social housing tenant (AHB-mortgage-to-rent). Both schemes are designed to assist families with income difficulties whose mortgages are now unsustainable, and where there is little or no prospect of a significant change in circumstances in the foreseeable future. To be eligible for the AHB-mortgage-to-rent scheme a household must have had their mortgage position deemed unsustainable under the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process, agree to the voluntary surrender of their home, be in negative equity, and be deemed eligible for social housing in accordance with section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2009.

A total of 2,598 cases had been submitted by the end of December 2014 under the AHB-mortgage-to-rent scheme. Of these 1,040 were ineligible or terminated during the process, of which 276 cases were not progressed because the household in question was deemed to be over or under accommodated. Agreement on the sale could not be agreed on a further 46 cases. Of the remaining cases submitted, 68 have been completed, 1,002 are currently with the lenders who are seeking the consent of borrowers to share information and for the carrying out of an independent valuation, and the remaining 442 are actively being progressed. My Department has issued funding approval in respect of 119 cases.

The Local Authority Mortgage to Rent (LAMTR) scheme, which was rolled out nationally in February 2014, allows local authorities to offer the mortgage to rent scheme to local authority mortgage holders with unsustainable mortgages. The national roll-out followed a pilot scheme in 2013 under which 18 households were assisted. In 2014, a further 64 households in distress with local authority mortgage arrears were assisted through the scheme, which continues to operate.

My Department issued revised guidelines to local authorities for dealing with mortgage arrears within the local authority sector in June 2014. Dealing with Mortgage Arrears – A Guide for Local Authorities is available on my Department's website at:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload,30943,en.pdf>.

The Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process, already in place in respect of commercial mortgages, is now being implemented across all local authorities. In cases of acute mortgage distress, homeowners also have the option of seeking to avail of the legal process now also in place to deal with personal insolvency.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

510. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the progress that has been made to tackle homelessness both in Dublin and nationwide since the homelessness forum met in December 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3401/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): 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. 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. A copy of this action plan is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/SpecialNeeds/HomelessPeople/>. Progress in implementing this plan is overseen by the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform and a copy of the most recent progress report is also available on my Department's website at the link provided above.

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. There is enough accommodation available for all those sleeping rough, so that no one needs to sleep rough unless they choose to do so. The number and availability of emergency beds is being monitored closely by Dublin City Council and further beds will be brought on stream should the need arise.

Where a homeless person does not want to be placed in emergency accommodation, the Housing First intake street team will refer the person to the newly established Nite Café which is now fully operational. The Nite Café links in with the new Transport with support services for those sleeping rough as an integral part of the Housing First service. This initiative transports homeless persons to emergency accommodation and provides them with the necessary health and care supports in conjunction with other State providers.

The long-term solution to homelessness is to increase the supply of homes. In November 2014, I launched the Government's Social Housing Strategy 2020. 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, inter alia, a resumption of direct building on a significant scale by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies.

Compulsory Purchase Orders

511. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will streamline the compulsory purchase order process for lands at dangerous locations along regional and local roads, as distinct from large new road projects; his views that the current process is completely unfit for purpose for councils to acquire small pieces of ditches, embankments or fields at one off locations as in effect, councils depend entirely on the co-operation of the landowner; the possible legislative or other solutions to make this process more timely and affordable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3402/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): I have not been made aware by local authorities or An Bord Pleanála of any difficulties or issues regarding the procedures for the compulsory acquisition of land at dangerous locations along regional and local roads for road enhancement purposes, and I have not received any request to amend the relevant procedures in this regard which are set out in the Housing Act 1966, as amended. Accordingly, I have no plans to amend the existing provisions at this point in time.

Question No. 512 answered with Question No. 507.

Proposed Legislation

513. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the proposed provisions to be included in the new water services Bill. [3501/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I will be seeking Government approval shortly to publish the Water Services Bill 2015 which will provide for a number of outstanding issues relating to the water charges package I announced on 19 November 2014. These matters were not included in the Water Services Act 2014 due to the requirement for additional consultations to take place with stakeholders. The Bill will, in the main, make provision for addressing any unpaid water bills relating to domestic property including privately owned and occupied property, private rented accommodation and local authority rented accommodation.

Pyrite Remediation Programme Expenditure

514. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of building condition assessments with damage condition rating 2 received by the Pyrite Resolution Board; and the number of houses remediated since the Pyrite Resolution Board began accepting the BCAs in August 2013. [3514/15]

515. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an estimate of the number of pyrite damaged houses which will be remediated using the funds provided by the taxpayer in the last and current budget; the additional funds that will be made available to remediate houses damaged by pyrite heave; and his views on the surplus of €25 million declared by a company (details supplied). [3515/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 514 and 515 together.

The Pyrite Resolution Board commenced accepting applications from eligible homeowners

ers for inclusion in the pyrite remediation scheme on 26 February 2014. As matters stand, the Board has received in the order of 627 completed applications of which some 597 have a Building Condition Assessment with a damage condition rating of 2. A total of 485 applications have been validated by the Board and forwarded to the Housing Agency for the verification stage; of those 295 have now been approved by the Board for inclusion in the scheme and the applicants have been notified. Applications for dwellings not yet included in the scheme are being processed as quickly as individual circumstances allow.

A pilot project involving the remediation of 5 dwellings was completed in the latter half of 2014. I understand that a works contract for 20 houses has recently been awarded and is due to commence shortly while procurement is underway in relation to a further 4 developments involving some 73 dwellings. In addition, I understand that tenders are due to issue on a further 49 dwellings before the end of this month. In light of the build-up of projects under the scheme, an allocation of €10 million is being provided for 2015.

HomeBond is a private limited company providing structural guarantees for new houses and, since November 2008, the HomeBond Insurance scheme is underwritten by Allianz Insurance. As is the case for any private company, its operations are a matter for its management and Board of Directors. My Department understands that HomeBond Insurance Services Ltd is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland. As a private company, my Department has no role or function in its operations.

However, in the context of the pyrite remediation scheme, an agreement was concluded between the Pyrite Resolution Board and HomeBond in June 2014 on the type and level of services which HomeBond will provide to the Board. My Department understands that HomeBond will contribute technical and project management services, under the direction and supervision of the Pyrite Resolution Board and/or the Housing Agency, to the value of €2 million.

Appointments to State Boards

516. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if three of the nine board members of the Western Development Commission appointed by his predecessor on behalf of the Government are former Fine Gael councillors; if another of the board members is a former election candidate for the Labour Party; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3528/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): I am advised that three members of the current Western Development Commission Board were former Fine Gael Councillors and one Board Member was a former Labour Party candidate.

All of the appointments to the current Western Development Commission Board were made in line with section 9(2) of the Western Development Commission Act 1998. Each of the Board members has significant experience in their respective fields, which makes them suitably qualified to “foster and encourage economic and social development in the Western Region”, which is the main function of the Commission.

In compliance with arrangements proposed by my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, and approved by Government on 30 September 2014, future appointments to State Boards which come under the aegis of my Department will be advertised openly on the State Boards portal at www.stateboards.ie, which is operated by the Public Appointments Service.

Homelessness Strategy

517. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding the launch of the homelessness strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46773/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I am assuming the Question is referring to the Action Plan to Address Homelessness arising from the special Summit on Homelessness which I hosted on 4 December 2014. That Summit reaffirmed the Government's commitment to end involuntary long-term homelessness by the end of 2016. 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. A copy of this action plan is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/SpecialNeeds/HomelessPeople/>.

Progress in implementing this plan is overseen by the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform and a copy of the most recent progress report is also available on my Department's website at the link provided above.

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. There is enough accommodation available for all those sleeping rough so that no one needs to sleep rough unless they choose to do so. The number and availability of emergency beds is being monitored closely by Dublin City Council and further beds will be brought on stream should the need arise.

Where a homeless person does not want to be placed in emergency accommodation, the Housing First intake street team will refer the person to the newly established Nite Café which is now fully operational. The Nite Café links in with the new Transport with support services for those sleeping rough as an integral part of the Housing First service. This initiative transports homeless persons to emergency accommodation and provides them with the necessary health and care supports in conjunction with other State providers.

The long-term solution to homelessness is to increase the supply of homes. In November 2014, I launched the Government's Social Housing Strategy 2020. 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, inter alia, a resumption of direct building on a significant scale by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies.

Water Charges Administration

518. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in respect of late payment charge-dwellings under the Water Services Bill 2014, when that late payment charge comes into effect if a customer has not entered into a payment plan with Irish Water. [3563/15]

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. The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides that Irish Water shall collect charges from its customers in receipt of water services provided by it. The Act also provides that responsibility

for the independent economic regulation of the water sector is assigned to the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) and the CER has been given statutory responsibility for protecting the interests of customers.

Section 4 of the Water Services Act 2014, which was enacted on 28 December 2014, provides where a customer has not paid any water charges within a period of 12 months after the issuing of the first demand and has not entered into, or is not complying with, a payment plan with Irish Water, a late payment fee shall be charged by Irish Water, for each year the charges remain unpaid.

The late payment fees that will apply are €30 for a dwelling occupied by not more than one adult and €60 for an unoccupied dwelling or a dwelling occupied by two or more adults.

Local Authority Housing Rents

519. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 918 of 14 January 2015 if local authority rents will increase from current rates following the introduction of the new local authority differential rent framework. [3565/15]

520. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 920 of 14 January 2015, the action he will take in the event a majority of elected representatives of a local authority vote against the implementation of the new differential rent framework and retain the existing arrangements. [3566/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 519 and 520 together.

I refer to the reply to Questions Nos. 916, 917, 918, 919 and 920 of 14 January 2015, in which I stated that “ The introduction of the rent framework will mean that, on the expiry of the 2 year transitional period, the amount of rent payable by some households may be lower in some cases, and higher in others, than the rent currently payable under section 58 of the Housing Act 1966. ” I cannot be more specific at this stage as the necessary Regulations prescribing the matters to be included by housing authorities in their section 31 rent schemes have not yet been made.

I also stated in the reply that I expect that the elected members of each housing authority will make a rent scheme in compliance with the law. I do not propose to speculate about the fulfilment, or otherwise, by individual councils of a reserved function under the Housing Acts.

Security of the Elderly

521. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide details of the engagement that has taken place between his Department and the community alert organisation in respect of proposed changes to the seniors alert scheme; his plans to bring forward changes to the scheme; if he will provide details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3575/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): My Department manages the Seniors Alert Scheme which encourages community support for vulnerable older people in our communities by providing

grant assistance towards the purchase and installation of personal monitored alarms to enable older persons, of limited means, to continue to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind. The scheme is administered by local community and voluntary groups with the support of my Department.

My Department undertook to consider new approaches to the Seniors Alert Scheme in 2014 and arising from this, it was decided that the scheme be managed by Pobal, given that organisation's significant experience delivering programmes on behalf of Government.

Pobal's management and administrative services for the Scheme includes an invitation to tender for the supply and installation of personal monitored alarms, which was publicly advertised on eTenders on 20 October 2014. The tender process, which is being led by Pobal, is almost complete. Following on from this, a panel of regional suppliers will be contracted to provide the equipment within specific regional areas. As the market for the equipment is well established, it was neither necessary nor appropriate to engage in consultations with the market on the matter prior to the tender process.

This new approach will reduce the administrative burden for the many hundreds of community and voluntary groups registered under the Scheme, who provide an excellent service for the elderly. It will enable the groups to concentrate on the main purpose of the Scheme, namely to support and interact with the elderly in the local community.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

522. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the total number of social housing built in 2009 and each subsequent year, including plans for 2015. [3583/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department publishes a wide range of housing statistics. It includes data on the number of units provided directly by local authorities and approved housing bodies (under the voluntary and co-operative heading), broken down by year. The statistics requested are available on my Department's website at: <http://www.envron.ie/en/Publications/StatisticsandRegularPublications/HousingStatistics/FileDownload,15291,en.xls> by clicking "Social Housing Outputs" under the Social Housing Supports heading.

I expect that, nationally, some 7,400 new social housing units will be provided under a range of initiatives for 2015.

Energy Regulation

523. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans regarding regulation of certain home heating (details supplied). [3584/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The regulation of gas and electricity heating installers is undertaken by the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. I am not aware of any plans for the establishment of a state regulatory body for the installation of other fuels along the lines suggested.

However, I understand that industry stakeholders are developing both a training and regis-

tration scheme for the installers of oil and solid fuel heating systems. Part J of the Building Regulations sets out the statutory minimum requirements that apply to ensure the safe design and installation of heat producing appliances in dwellings. Following a full review, new Building Regulations (Part J Amendment) Regulations 2014 and a revised Technical Guidance Document (TGD J 2014) came into effect from 1 September 2014.

Part J/TGD J 2014 place a new emphasis on the engagement of competent contractors, the proper commissioning of systems and the obligation to provide information for owners on the system installed and any continuing maintenance required to ensure its safe and effective operation and avoid risk to health.

There are no proposals for the establishment of a state regulatory body for stove installers along the lines suggested. The National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI), which comes under the remit of the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, is the lead agency in relation to the formulation of quality, design and safety standards for heating installations and it normally advances such work through the establishment of expert industry working groups.

I also understand that the Construction Industry Register Ireland (CIRI) established by the Construction Industry Federation (CIF) as a register of builders and contractors provides for participation in the register by heating and plumbing contractors.

While the CIRI register is a voluntary register at present, the Government has signalled its commitment to placing the register on a statutory footing. I expect that legislative proposals in that regard will be brought to Government in the first half of this year. in line with the Government's commitment to have the necessary legislation in place during 2015. I have asked my Department to liaise with CIRI and the NSAI in relation to the development of the heating and plumbing element of the register.

Information and Communications Technology

524. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is satisfied with the role his Department is playing in driving e-Government strategy through better local Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3588/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Local Government ICT Strategy Implementation Plan identifies priority ICT enabled projects for the sector in areas such as shared services and online services. The plan also identifies the need for enabling technologies and infrastructure which would be used across all of these projects. The local government sector has delivered major improvements in customer service, efficiency and effectiveness over the last number of years. This has been achieved by allowing customers to transact their business online, automating the interactions between local government and other public service organisations and by automating internal business processes to free up more staff to provide front line services.

Local authorities have enabled their customers, be they individual citizens or businesses, to search for information and transact their business online for many years.

Examples of this include :

- Local Government Portal to show the services available and portals at service level where appropriate, for example, a planning portal,

- Application forms available online,
- Online planning applications, via the Building Control and Management System (BCMS), are available in some local authorities and are being rolled out across all local authorities. This is an information technology-based system developed to facilitate the electronic administration of building control matters by Building Control Authorities,
- Online Payments (Household Charge, NPPR),
- Voter Registration (checktheregister.ie),
- Latest information on traffic, road works, planning etc,
- Register a fault (i.e. Fixyourstreet.ie),
- Social Media – providing information in new ways to the customer,
- Library Service - providing internet access for the public and providing access for the public to their own library services on line.

Local authorities share data and have integrated processes with other public service organisations in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness and so improve customer service either directly or indirectly.

Examples include:

- Local authorities provide timely information to my Department to support policy making based on the most current information
- Automated application and approval processes between local authorities and my Department
- Automated links with the Department of Social Protection, the Environmental Protection Agency , Irish Water, etc.

Local authorities have automated their own business processes to achieve efficiency and effectiveness and so improve customer service either directly or indirectly. Examples include the following:

- Employee self-service portal for payroll, HR and pension services.
- Business systems to automate all significant business processes. The MyPay system is a centralised payroll system currently being rolled out across all local authorities.
- Customer Relations Management systems to efficiently handle customer interactions.
- Social media and website to proactively provide information to customers.

Further improvements continue to be made in each of these areas and these are part of a strategy of continuous modernisation within the sector.

Appointments to State Boards

525. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the make-up of the board of An Bord Pleanála fully represents urban and rural interests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3592/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, provides that the membership of the Board of An Bord Pleanála shall comprise a Chairperson and up to 9 ordinary members. The processes for the appointment of the Chair person and the ordinary Board Members are set out under sections 105–107 of the Act and associated regulations. In relation to the position of Chairperson, the appointment is made by Government from candidates selected by an independent statutory selection committee. The composition of this committee is set out under section 105 of the Act and, where a vacancy arises, the committee is required to select a maximum of three suitable candidates from among those who compete in a publicly advertised open competition. The selection committee established for the purpose of the appointment of a Chairperson in accordance with the Act shall consist of:

- the President of the High Court,
- the Cathaoirleach of the General Council of County Councils,
- the Secretary General of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government,
- the Chairperson of An Taisce – the National Trust of Ireland, and other specified parties.

The current Chairperson of the Board was appointed in May 2011 on foot of this process.

The appointment process for ordinary Board Members, set out in section 106 of the Act, provides that appointments shall be made by the Minister from nominees put forward by four representative panels of nominating bodies prescribed for this purpose.

The 37 organisations which make up these nominating panels are set out in Article 64 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended. These bodies represent a broad cross-section of interests across society so that potential appointees are drawn from a representative group of people, with diverse backgrounds, with a view to ensuring that a balanced and comprehensive view can be reached on the issues with which the Board is or may be concerned. Each body in each nominating panel is invited to nominate suitable candidates for consideration for appointment to the Board.

In addition to the Chair person, there are currently eight ordinary members on the Board. In making the appointments of the ordinary Board members, cognisance is taken of the balance of skill sets and expertise required by Board members for the effective discharge of An Bord Pleanála's complex and wide ranging functions.

I am satisfied that the current nomination and appointment process for the positions of Chairperson and ordinary Board members is fair and transparent and I have no plans to amend the arrangements at this point in time.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

526. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown of the 35,000 target for so-called direct built housing for each of the years from 2015 to 2020; and if he will provide the respective figure for each year for built-acquired, leased and refurbishment. [3595/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Details of targets and timelines for delivery of social housing units are set out in tables 1 and 2 of the Social Housing Strategy 2020, which is available on my Department's website at

the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload,39622,en.pdf>

The provision of 35,000 new social housing units under the Strategy is set out in two phases: Phase 1 targets the delivery of 18,000 additional housing units by the end of 2017 and phase 2, spanning the years 2018 to 2020, targets the delivery of 17,000 units.

Of the 35,000 units, I expect that 5,400 new social housing units will be delivered in 2015 through the following methods; 3,000 leasing, returning 1,000 vacant properties back to productive use ; and 1,400 units through direct build or acquisition by local authorities and approved housing bodies.

Commercial Rates

527. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the progress achieved with local authorities in reducing the rates burden on businesses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3600/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes, in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation under the Valuation Act 2001. The Commissioner of Valuation has sole responsibility for all valuation matters. The Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV), which is applied to the valuation of each property determined by the Valuation Office to obtain the amount payable in rates, is decided by the elected members of each local authority in the annual budget and its determination is a reserved function.

Local authorities are very aware of the demands placed on the business and commercial sector at this time, as well as the competitiveness issues this gives rise to. Local authorities have a leading role in creating a pro-enterprise supportive environment to generate new jobs and sustain existing ones. They are committed to local economic development, and are best placed to meet many of the needs of businesses in terms of infrastructure, local promotion and other key enabling measures.

In accordance with the Government's Action Plan for Jobs, my Department requested local authorities to exercise restraint in setting ARVs in recent years and they have responded positively in this regard. The average ARV adopted by local authorities nationally has decreased each year since 2010. The new structures of local government, including the establishment of municipal districts, have provided an opportunity to achieve a more coherent approach to rates and charges on a county-wide basis. In 2015, local authorities have begun the process of harmonisation to cater for differences between ARVs of former towns and of counties. In the harmonisation process ratepayers will not pay any more in 2015 than they did in 2014. Any increase or decrease in rates liability due to harmonisation will be phased in after 2015 over a period of up to 10 years. I am also pleased to note that those local authorities which are not subject to the requirement to harmonise, due to already having one ARV for the whole of their administrative area, have either reduced the ARV for 2015 or kept it the same as 2014.

It is worth noting that analysis of the impact of rates on business costs is limited. What analysis is available concludes that commercial rates represent a small portion of overall business overheads compared to energy, rents, payroll and other inputs. The figures vary from sector to sector but research from Forfás, IBEC and local authorities all indicate that commercial rates are, on average, less than 5% of business costs.

I accept that the current rates burden, while not excessive overall, may be unfairly distributed in some cases. The revaluation process currently underway by the Valuation Office is re-balancing rates liabilities to ensure that the rates burden is more equitable and in line with changes in valuations across different classes of properties within counties.

Private Rented Accommodation Standards

528. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if there is a register of all rented properties here; if not, if a register will be compiled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3620/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The Residential Tenancies Act 2004 regulates the landlord/tenant relationship in the private rented residential sector and the Act provides that landlords must apply to the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) to register the tenancy of a dwelling within one month of the commencement of the tenancy.

The published register lists the addresses of all tenancies registered with the PRTB. Details of the register on a county or, in the case of Dublin, a postcode basis are available on its website at https://portal.prtb.ie/public_registrations.aspx

Pyrite Issues

529. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on the fact that had the BC(A)R 2014 been introduced prior to the building boom in the 1990s to 2008, and been in effect during the boom, the regulations could not have prevented the pyrite disaster; the reason recommendation No. 18 of the Pyrite Panel, that the system of independent inspections carried out by the building control officers be strengthened, was not implemented in the BC(A)R 2014. [3622/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The Pyrite Panel, convened in September 2011, undertook a desktop study, in conjunction with stakeholder consultation, to establish facts in relation to the potential exposure to pyrite problems. The information was gathered from a number of sources, including local authorities, structural guarantee providers, representatives of homeowners, private builders, construction professionals and public representatives, and was cross referenced to verify, as far as practicable, its validity.

The Report of the Pyrite Panel, which was published in July 2012, contained twenty four inter-related recommendations covering a wide range of issues which aimed to provide a framework for the resolution of the difficulties being faced by homeowners affected by pyritic heave and which aimed to reduce the risk of such a problem occurring into the future.

However, in its report, the Pyrite Panel clearly stated that it did not believe the State was responsible for the pyrite problem and concluded that, prior to the identification of pyritic heave, Ireland's Building Regulations compared favourably with those in the UK and in other jurisdictions and were reflective of the knowledge and experience available at that time in Ireland. Nevertheless, to reduce the risk of such problems occurring into the future, recommendation number 18 recommended that -

- a mandatory certification system be developed for buildings to enhance the existing system

of building control;

- the system of independent inspections carried out by building control authorities be strengthened to complement the proposed mandatory certification system; and

- the guidance to building control authorities be reviewed to allow for a more structured inspection process.

These recommendations have been met by the operation of the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014, which came into effect on 1 March 2014, the development of the Building Control Management System (BCMS) and the guidance provided in the Framework for Building Control Authorities by the County and City Management Association.

Housing Data

530. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of households nationally occupying accommodation rented directly from one of the 34 local authorities; the number of households occupying accommodation rented from an approved housing body or housing association; the number of units of local authority housing known to be vacant or unoccupied because they are in disrepair; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3637/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department publishes a wide range of housing and planning statistics on our website and the total number of local authority housing units occupied can be found at the following link, under the area titled 'LA rented units by area 2003+' within the Social Housing Supports contents: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/StatisticsandRegularPublications/Housing-Statistics/FileDownload,15291,en.xls> .

This information does not cover households currently renting directly from Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs). However, it is estimated that there are approximately 27,000 units of social housing in the AHB sector.

General statistics on local authority housing stock, including units that may be empty, are published annually by the Local Government Management Agency. The most recent statistics are in respect of 2013 and are available at the following link: <http://www.lgma.ie/en/service-indicators-local-authorities-2013>

As part of a planned programme supported by my Department in 2014, there were over 2,300 vacant social housing units returned to productive use at a cost of €26.1 million. This issue will continue to be addressed in 2015, through funding made available under Budget 2015.

Homelessness Strategy

531. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans for interim measures to deal with rising homelessness before the promised social housing is operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47081/14]

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 the following link: <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 of 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. 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. A copy of this action plan is available on my Department's website at the aforementioned link provided. Progress in implementing this plan is overseen by the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform and a copy of the most recent progress report is also available on my Department's website at the aforementioned link.

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. There is enough accommodation available for all those sleeping rough so that no one needs to sleep rough unless they choose to do so. The number and availability of emergency beds is being monitored closely by Dublin City Council and further beds will be brought on stream should the need arise. Where a homeless person does not want to be placed in emergency accommodation, the Housing First intake street team will refer the person to the recently established Nite Café which is now fully operational. The Nite Café links in with the new transport support services for those sleeping rough as an integral part of the Housing First service. This initiative transports homeless persons to emergency accommodation and provides them with the necessary health and care supports in conjunction with other State providers.

The long-term solution to homelessness is to increase the supply of homes. In November 2014, I launched the Government's Social Housing Strategy 2020. 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, *inter alia*, a resumption of direct building on a significant scale by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies.

Additional funding for homeless services across the country in 2015 will ensure continued progress toward the achievement of the Government's target of ending involuntary long-term homelessness by the end of 2016. My Department is currently considering the appropriate allocation of the 2015 homelessness budget so as to ensure that Section 10 homelessness funding contributes to meeting the needs in the various regions.

Rural Development Programme Funding

532. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when Leader funding will be made available under the rural development programme; the EU regulations groups must meet to avail of funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3682/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): My Department is currently working with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the European Commission to finalise the text of the Rural Development Programme with a view to commencing the LEADER Local Development Strategy selection process over the coming weeks. Notwithstanding the level of work to be done in advance of the programme becoming operational, I expect that the programme will be in a position to start selecting Local Development Strategies for implementation by mid-2015.

The two main framework regulations that those involved in the delivery of the Rural Development Programme will be required to work within are EU Regulation 1303/2013, the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR), and EU Regulation 1305/2013, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) regulation. A third regulation, EU Regulation 1306/2013, details more technical requirements for the financing and management of the programme and further regulations outline the control/compliance regime for the programme.

My Department is currently preparing a set of operating rules for the delivery of the LEADER elements of the Rural Development Programme that will consider and outline all that is required in order to be compliant with all relevant regulations. These operating rules will be available to all Local Action Groups selected to deliver the LEADER elements of the Rural Development Programme in advance of programme commencement.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

533. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the reason a project (details supplied) in County Mayo which has received State funding is refusing to accept tenants from a local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3683/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The issue raised concerns moving existing Rental Accommodation Scheme and Local Authority tenants who have been nominated by Mayo County Council, into a new development provided under the Capital Assistance Scheme. The charging of rent is, in the first instance, a matter for the approved housing body concerned. However, housing authorities have a clear right of consultation in relation to the fixing of rents generally and the rents should be fair and equitable in respect of the development.

I understand that Mayo County Council has been in regular contact with the approved housing body concerned in an effort to secure agreement on the rent levels.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme

534. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to concerns expressed by community groups around the way SICAP is being implemented, specifically the danger that this programme will put communities and community groups in competition with one another; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3685/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): My Department's Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP) superseded the Local Development Social Inclusion and the Community Development Programmes in 2010. LCDP is the largest social inclusion intervention of its kind in

the State. The current Programme officially ended at the end of 2013 having operated for four years with funding of €281 million over that period. It is being implemented on a transitional basis until March next, pending the roll-out of the new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) in April next.

As part of the programme of reform of local government, Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) were established in all local authorities. These Committees, comprising public-private socio-economic interests, will have responsibility for local and community development programmes on an area basis. They will develop, co-ordinate and implement a more coherent and integrated approach to local and community development than heretofore, with the aim of reducing duplication and overlap and optimising the use of available resources for the benefit of citizens and communities.

The new SICAP is one of my key priorities and targets a range of groups across communities. In accordance with the Public Spending Code, legal advice, good practice internationally and in order to ensure the optimum delivery of the services to clients, the Programme is subject to a public procurement process, which is currently underway. Stage one (Expression of Interest) has been completed. Stage two (Invitation to Tender), got underway on 20 October 2014 and involved the successful applicants from Stage one being invited to apply to one or more Local Community Development Committees, in Local Authority areas, to deliver the programme. Contracts for SICAP will be determined following the outcome of the procurement process. The closing date for receipt of tenders under stage two was noon on 19 December 2014. The tenders received are currently being evaluated and tenderers will be informed of the outcome by mid February.

It should be noted that the procurement process for SICAP was open to Local Development Companies, other not-for-profit community groups, commercial firms and national organisations that can provide the services to be tendered for to deliver the new Programme. In Stage one, joint applications were encouraged and organisations of varying sizes (for example smaller organisations working in consortia with larger organisations) were invited to submit joint applications.

I am satisfied that the procurement process underway is in line with best practice and that the procurement documentation on e-Tenders contains all the relevant information on the process. I look forward to the outcome of the process and the roll out of SICAP in April 2015.

All groups who received LCDP funding in 2014 are being funded through LCDP interim arrangements until 31 March next, pending the outcome of the SICAP competitive process.

Local Authority Charges Yield

535. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide in tabular form the total amount raised from parking fees by Tipperary County Council and its predecessors, South Tipperary County Council and North Tipperary County Council, in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3686/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Annual Financial Statement of each local authority provides an analysis of income from goods and services. South Tipperary County Council and North Tipperary County Council's income from parking fines and charges in respect of the years 2011 to 2013, the latest year for which audited information is available, is set out in the following table.

Local Authority	2011 - €	2012 - €	2013 - €
North Tipperary County Council	166,134	135,927	120,494
South Tipperary County Council	2,482	7,752	792

Housing Regeneration

536. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the work being done to deal with voids in local authority housing stocks in County Cork; if funding will be made available to refurbish and maintain the many voids that have been boarded up; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3696/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): As part of a planned programme of addressing vacant properties supported by my Department in 2014, there were 2,333 units returned to productive use nationally at a cost of €26.1 million. 155 of those units were in County Cork. The programme will be continuing into 2015, through funding made available under Budget 2015.

Question No. 537 answered with Question No. 507.

Climate Change Policy

538. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the reason his Department considers it appropriate to include a timeframe of up to 2017 for the preparation and implementation of the national and sectoral mitigation plans under the proposed Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill 2015; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Environmental Protection Agency projects that domestic non-ETS emissions will exceed the former EU 2020 targets from 2016 on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3719/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The extent of the challenge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, in line with our EU commitments, is well understood by Government, as reflected in the National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development, published in April 2014, and in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill 2015, published last week. The National Policy Position provides a high-level policy direction for the adoption and implementation by Government of plans to enable the State to move to a low-carbon economy by 2050. Proposed statutory authority for the plans is set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill 2015.

In anticipation of enactment of the planned legislation, work is already underway on developing a low-carbon plan - the National Mitigation Plan - the primary objective of which will be to track implementation of measures already underway and identify additional measures within the longer term to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and progress the overall national low carbon transition agenda to 2050. I am satisfied that Ireland is on course to comply with the annual mitigation targets under the 2009 EU Effort-Sharing Decision (406/2009/EC) in the first half of the 2013-2020 compliance period. However, there will be a significant compliance challenge in the years 2017-2020 and therefore the first iteration of the National Mitigation Plan will place particular focus on putting the necessary measures in place to address this particular challenge in the years 2017 to 2020 but also in terms of planning ahead to ensure that appropriate policies and measures will be in place beyond that. It is also important to note that the Bill will

provide for long-term successive planning in this respect.

In terms of the timeframe, the development of the National Mitigation Plan will be an open and inclusive process. It will be necessary therefore to ensure that the Plan will comply with the principles and requirements of EU Directive 2001/42/EC and the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 to 2011 and the Appropriate Assessment provisions of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and S.I. No. 477/2011 (European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011). Both of these processes involve a number of phases, including statutory consultative phases at different stages of the development of the plan. In addition to the statutory consultations required under the Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment legislation, the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill provides that there will be a consultation process on the draft National Mitigation Plan. I propose to allow a significant period of time for the public and stakeholders to express their views and provide input to the continued development of the plan.

The general public and stakeholders have already had opportunities to submit views on the sectoral elements of the planned National Mitigation Plan in previous public participatory processes over the last year or so. In continuing my commitment to openness and inclusiveness, I will shortly be inviting the views of the public and stakeholders on the preparation of the National Mitigation Plan currently being developed and I am particularly looking forward to receiving input from all interested parties on how we might address the specific challenges ahead and what economic opportunities might arise in moving towards a low-carbon sustainable economic future.

Legislative Programme

539. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when he anticipates publishing planning legislation that will introduce greater certainty and obligations with regard to bonds and securities which are required by a planning authority as part of a permission; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there are many cases where a bond has expired or cannot be activated to help complete unfinished estates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3720/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): On 20 June 2013, my Department issued Circular Letter PL 11/2013 to planning authorities in relation to the provision of adequate security provided under section 34(g) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, for the satisfactory completion of residential developments. The Circular advised on updated practice to be implemented in relation to bonds and securities for housing and other relevant developments, complementing previous circular PD 1/08 on the taking in charge of residential developments generally, including developments involving management companies. My Department has committed to keeping Circular Letter PL 11/2013 under review as required in order to take account of practical experience in the implementation of the guidance concerned. However I have no immediate plans to amend the planning legislation in this regard at this point in time.

Given the increasingly important role of securities in effecting the resolution of public infrastructure elements especially of unfinished housing developments, information has been collated nationally on the level of planning securities, including bonds, held by planning authorities in respect of unfinished housing developments.

Over the past four years, local authorities across the country have obtained more than €43.3

million from such securities to complete essential public infrastructure within housing developments including roads, water services, public lighting and amenity areas and where breaches of planning conditions have occurred. The yearly breakdown is as follows:

- 2010 - 2011: €23.9 million
- 2012: €3.9 million
- 2013: €2.9 million
- 2014: €12.6 million

In addition, Budget 2014 contained a special provision, in the form of a targeted €10 million Special Resolution Fund (SRF), to assist further in addressing the legacy of unfinished housing developments. The SRF is designed to encourage the resolution of the remaining tranche of unfinished developments identified in the National Housing Development Survey 2013 and, particularly, those developments not likely to be resolved in the normal way through solely developer/owner/funder action because of the presence of specific financial barriers.

The management and administration of issues relating to unfinished housing developments, including bonds and securities, is a matter for individual local authorities. Each local authority has appointed an Unfinished Housing Development co-ordinator and contact details can be found at: www.housing.ie.

Waste Management

540. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the progress that has been made regarding the promised review of the waste management industry that was made by the Government during the Greyhound company strike in 2014 and its immediate aftermath. [3739/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): As part of the introduction of a radical and comprehensive new regulatory framework to reform the regulation of the collection of household waste in 2015, I intend to introduce measures to require collectors to have a customer charter in place and to meet certain minimum standards of customer service, such as specified frequencies of collection. I will be setting out in law what the minimum content of these customer charters will be, so that standards of service are raised and are consistent.

It will also become a statutory requirement for all collectors to operate the “pay-by-weight” system as a condition of their permit. The requirement for households, other than those already on a pay-by-weight system, to pay on a by-weight basis will not apply until 2016 so as to provide an appropriate lead-in time.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

541. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown by local authority area of the number of new social homes that are targeted to be built by local authorities in 2015 and 2016; the number that are projected to be built by private developers under the proposed planning (No. 1) Bill; and the number under public-private partnerships. [3740/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Social Housing Strategy 2020 – Support, Supply and Reform, published in November 2014, sets out clear, measurable actions and targets to increase the supply of social housing, reform delivery arrangements and meet the housing needs of households on the housing list. Actions 1 and 4 of the Strategy require the agreement of national targets for delivery of social housing across local authorities in 2015 and in subsequent years.

In 2015, I expect that some 7,400 new social housing units will be provided, broken down as follows:

- 1,400 units to be built or acquired by local authorities and approved housing bodies;
- 3,000 units under the Social Housing Leasing Initiative;
- 1,000 vacant local authority units will be returned to use; and,
- 2,000 new Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) units.

In addition, a further 8,400 households will be assisted through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP).

Over the following two years, 2016 and 2017, I envisage that some 13,500 additional new units will be provided and an extra 20,000 households will also be accommodated through HAP. The Project Board responsible for oversight of the delivery of actions and targets under the Social Housing Strategy, and the Dublin Social Housing Delivery Taskforce have each agreed a process on setting social housing delivery targets. Consultation with individual Local Authorities is now taking place.

The Strategy envisages that the standard availability-based design, build, finance and maintain (DBFM) Public Private Partnership (PPP) model will be used as a basis for the delivery of a large-scale social housing investment, delivering social housing units in multiple locations and procured within the same public contract. The model proposed has been used to build a number of national roads and 23 schools in Ireland and is also being used to deliver primary health care centres and a programme of new and refurbished courthouses. This considerable experience will be used to ensure that the housing PPP can deliver significant scale, value for money for the State and a return for investors.

Under the detailed governance arrangements outlined in the Social Housing Strategy, an Oversight Group, which I Chair, will oversee the delivery of the 37 actions. Action 8 sets a target of delivering 1,500 units via PPP by the end of 2017. The Project Board will ensure that all actions are progressed under the 5 work streams identified in the Strategy. A separate Group has been established to progress the delivery of actions under each work stream. The detailed work on the PPP proposal will be progressed with the benefit of the expertise of the Group responsible for Work Stream 1 - Finance.

In October 2014, I announced major reforms of the planning system as part of the forthcoming Planning and Development (No. 1). The Review of Part V of the Planning and Development Acts has been completed. The legislative changes required on foot of the Review have been incorporated into the General Scheme of the Bill which was published in November 2014 and is available on my Department's website at:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/PublicationsDocuments/FileDownload,39512,en.pdf>.

The General Scheme of the Bill is currently the subject of pre-legislative scrutiny by the Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht. The Bill is currently being drafted

with a view to enactment in 2015.

The new Part V proposals will require developers to provide up to 10% of their housing units for social housing and the legislation will remove the ability of developers to account for their social housing commitments through cash payments to local authorities. The proposals will furthermore ensure that the social housing units will be located predominantly on the site of the original developments. Under these plans, it is estimated that in the region of 4,000 additional social housing units will be delivered through the Part V mechanism by 2020.

Seanad Reform

542. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 1485 of 17 September 2014, the number of meetings of the technical working group on Seanad Éireann university constituencies that have taken place since 17 September 2014; and when the work of the technical working group will be concluded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3759/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I am currently considering observations made by the Technical Working Group and issues raised in submissions made as part of the public consultation process on the General Scheme of the Seanad Electoral (University Members) (Amendment) Bill 2014. These are informing the further development of the General Scheme, which has not yet concluded.

To date, the Technical Working Group has met on four occasions. No meetings of the Group have taken place since 17 September 2014. Since its last meeting, contact has been maintained between my Department and members of the Technical Working Group and further meetings of the Group may be convened at a later stage should any other matters arise that would benefit from its further consideration.

Seanad Elections

543. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his Department has conducted any research on the accuracy of the National University of Ireland and University of Dublin Seanad Éireann electoral registers; and if he will report on any interaction his Department may have had with these institutions regarding their electoral registers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3760/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Responsibility for the maintenance and publication of the relevant electoral registers is assigned in law to the universities which form the university constituencies for the election of members of Seanad Éireann. My Department has not carried out any research on the electoral registers of either university constituency. Section 8(1) of the Seanad Electoral (University Members) Act 1937, 'the Act', requires the governing body of every university which is a university constituency to cause a register to be kept in accordance with the Act of the persons who are for the time being entitled to be registered as electors. Section 9(1) of the Act provides that there shall be a registration officer for each of the university constituencies who shall be appointed and paid for by the governing body of the university forming the constituency.

In progressing work on the General Scheme of the Seanad Electoral (University Members) (Amendment) Bill 2014, a technical working group was set up to examine and make observations on operational matters including in respect of the creation and maintenance of a register

of electors. This group includes nominees from the National University of Ireland and the University of Dublin - Trinity College.

Building Regulations Compliance

544. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of inspections of building projects by building control officers, by county, since the introduction of the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014; and if he will report on the technical capacity of the building control management system to check calculations submitted. [3761/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The statistical information sought is not available in my Department. A target inspection rate of 12-15% of all buildings covered by valid commencement notices is in place within all local building control authorities. Performance against this target is reported by the Local Government Management Agency in its Annual Services Indicators report. A report in respect of activity during 2014 has not yet been compiled.

The Building Control Management System is an online system allowing for the electronic administration of building control matters. Its main function is to facilitate the lodgement and storage of documentation prepared by owners, designers, builders and assigned certifiers to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of the building regulations. Responsibility for the accuracy of the information supplied, as with responsibility for compliance more generally, continues to rest with the owner, designer or builder of the works or building concerned and with any agent engaged on their behalf.

Local Government Reform

545. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on city status for the greater Drogheda metropolitan area as the way forward as there are 76,000 persons living within the GDMA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3777/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): There are no proposals to establish additional city authorities. The Action Programme for Effective Local Government (October 2012) sets out government policy in relation to the reform of a range of local government matters and the Local Government Act 2001, extensively revised and updated by the Local Government Reform Act 2014, now provides a modern legal framework supporting the local government sector. The 2014 Act provided for the unification of the city and county councils in Limerick and Waterford and reviews of local government arrangements, recently announced in Cork and Galway, include the option of unification of the city and county councils in those areas.

A new system of sub-county governance in the form of municipal districts was also introduced under the 2014 Act to replace the now dissolved town council formation and achieve stronger, more integrated local government in each county while devolving significant decision-making to elected members at district level.

Within the new sub-county arrangements, specific legal provision has been made to allow Drogheda to retain the title 'Borough' and to continue to use the title of 'Mayor' as an alternative to Cathaoirleach, thereby maintaining appropriate recognition for the history and civic sta-

tus of the town. Moreover, elected members for the Borough District of Drogheda have a wide range of reserved functions which can be performed in respect of the district. In addition, those same members form part of the combined plenary membership for Louth County Council with responsibility for the discharge of an additional suite of strategic and other reserved functions.

Overall, I am satisfied that Drogheda has a status appropriate to its size and location within Louth County Council and having regard to the structural and other changes that have taken place countrywide under the Action Programme and revised legislation. In the circumstances, I have no proposals to introduce amending legislation to establish a new city authority in Drogheda or elsewhere. Any such proposal would be at variance with the thrust of policy development and implementation work to date which has seen greater streamlining and integration of local government, with the potential for improved subsidiarity, coherence and efficiency resulting in better value for money and service delivery for citizens.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

546. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the housing supports available in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3790/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The allocation of social housing support to qualified households is a matter for the local authority concerned, in accordance with the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated Regulations. As Minister, I am precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any case being dealt with by a housing authority.

The suite of social housing supports available to assist households is being expanded with the introduction of the new Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, under which a housing authority will pay rent up to a maximum limit to the landlord of private rented accommodation sourced by a qualified household and the household will pay an income-related rent contribution to the authority. The scheme is being piloted by a number of housing authorities, including a pilot in Dublin City and County for certain classes of homeless households, and will continue to be rolled out across the country this year.

Housing authorities make available two types of house purchase loan to assist households to purchase their first home: standard annuity loans targeted at lower-income first-time buyers and loans under the Home Choice Loan scheme, which are available to qualifying middle-income first-time buyers. All applicants must complete a housing loan application form which can be downloaded from the relevant local authority's website. The terms and conditions governing the operation, including eligibility terms, of annuity mortgages and the Home Choice Loan are set out under the Housing (Home Choice Loan) Regulations 2009, and the Housing (Local Authority Loans) Regulations 2012. These are also available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Legislation/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/>.

The final decision on loan applications is a matter for the authority concerned and its credit committee, in accordance with the relevant Regulations.

547. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his Department's proposals to amalgamate the library services in Cork city and County Cork; the discussions that have taken place with service users and staff members and their representatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3807/15]

548. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his Department's proposals to amalgamate the library services in counties Sligo, Roscommon and Leitrim; the discussions that have taken place with service users and staff members and their representatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3808/15]

549. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his Department's proposals to amalgamate the library services in counties Cavan and Monaghan; the discussions that have taken place with service users and staff members and their representatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3809/15]

550. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his Department's proposals to amalgamate the library services in counties Carlow and Kilkenny; the discussions that have taken place with service users and staff members and their representatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3810/15]

551. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his Department's proposals to amalgamate the library services in counties Longford and Westmeath; the discussions that have taken place with service users and staff members and their representatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3811/15]

552. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his Department's proposals to amalgamate the library services in counties Laois and Offaly; the discussions that have taken place with service users and staff members and their representatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3812/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 547 to 552, inclusive, together.

I refer to the reply to Question No. 557 of 20 January 2015 which sets out the position in this matter.

Senior management in local authorities and library service managers have been consulted throughout the process. Consultations with unions have taken place from the initial stages of the review and are ongoing. The report, *Managing the Delivery of Effective Library Services*, identifies the strong staffing structure necessary to deliver the services and provides the commitment to implement this across the country.

The report implements Government policy under the new national public library strategy 2013-2017, *Opportunities for All*. The development of the national strategy involved wide consultation with library users of all ages and all other public library stakeholders, as well as formal national public consultation. *Managing the Delivery of Effective Library Services* seeks to establish stronger, more effective and efficient public libraries and deliver better library services to local communities and citizens, with front-line service continuing to be locally focused and people-centred, and presents opportunities for enhanced individual and community support services and engagement, with no detriment to library services. Against that background, and as the policies, priorities and budgets for library services in each local authority remain the responsibility of the elected members, no separate national consultations were undertaken in the development of this report.

Leader Programmes Applications

553. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of an application to Mayo North East LEADER partnership by an organisation (details supplied); if the application will be expedited in order to allow the project to progress; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3829/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): I am advised that Mayo North East LEADER Partnership have recently received outstanding information from the promoter with regard to this project.

I understand that the project will be submitted to my Department shortly, for assessment and written approval, which is a requirement for grant applications in excess of €150,000 value.

Insurance Industry Regulation

554. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the legal basis for the HomeBond scheme; his views on the role of the State in the matter; his further views on the way the scheme is operating; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3841/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): HomeBond is a private limited company providing structural guarantees for new houses and, since November 2008, the HomeBond Insurance scheme is underwritten by Allianz Insurance. As is the case for any private company, its operations are a matter for its management and Board of Directors. My Department understands that HomeBond Insurance Services Ltd. is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland. As it is a private company, my Department has no role or function in its operations.

I understand that HomeBond is operated by the National House Building Guarantee Company which is a private company established in 1978 by the Irish Home Builders Association and the Construction Industry Federation. My Department supported the establishment by the industry of a guarantee scheme to protect purchasers of newly built houses and, up to early 2004, participated at Board meetings in a non-voting observer capacity.

On foot of the establishment of HomeBond, to ensure national coverage of the guarantee scheme and to facilitate an independent assessment of construction standards, inspectors, already engaged by my Department for grant-related work, carried out inspections on a fee basis on houses registered, up to the end of 2003, with the scheme outside the Dublin area. The costs of these inspections were recouped by HomeBond to the Department.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Applications

555. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding a mortgage to rent case in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Cork; the next steps in the process; the estimated timeframe for its completion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3842/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I refer to the reply to Question No. 169 of 16 July 2014 where I outlined that an application for provisional approval in the case referenced was received by my Department on 9 June 2014

and this provisional approval was granted the following day.

In an effort to increase the numbers delivered under the scheme a new protocol between all parties in the process was agreed and came into operation in June 2014. The protocol includes such measures as the provision of a single independent valuation for the purpose of agreeing the purchase price. The valuation and condition surveys will now be carried out earlier in the process to give more certainty to all parties in the process including the borrower. The new protocol is endeavouring to ensure that as much certainty is being provided as early as possible in the process to minimise uncertainty and late withdrawals from the scheme.

I understand that a valuation under this new protocol has been requested on the property referred to in the Question. Once this valuation is received by the Housing Agency, and subject to the eligibility criteria for the scheme being met, the property will then be offered to the approved housing body panel for expressions of interest. Once an appropriate approved housing body has been identified, a further submission for full funding approval can be made to my Department.

Leader Programmes Applications

556. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the reason there is a continuing delay in processing a payment by Mayo North East LEADER Partnership to an organisation (details supplied) in County Mayo; if the payment will be expedited so as to prevent any negative impact on the promoter's cash flow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3859/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): I am advised by Mayo North East LEADER Partnership that they are awaiting the submission of outstanding information by the project promoter in order to progress the claim for payment.

Leader Programmes Funding

557. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the progress that has been made with the new Leader programme; when it will be launched; the criteria involved; and when projects will be lodged. [3871/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): My Department is currently working with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the European Commission to finalise the text of the Rural Development Programme. I met with the European Commission in this context on Wednesday 21 January 2015, and I can assure the Deputy that significant progress in terms of finalising arrangements for the programme has been made over the last number of weeks.

I hope to be in a position shortly to begin the process whereby I will accept Expressions of Interest from local development and community groups to design and implement LEADER Local Development Strategies for the Rural Development Programme. The LEADER Local Development Strategy selection process will be open to any entity that can show broad local and community participation and that has a coherent vision for the development of its area.

While the Government's preferred outcome is one Local Development Strategy for each area, there will be no limit on the number of groups that can express an interest from within a

sub-regional area. The Expressions of Interest will be evaluated and entities will be selected to develop prospective Local Development Strategies through a process of assessment by an independent Evaluation Committee, comprising an independent chair, officials from my Department and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, along with external rural and local development expertise.

Notwithstanding the level of work to be done in advance of the programme becoming operational, I expect that the programme will be in a position to start selecting Local Development Strategies for implementation by mid-2015.

Voluntary Sector Funding

558. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the staffing issue at his Department which is delaying funding to volunteer centres, including salaries; and if the separate issue of the loss of a funding stream due to the restructuring of the local development structures has been addressed so that volunteer centres can proceed with plans for this year and the important work that the centres do across the country. [3883/15]

561. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to inform Volunteer Ireland and volunteer centres across the country regarding their funding for 2015; the reason there has been a delay to date; if he will organise the relevant budgetary allocations as soon as possible so that staff will be paid and services will be maintained; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3929/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 558 and 561 together.

The Government continues to advance a range of measures that support volunteering and active citizenship. My Department funds a network of 21 volunteer centres. It also provides funding to Volunteer Ireland, the national volunteer development agency. The focus of Volunteer Ireland is to create an enabling environment for volunteering, to develop an ethos of volunteerism across all sectors of society and to be an independent and legitimate voice for volunteering.

The volunteer centres act as ‘brokers’ between potential volunteers and organisations seeking volunteers. They also work with organisations to develop their volunteer management capacity and facilitate Garda vetting for smaller organisations.

My Department has recently provided funding to each Volunteer Centre and will be in contact shortly with each of the organisations regarding further funding for 2015.

Building Regulations

559. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the measures he is taking to provide and promote energy-efficient housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3886/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): General responsibility for the promotion of energy efficiency rests with the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, who has published Ireland’s Second National Energy Efficiency Plan. The plan details the broad range

of measures in place or being planned by a range of departments and agencies with a view to improving energy efficiency in all sectors of the economy. Specific responsibilities within the remit of my Department in this regard include setting energy performance standards under the Building Regulations and promoting energy efficiency in social housing.

Directive 2010/31/EU on the energy performance of buildings requires EU Member States to ensure that all new buildings will be nearly zero-energy by 31 December 2020. The Directive broadly defines a ‘nearly zero-energy building’ as a building with a high energy performance where the very low amount of energy required should, to a very significant extent, be met by energy from renewable sources, including renewable energy produced on site or nearby.

Against this background, Ireland has been making significant progress in terms of both improving energy efficiency and reducing carbon dioxide emissions within the built environment. Taking the energy efficiency requirements established in 2005 as the benchmark, the Building Regulations (Part L Amendment) Regulations 2007 set the requirements necessary to achieve a 40% improvement (over the 2005 standards) in the energy and carbon performance of new dwellings. The requirements were subsequently upgraded under the Building Regulations (Part L Amendment) Regulations 2011 which has delivered a 60% aggregate improvement (relative to 2005 standards) in both the energy and carbon performance of new dwellings. One further upgrade of the Part L requirement is envisaged in order to ensure that Ireland meets our ‘nearly zero energy’ obligation by 2020. A comprehensive public consultation process and a rigorous regulatory impact assessment will be undertaken before such changes are finalised.

My Department also continues to pursue an ongoing programme of investment in improving the energy efficiency of the existing stock of social housing owned by local authorities and has published the best practice design guidelines Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities which, among other things, promote higher standards of energy efficiency in new social housing. Local authorities are undertaking an ambitious programme of insulation retrofitting, with the support of my Department, on the least energy efficient social houses over a three-year period. Funding of €50 million is being provided over the period 2013-2015 for improving the energy performance of older local authority housing stock. This programme will improve energy efficiency and comfort levels, and therefore BER ratings, in 25,000 local authority homes.

Wind Energy Guidelines

560. **Deputy Helen McEntee** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when the revised guidelines for wind energy will be published; and if they will apply to projects that have prior applications submitted. [3893/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): In December 2013, my Department published proposed draft revisions to the noise, setbacks and shadow flicker aspects of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines. These draft revisions proposed:

- The setting of a more stringent day and night noise limit of 40 decibels for future wind energy developments,
- A mandatory minimum setback of 500 metres between a wind turbine and the nearest dwelling for amenity considerations, and
- The complete elimination of shadow flicker between wind turbines and neighbouring dwellings.

A public consultation process was initiated on these proposed draft revisions to the Guidelines, which ran until February 21 2014. My Department received submissions from 7,500 organisations and members of the public during this period.

It is intended that the revisions to the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines will be finalised as soon as possible. In this regard, account has to be taken of the extensive response to the public consultation in framing the final guidelines. Further work is also advancing to develop technical appendices to assist planning authorities with the practical application of the noise measurement aspects of the Wind Guidelines.

The revisions to the Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2006, when finalised, will be issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. In the interim, the 2006 Guidelines continue to apply to existing planning applications. Planning authorities, and, where applicable, An Bord Pleanála must have regard to guidelines issued under Section 28 in the performance of their functions under the Planning Acts.

I am precluded, under section 30 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, from exercising any power or control in relation to any individual planning application or appeal with which a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála is or may be concerned. It is a matter for the relevant planning authority to make the appropriate determination in relation to a planning application or appeal, and my Department has no function in this regard. As indicated, planning authorities must 'have regard' to planning guidelines issued by my Department. However, these are issued for guidance purposes to assist planning authorities in the performance of their functions. Ultimately, planning authorities will make their own decision based on the specific merits or otherwise of individual planning applications.

Question No. 561 answered with Question No. 558.

Renewable Energy Generation

562. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to follow the example set by certain German cities, such as Munich and Frankfurt, which have pledged to move to 100% renewable energy by 2025 and 2050, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3887/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The overarching objective of the Government's energy policy is to ensure secure, sustainable supplies of competitively priced energy to all consumers. As a State we have ambitious targets for 16% of our energy from renewable sources by 2020 through meeting 40% of electricity demand from renewable sources, with 10% renewables in transport and 12% in heat. In 2013, 7.8% of Ireland's overall energy requirement was met by renewable energy, equating to 20.9% of electricity demand, 5.7% of heat demand and 2.8% of transport demand.

To date, wind energy has been the largest driver of growth in renewable electricity. The total amount of wind generation connected to the grid is approximately 2,200 MW. It is estimated that a total of between 3,500 MW and 4,000 MW of onshore renewable generation capacity will be required to allow Ireland to meet its 40% renewable electricity target.

With regard to 2030, the October European Council endorsed a binding EU target of at least 40% domestic reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990. In addition, an EU target of at least 27% is set for the share of renewable energy consumed in the EU in 2030, and an indicative target at the EU level of at least 27% is set for improving energy ef-

ficiency in 2030 compared to projections of future energy consumption.

Ireland intends to make a cost-effective, achievable and fair (in terms of effort sharing among Member States) contribution to these high level EU goals. My Department is overseeing detailed and rigorous energy system and economic modelling to identify the contribution which is appropriate for Ireland taking account of our specific economic circumstances. This analysis will address issues such as the quantum of additional renewable electricity we should seek to achieve by 2030, the technologies that should be supported in this regard, and the level at which any future supports should be set.

Furthermore, my Department participates fully in the whole of Government approach to addressing the challenges of climate change and the transition to a low carbon energy system by 2050. In this regard, my Department is fully engaged with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, and all other relevant departments and agencies, in progressing work to produce a National Low Carbon Transition and Mitigation Plan for the purpose of achieving this transition by 2050.

Broadband Service Provision

563. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if the residents of the Geesala and Bangor Erris area, County Mayo will receive access to adequate broadband as they have had inadequate service since August 2014. [3296/15]

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 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 30 Mbps from the commercial sector by end of 2016. The areas marked Amber will require the intervention of the State and includes Geesala and Bangor Erris, Co Mayo.

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, including County Mayo.

In tandem with the mapping consultation, intensive design and planning work is underway in my Department to produce a detailed intervention strategy. The strategy will address a range of issues in relation to the intervention including the optimum procurement model, ownership model for the infrastructure, intervention cost and likely market impact.

My Department has engaged external advisors to provide legal, economic, technical and fi-

nancial advice on the various aspects of the Plan over the next two years. The next steps in this process will see a further public consultation on a detailed intervention strategy in mid-2015. The Intervention Strategy will be notified to the European Commission for State Aid clearance.

Following the public consultation, towards the end of this year a detailed procurement process will be undertaken in order to select a preferred bidder or bidders. The Department will design a tender in a way that maximises efficiencies and keeps the cost of the network build as low as possible. It is expected that the physical build of this network will commence from 2016.

This complex and ambitious project is a key priority for Government. It aims to conclusively address current connectivity challenges in Ireland.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

564. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the progress of the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3395/15]

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 24 November last, a public consultation on a national high speed coverage map 2016 was launched. This consultation will close on 12 February next. 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 30 Mbps 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 or 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 throughout the entire country.

It is anticipated that speeds of at least 30 Mbps 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.

In tandem with the mapping consultation, intensive design and planning work is under way in my Department to produce a detailed intervention strategy. The strategy will address a range of issues in relation to the intervention including the optimum procurement model, ownership model for the infrastructure, intervention cost and likely market impact.

My Department has engaged external advisors to provide legal, economic, technical and financial advice on the various aspects of the Plan over the next two years. The next steps in this process will see a further public consultation on a detailed intervention strategy in mid-2015.

The Intervention Strategy will be notified to the European Commission for State Aid clearance.

Following the public consultation, towards the end of this year a detailed procurement process will be undertaken in order to select a preferred bidder or bidders. The Department will design a tender in a way that maximises efficiencies and keeps the cost of the network build as low as possible. It is expected that the physical build of this network will commence from 2016.

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Public Service Charges

565. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide an update regarding the introduction of a broadcasting charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3396/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): I refer the Deputy to the reply to Question No. 6 of 11 December 2014, in which I set out the position in relation to consideration of the Public Service Broadcasting Charge, and that a number of administrative and operational amendments are also under consideration. This position has not changed.

Broadband Service Provision

566. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the position in respect of broadband for Killoe on the outskirts of Lonford town; if same will be rolled out as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3594/15]

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 30 Mbps from the commercial sector by end of 2016. The areas marked Amber will require the intervention of the State and includes Killoe, Co Longford.

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 including Co Longford.

It is anticipated that speeds of at least 30 Mbps 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.

In tandem with the mapping consultation, intensive design and planning work is underway in my Department to produce a detailed intervention strategy. The strategy will address a range of issues in relation to the intervention including the optimum procurement model, ownership model for the infrastructure, intervention cost and likely market impact.

My Department has engaged external advisors to provide legal, economic, technical and financial advice on the various aspects of the Plan over the next two years. The next steps in this process will see a further public consultation on a detailed intervention strategy in mid-2015. The Intervention Strategy will be notified to the European Commission for State Aid clearance.

Following the public consultation, towards the end of this year a detailed procurement process will be undertaken in order to select a preferred bidder or bidders. The Department will design a tender in a way that maximises efficiencies and keeps the cost of the network build as low as possible. It is expected that the physical build of this network will commence from 2016.

This complex and ambitious project is a key priority for Government. It aims to conclusively address current connectivity challenges in Ireland.

Broadband Service Provision

567. **Deputy Tom Barry** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when broadband services in the Rathcormac area (details supplied) in County Cork will be improved as it is affecting rural businesses. [3709/15]

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 30 Mbps from the commercial sector by end of 2016. The areas marked Amber will require the intervention of the State.

The area of Rathcormack, Co Cork falls mainly within a Blue area of the map and will therefore have access to high speed broadband services from the commercial sector by the end of 2016. Any premises or domestic residence in the general vicinity that is outside the blue area will be provided with high speed broadband services as part of the State led intervention. Members of the public are encouraged to access the map where they can ascertain whether their individual premises falls inside or outside the proposed intervention area. The map also provides detailed information on over 50,000 townlands in every county in Ireland, including

County Cork.

It is anticipated that speeds of at least 30 Mbps 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.

In tandem with the mapping consultation, intensive design and planning work is under way in my Department to produce a detailed intervention strategy. The strategy will address a range of issues in relation to the intervention including the optimum procurement model, ownership model for the infrastructure, intervention cost and likely market impact.

My Department has engaged external advisors to provide legal, economic, technical and financial advice on the various aspects of the Plan over the next two years. The next steps in this process will see a further public consultation on a detailed intervention strategy in mid-2015. The Intervention Strategy will be notified to the European Commission for State Aid clearance.

Following the public consultation, towards the end of this year a detailed procurement process will be undertaken in order to select a preferred bidder or bidders. The Department will design a tender in a way that maximises efficiencies and keeps the cost of the network build as low as possible. It is expected that the physical build of this network will commence from 2016.

This complex and ambitious project is a key priority for Government. It aims to conclusively address current connectivity challenges in Ireland.

Exploration Licences

568. **Deputy Eamonn Maloney** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide details of licences which were issued for oil exploration, both onshore and offshore in Irish territories during 2012, 2013 and 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3769/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh): The tables below includes details of all petroleum exploration authorisations awarded in respect of areas of the Irish offshore during the period 2012 to 2014. No petroleum exploration authorisation was awarded in respect of any onshore area in those years.

EXPLORATION LICENCES

Licence Number	Location	Participants *operator	Commencement Date	Expirations Date
Frontier Exploration Licence(FEL) 1/13	Southern Moling Sub Basin	*Kosmos Energy Ireland 75% Ant-rim Exploration (Ireland) Ltd 25%	05/07/2013	04/07/2028
FEL 2/13	Porcupine	*Kosmos Energy Ireland 85%, Europa 15%	05/07/2013	04/07/2028
FEL 3/13	Porcupine	*Kosmos Energy Ireland 85%, Europa 15%	05/07/2013	04/07/2028
FEL 4/13	Rockall	*Serica Energy Rockall BV (100%)	01/12/2013	30/11/2028
FEL5/13	Porcupine	*Woodside Energy (Ireland) 90%, Bluestack Energy 10%	13/12/2013	12/12/2028

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Licence Number	Location	Participants *operator	Commencement Date	Expirations Date
FEL 1/14	Porcupine	*Capricorn Ireland Ltd 38% Providence Resources 32% Chrysaor 26% Sosina 4%	01/01/2014	31/12/2028
FEL 2/14	Porcupine	*Providence 80% Sosina 20%	01/01/2014	31/12/2028
FEL 3/14	Porcupine	*Providence 80% Petrel 20%	01/03/2014	28/02/2029
FEL 4/14	Porcupine	*Woodside Energy (Ireland) 85% Petrel 15%	01/03/2014	28/02/2029
FEL 5/14	Porcupine	*Woodside Energy (Ireland) 60% Strike Oil 40%	01/03/2014	28/02/2029
FEL 6/14	Goban Spur	*Providence 80% Sosina 20%	01/04/2014	31/03/2029

LICENSING OPTIONS

Licence Number	Location	Participants *operator	Commencement Date	Expiration Date	Duration (years)
Licensing Option (LO) 12/1	Celtic Sea	*Fastnet Petroleum Ltd, 50% Excalibur Exploration Ltd 50%	01/05/2012	30/04/2015	3
LO 12/2	Celtic Sea	Fastnet Oil & Gas (Ireland) Ltd 100%	01/06/2012	31/05/2015	3
LO 12/3	Celtic Sea	Fastnet Oil & Gas (Ireland) Ltd 100%	01/06/2012	31/05/2015	3
LO 12/4	Celtic Sea, Barryroe N	*EXOLA Ltd 80% Lansdowne Oil and gas 20%	01/08/2012	31/07/2015	3
LO 12/5	Celtic Sea	*Fastnet Oil & Gas (Ireland) 82.35% Adriatic Oil plc 15.5% Carob Ltd 1.08% Petro-Celtic Consultancy Ltd 1.08%	01/12/2012	31/05/2014	1.5
LO 12/6	Celtic Sea	*Fastnet Oil & Gas (Ireland) 85% Carob Ltd 7.5% Petro-Celtic Consultancy Ltd 7.5%	15/11/2012	14/05/2014	1.5
LO 13/1	North Celtic sea	Charge Oil Ltd	01/05/2013	30/04/2016	3
LO 13/2	Fastnet Basin	Charge Oil Ltd	01/05/2013	30/04/2016	3
LO 13/3	Mizen Basin	Fastnet Oil and gas (Ireland) Ltd	01/05/2013	31/10/2014	1.5
LO 13/4	South Celtic Sea	Providence Resources plc	01/12/2013	31/05/2015	1.5
LO 13/5	North Celtic Sea	*Excalibur Exploration Ltd 90% Theseus Ltd 10%	01/12/2013	31/05/2015	1.5
LO 14/1	North Celtic Sea	Faroe Petroleum 100%	01/10/2014	30/09/2016	2
LO 14/2	North Celtic Sea	Faroe Petroleum 100%	01/10/2014	30/09/2016	2
LO 14/3	North Celtic Sea	Faroe Petroleum 100%	01/10/2014	30/09/2016	2
LO 14/4	North Celtic Sea	Trans International Oil Exploration 100%	15/10/2014	14/10/2015	1

PETROLEUM PROSPECTING LICENCES

Licence Number	Owner	Commencement Date	Expiry Date	Duration (Years)
Petroleum Prospecting Licence (PPL) 1/12	Shell E&P Ireland Limited	28/5/2012	27/5/2014	2
PPL 1/13	ENI Ireland BV	01/02/2013	31/01/2016	3
PPL 2/13	PGS Exploration (UK) Ltd	01/04/2013	31/03/2016	3
PPL 3/13	Providence Resources	23/04/2013	22/04/2016	3
PPL 4/13	Fastnet Petroleum Ltd	01/04/2013	31/03/2016	3
PPL 5/13	Terra Energy Ltd	01/04/2013	31/03/2016	3
PPL 6/13	Spectrum Geo Ltd	01/06/2013	31/05/2016	3
PPL 7/13	Charge Oil Ltd	01/07/2013	31/06/2016	3
PPL 8/13	Kosmos Energy Ireland	01/07/2013	31/06/2016	3
PPL 9/13	TGS NOPEC	01/07/2013	31/06/2016	3
PPL 1/14	Excalibur	01/12/2013	31/05/2015	1.5
PPL 2/14	Polarcus	01/04/2014	31/03/2016	2
PPL 3/14	Capricorn	01/07/2014	30/06/2017	3
PPL 4/14	Seabird Exploration	01/07/2014	30/06/2016	3
PPL 5/14	Searcher Seismic	01/07/2014	30/06/2017	3

Details of all authorisations are updated on a quarterly basis on the Department's website and can also be found in the six monthly reports to the Oireachtas, which I am obliged to lay before the Houses under the Petroleum and Other Minerals Development Act, 1960.

Public Service Obligation Levy

569. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views that an adjustment to the public service obligation, PSO, levy should be made considering the changing market forces (details supplied). [3799/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The Public Service Obligation (PSO) levy has been in place since 2001 and is the overall support mechanism for generation constructed for security of supply purposes, including peat generation, and for the development of renewable electricity. It is designed to compensate electricity suppliers for the additional costs they incur by purchasing electricity generated by these producers. The PSO levy is vital to enable Ireland to meet its 40% target for electricity generated from renewable sources by 2020, which in turn is important for the achievement of Ireland's 16% EU 2020 target for renewable energy.

The Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) determines the PSO levy which is a charge on all electricity customers without exception. The legal basis for the PSO levy and its method of calculation are set out in Regulations made under the Electricity Regulation Act 1999 (S.I. 217 of 2002). The annual PSO levy amount for 2014/2015 is €335.4 million. This equates to €64.37 per annum for residential customers, €221.66 per annum for small to medium sized business customers and €34.20/kVA for medium and large customers.

Tynagh Energy was one of two plants awarded a 10 year contract as a result of a competition run by the CER to provide urgently required capacity to the electricity system. The purpose of the scheme was to ensure security of supply in the framework of continuous electricity demand growth. The 10 year contract ends in 2016 and the plant will not receive compensation from the PSO levy for electricity generated after this date. Having been awarded 15 year contracts to

ensure security of supply, the peat plants are also transitioning out of subsidy. Edenderry Power will be out of subsidy from the end of this year and Lough Ree and West Offaly power plants will be out of subsidy at the end of their contracts in December 2019.

National Digital Strategy Implementation

570. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will examine an application to the national digital strategy, Knowledge Society Division in Adelaide Road, Dublin 2, in his Department, by a committee (details supplied) in County Kerry as the recently closed primary school is now a focal point of the local community for various activities and the requested computers are vital for the various classes and activities developed by the community organisers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3826/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): Under the Government's National Digital Strategy, my Department, through its Benefit Programme, supports community, voluntary and not-for-profit organisations in the provision of basic digital literacy training for citizens. It does not, however, directly fund the purchase of computers as requested in the correspondence from the Committee referred to in the Question.

The latest call for grant applications under the Benefit programme closed in August 2014. All funds available under the programme have since been allocated with my announcement in December last that 29 additional organisations had secured funding, following the conclusion of the competitive evaluation process.

Internet training will be taking place throughout 2015 and is now available at some 700 locations nationwide. Further details can be found on my Department's website at National Digital Strategy - Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources.

My officials will respond directly to the Committee to advise them of the training opportunities and offer any advice available in relation to alternative approaches to obtaining the computers they wish to acquire.

Appointments to State Boards

571. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of persons who applied under the public application process for each of the vacant positions on the board of Ervia; the number selected from the public application process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3835/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The Public Appointments Service (PAS), in conjunction with NewERA, managed the recent selection process for the filling of vacancies on the Board of Ervia in accordance with the "Guidelines on appointments to State Boards" published by the Government in November 2014. Four vacancies were advertised on the stateboards website on 20 November 2014 and candidates were required to submit their application by the deadline of 3 December 2014.

I am advised by the PAS that there was a significant level of interest in the posts advertised with 88 applications received. On conclusion of a rigorous selection process, involving NewERA's assistance, I made four appointments to the Ervia Board. All nine Ervia Board positions are now filled.

Inland Fisheries

572. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on the effectiveness of the current system for counting on Irish waterways; his further views that it is providing incorrect estimates of salmon and eel stock levels; if the process of a once annual count needs to be addressed as it only takes in rod line catches and the number of anglers are down across the country; his plans to introduce a system of scientific counting to ensure a more accurate reading and which would also cause no harm to the fish as catch and release is widely believed to be harmful to the fish and in some cases result in death; his plans to introduce the use of scientific counting on the main south east waterways the Nore, the Barrow and the Suir; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3847/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh): Ireland's inland fishery authorities are committed to using the most accurate available data and internationally accepted methodologies to inform decision making. In this regard, while Inland Fisheries Ireland is the Statutory body responsible for the protection, management and conservation of the inland fisheries resource, it is supported in Salmon fisheries assessment by the Standing Scientific Committee on Salmon (SSCS) which includes fisheries scientists from IFI, the Marine Institute, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Bord Iascaigh Mhara, the Loughs Agency, and the Agriculture, Food and Biosciences Institute for Northern Ireland (AFBINI). Although the scientists are drawn from these agencies, the advice from the SSCS is independent of the parent agencies.

The SSCS annually carry out an assessment of salmon stocks on a catchment by catchment basis using internationally accepted best scientific practice to ascertain whether conservation limits are being or likely to be attained on an individual river basis. The SSCS provide advice to IFI, who are responsible for the management and conservation of these stocks.

I am advised by Inland Fisheries Ireland that fish counter data and rod/net catch data (in-river or estuarine measures) of salmon abundance are used by the SSCS to provide a primary measure of spawning stocks and attainment of individual river conservation limits.

With the operation of fisheries restricted to estuaries and rivers, following the Government decision to close mixed stock fisheries at sea from 2007, the SSCS assessment is now focused primarily on estimating individual river returns from catch data, counter data and ranges of rod catch exploitation rates derived from observed values in Irish rivers in recent years. The catch statistics derived from estuarine commercial fisheries are an important source of quantitative information for the SSCS, particularly in determining the attainment of individual river Conservation Limits. Following implementation of the wild salmon and sea trout tagging scheme which commenced in 2001, the catch data are derived from the logbook returns of commercial fishermen and recreational anglers.

Data are available to the SSCS from 32 fish counters for the 2014 – 2015 assessments, an increase of 11 counters on the 2011 – 2012 assessment. Information on juvenile abundance indices derived from electro-fishing surveys carried out annually by IFI is also examined to indicate stock status. Juvenile abundance data is used primarily where new information has not been available for rod catches where rivers may be closed to exploitation.

The information set out above is very comprehensive and is collected annually, where available, for all 143 salmon rivers in Ireland. The SSCS use the most recent five years of data and not a once annual count to forecast the run of salmon in the following year and to formulate advice to IFI on any surplus available over the conservation limit of each individual river. This is done to take account of any extremes in conditions such as droughts and floods, and to avoid

large short-term fluctuations in predicted salmon returns in the annual scientific advice.

In circumstances where the number of anglers is reduced over recent years, for rivers where rod catch is the primary means of salmon stock assessment, a rod exploitation rate is applied to the reported rod catch for each river. If the number of anglers has reduced, for example, due to catch and release angling, a lower rod exploitation rate is applied in that instance.

For the majority of salmon rivers, the reported rod catch is used in conjunction with rod exploitation rates over the previous five years to estimate the size of salmon runs and predict the run in the following year. Rod exploitation rates used are derived from fish counters where the total salmon run is known and the also percentage of the run that is taken by anglers (i.e. the exploitation rate).

Ireland's wild salmon management regime, including the work of the SSCS, is very well regarded internationally with delegations from a number of countries visiting in recent years to study and learn from our management system now regularly viewed as best international practice. The management structure is also well regarded within the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO).

With regard to the survival of salmon after catch and release, a recent study on three Irish rivers (Gargan et al. 2015) has shown that, when conducted using proper guidelines, survival of salmon after C&R can be high. Opening rivers to C&R angling provides an important tool to assist data collection on salmon stock status while not significantly impacting on salmon survival.

Currently, rod catches and commercial catches (if a commercial fishery operates) are used to determine the status of salmon stocks on the Barrow, Nore and Suir rivers. Use of rod catch, in conjunction with a range of exploitation rates, is the primary index of salmon stock status on the great majority of Irish rivers. IFI are currently investigating the possibility of installing a fish counter on the river Barrow for salmon stock assessment. This process will depend on locating a suitable site and securing the necessary planning and other relevant permissions.

Ireland's Eel Management Plan (EMP) was accepted by the EU in 2009 under the EC Regulation (EC No. 1100/2007). I am advised by IFI that a close link between the management actions in Ireland's EMP and eel-stock targets has been established by implementing a comprehensive monitoring and stock assessment programme. This will allow for a direct feedback to management based on response of the stock to management actions.

Each year, eel stocks are assessed in a national monitoring programme. This involves assessment of juvenile eel (glass eels or elvers), maturing eel (yellow eels) and mature eels on their migration to sea (silver eels). Monitoring of recruitment is critical to evaluating the overall success of the eel regulation and is required by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) for international stock assessment. This information is also required to assess and model changes in the future eel stocks in Ireland.

The EMP was reviewed in 2012 with scientific advice from the statutorily independent Standing Scientific Committee on Eels (SSCE). This review included a robust public consultation during which many issues were raised and considered. Full details of the scientific assessment and outputs of the public consultation are available on the IFI web site.

The actions set out above under the National Eel Monitoring Programme constitute a comprehensive assessment of eel stock status in Ireland and are reported to the EU on a three yearly basis to comply with Ireland's obligations under the EC Regulation (EC No. 1100/2007) for the recovery of eel stocks.

Inland Fisheries Ireland Investigations

573. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when the most recent social impact study was completed in relation to the effect the closure of salmon and eel fishing is having on the families of the affected fishermen; if his attention has been drawn to the serious pressure being put on these families; his plans for a new social impact study to assess the risk to the loss of heritage in the industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3848/15]

574. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if there are funds reserved from the last salmon buy-out that could be allocated to a scheme where older fishermen could avail of retirement scheme; his plans to introduce a further set-aside scheme for those who wish to seek alternative employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3849/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 573 and 574 together.

Ireland's Eel Management Plan (EMP) was accepted by the EU in 2009 under the 2007 EU Eel regulation (1100/2007). The plan outlined the following main management actions aimed at reducing eel mortality and increasing silver eel escapement to the sea:

- a cessation of the commercial eel fishery and closure of the market,
- mitigation of the impact of hydropower installations,
- ensure upstream migration of juvenile eel at barriers,
- improvement of water quality.

The overall requirement and objective is to provide, with high probability, a long-term 40% escapement to the sea of the biomass of silver eel, relative to pristine conditions (i.e. if the stock had been completely free of man-made influences including commercial fishing).

Based on comprehensive scientific assessment of eel stocks nationally and a review of Ireland's EMP in 2012 it was recommended that the closure of both the commercial and recreational eel fisheries be continued in line with the conservation imperative. The 2012 review included a robust public consultation during which many issues were raised and considered. Full details of the outputs of the public consultation are available on the Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) web site. Similar reviews were carried out across EU Member States as the eel stock has radically declined throughout Europe. The status of the European Eel has also been defined by the United Nations as critically endangered.

While I recognize fully the difficulty facing eel fishermen, the review of scientific and management advice and inputs from the public consultation informed the decision to continue with the cessation of the commercial eel fishery and closure of the market for the period from 2012 to 2015. Ireland's EMP will be reviewed again this year and an opportunity for further consultation with, and submissions from, stakeholders will be advanced at that time.

I understand that a number of former eel fishermen have been contracted by the ESB to catch eel so as to contribute to "Trap and Transport" operations to mitigate the impact of hydro-power schemes as part of the EMP.

The management regime for salmon is reviewed annually for each of Ireland's 143 salmon rivers and is set out via statutory Instrument at the end of each year in respect of the coming

year. The process includes a statutory 30 day consultation period during which all stakeholders have the opportunity to make submissions on the proposals before they are finalised.

The Salmon Hardship Scheme was introduced following a Government decision in 2006 to cease, for conservation reasons, the commercial salmon mixed stock fishery in the sea. The scheme targeted €25m towards commercial salmon fishermen who were active in the fishery at the time and funding was provided to fishermen for them to permanently cease fishing activity. A further €5m was directed towards community projects.

The scheme closed for applications on 31 December 2007 and was ceased in 2008 and I understand that all funds were expended.

In the current economic circumstances there is no prospect of funding being available for similar initiatives.

Inland Fisheries

575. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to conduct a review of the composition of the two standing scientific committees with a view to having a fair and complete representation of all groups affected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3850/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Standing Scientific Committees on Eel (SSCE) and Salmon (SSCS) are provided for under Section 7.5(a) of the 2010 Inland Fisheries Act. The purpose of the committees is to provide independent scientific advice to Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) who are responsible for the conservation and sustainable exploitation of the Ireland's salmon and eel stocks.

In framing the 2010 legislation consideration was given to the need for these scientific committees to act independently of IFI Ireland and the relevant sectors in the exercise of their functions. The committees consist of leading fishery scientists from IFI, the Marine Institute, BIM, ESB, the Agri Food Bio-Sciences Institute (AFBI) in Northern Ireland, and third level institutes. The scientists involved act independently of their agencies to produce scientific advice to support the management of fisheries.

While the Committees are independent scientific committees, they are open to receiving and considering scientific inputs and data from parties or stakeholders. The independence and the scientific credentials of the membership of the SSCE and SSCS is an important element in facilitating the carrying out of their work in an impartial, objective manner based on best international scientific practice.

Fisheries Protection

576. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if his Department received feedback regarding the European initiative, FARNET, which covers more than 10,000 km. of inland fisheries in Europe; his views that this needs to be extended to areas where tidal water stops; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3851/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh): I am advised that FARNET is the community of people, including

experts, civil servants and local citizens from across the EU, that are collectively engaged in implementing a particular strand (Axis 4) of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) aimed at promoting sustainable development in EU fisheries areas. Funding available under this strand is targeted primarily at creating alternative economic activity and improving the quality of life in areas affected by a decline in fishing activities.

I understand that the Competent Authority in relation to the implementation of the EFF is the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Broadband Service Provision

577. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the plans he has for the provision of an effective broadband service for an area (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3872/15]

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 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 30 Mbps from the commercial sector by end of 2016. The areas marked Amber will require the intervention of the State and includes Orchardstown, Co Tipperary. It is anticipated that speeds of at least 30 Mbps will also be delivered through the Government's intervention.

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.

In tandem with the mapping consultation, intensive design and planning work is underway in my Department to produce a detailed intervention strategy. The strategy will address a range of issues in relation to the intervention including the optimum procurement model, ownership model for the infrastructure, intervention cost and likely market impact.

My Department has engaged external advisors to provide legal, economic, technical and financial advice on the various aspects of the Plan over the next two years. The next steps in this process will see a further public consultation on a detailed intervention strategy in mid-2015. The Intervention Strategy will be notified to the European Commission for State Aid clearance.

Following the public consultation, towards the end of this year a detailed procurement process will be undertaken in order to select a preferred bidder or bidders. The Department will design a tender in a way that maximises efficiencies and keeps the cost of the network build as low as possible. It is expected that the physical build of this network will commence from 2016.

This complex and ambitious project is a key priority for Government. It aims to conclusively address current connectivity challenges in Ireland.

North-South Interconnector

578. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the position regarding the requests of local communities in the north east that in the event of the proposed North-South interconnector proceeding that cables will be put underground; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3921/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): One of the key concerns arising from public consultation processes on EirGrid's Grid25 Strategy has been the extent to which undergrounding options have been explored, so as to allow ready comparison with overhead line solutions for individual projects.

In January 2014, an Independent Expert Panel (IEP) was established to oversee the integrity of the process being undertaken by EirGrid to report on comprehensive, route-specific studies of overhead and underground options for both the Grid Link and Grid West projects. The studies are required to take account of environmental (including visual amenity) impacts, technical efficacy and cost factors. The IEP will comment on the completeness, objectivity and comparability of the studies and reports.

The Panel was also asked to consider what work it might usefully undertake to establish whether or not there has been parity of treatment between the North South (N/S) project and the Grid West and Grid Link projects in terms of the work undertaken on the N/S project to date, including route-specific studies of overhead and underground options. Having considered and discussed all of the material provided by EirGrid, in July 2014, the Panel provided its unanimous opinion that, in all material respects, what has already been done on the N/S project is compatible with the methodologies now being employed on the Grid West and Grid Link projects.

The N/S project is part of an on-going process which is expected to be subjected to rigorous assessment as part of the planning processes in both jurisdictions (Ireland and Northern Ireland). It is expected that the planning application for the project will be submitted in April 2015.

Energy Schemes

579. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the position regarding grants (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3922/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): Energy efficiency is a key element of energy policy. Improving the efficiency with which we use our energy reduces costs and helps to make our energy system more environmentally sustainable. In addition, it is widely recognised that improving the thermal efficiency of our homes brings real benefits for health and well being.

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) delivers a range of energy efficiency schemes, on behalf of my Department, of which older people can avail. The Deputy will find all the necessary information on the Better Energy section of the SEAI website. For older people, for whom funding may be difficult, I direct the Deputy to the Better Energy Warmer Homes

scheme, which delivers energy efficiency improvements free of charge. Since 2000 the scheme has upgraded 112,000 homes with Government funding of €136 million.

Support for home improvements for older people, which includes structural upgrades to aid energy efficiency, is also available from the Department of Environment, Community & Local Government. Details on the Housing Aid for Older People scheme can be found on that Department's website. I understand that more than 23,000 homes have benefitted under this scheme since 2010.

Energy Conservation

580. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the position regarding grants for boilers burning wood (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3923/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The Draft Bioenergy Plan was published in October and will undergo Strategic Environmental and Appropriate Assessments which will inform the content of the finalised Plan. These assessment processes will commence shortly.

Analysis underpinning the draft Plan is that an additional bioenergy-focussed measure in the heat sector would represent the most cost effective means of meeting a number of different policy goals. Therefore, the draft Plan recommends the introduction of a Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) for larger heat users to change to heating solutions that produce heat from renewable sources, including wood pellets and other biomass. The RHI scheme, once designed, will require State Aid approval from the European Commission and further Government approval. It is proposed to have the scheme in place in 2016.

The uptake of renewable heat is also supported through Part L of the Building Regulations. Furthermore, the planned reviews of these regulations, for buildings other than dwellings, to achieve Nearly Zero Energy Buildings status, are also expected to result in increasing the uptake of renewable heat from a range of sources including biomass.

The Better Energy Homes scheme, operated by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), provides grants towards improving the energy efficiency of residential heating through upgrades of boilers, heating control upgrades and the installation of solar heating. The scheme does not provide grant support for biomass heating systems.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

581. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the promotion of the broadband mapping consultation process that has been embarked on with local community groups and vested interest organisations. [3935/15]

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 24 November last, a public consultation on a national high speed coverage map 2016 was launched. This consultation will close on the 12th February next. Submissions made in respect of this paper will feed in to the on-going work on developing a comprehensive intervention strategy which is scheduled to be completed by next summer. 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 30 Mbps 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 or 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 throughout the entire country.

In the run up to and since the publication of the Map, my Department has had over 80 meetings with operators and stakeholder groups representing a wide range of rural interests. I was also pleased that both the Irish Farmers Association and the Clare Local Development Company participated with me in launching the Map in Doolin, Co. Clare. The on-line Map and associated information links created by my Department has received over 50,000 hits since launch, which I believe is a strong indicator of the public's interest in this project.

My Department is continuing to actively engage with a wide range of stakeholders and my officials are always available to meet with representative groups or bodies to explain the background to the mapping exercise and the NBP in general. I would encourage all stakeholders, be they individuals or representative groups, to engage with the consultation process.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

582. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has read the document Investing in Our Transport Future: A Strategic Framework for Investment in Land Transport; his views that it will be in line with the objectives laid out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill, in particular in relation to our commitment to lowering our carbon emissions by 80% on 1990 levels by 2050 across the board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3884/15]

613. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is satisfied that his Department's document Investing in Our Transport Future: A Strategic Framework for Investment in Land Transport effectively addresses the need for carbon emission mitigation, as outlined in our commitments to the 2020 and 2050 EU carbon emissions climate legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3937/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 582 and 613 together.

My Department published a draft Framework "Investing in Our Transport Future" for public consultation in August last. The draft framework was drawn up by a steering group which set out to establish priorities and principles to guide future decisions around the level and focus of land transport investment.

Some 64 submissions were received from a wide range of stakeholders and interested par-

ties. Having considered the submissions made, my Department is in the process of finalising a consultation report and resulting revisions that are proposed to the draft Framework.

Ireland has particularly challenging carbon emissions targets for 2020 and the Government has announced an ambition to radically reduce carbon emissions by 2050. The work undertaken by the Steering Group considered the role of land transport investment in carbon emissions mitigation.

The draft Framework highlighted the important role that improvements in the planning system and investment in public transport and cycling and walking can play in reducing emissions, particularly in urban areas.

However, for a significant proportion of car journeys in Ireland such modal shift is not a viable option. A significant change in the carbon emitting profile of the Irish vehicle fleet will be needed, and this is outside of the scope of the funding framework. Similarly, any measures promoting or marketing modal shift or behavioural change to sustainable transport require current funding. They are therefore also outside of the scope of this particular document, which relates to the capital investment framework, although they are of course an important part of my Department's work more generally.

Revisions are being made to the draft Framework in light of the consultation responses which will put greater emphasis on the interaction between transport investment decisions and mitigation of carbon emissions and the revised Framework will be published in due course.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

583. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the role of clean light rail transport in tackling carbon emissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3885/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I fully support the development of light rail projects in areas of appropriate existing or predicted population levels which have a sound business case and are affordable. I recognise the importance of light rail as part of a range of sustainable travel options in our efforts to reduce CO₂ and other greenhouse emissions and mitigate against the impacts of climate change. However the development of any new project is subject to the availability of funding once the priority of maintaining existing assets to an appropriate standard is met.

Despite funding constraints the Luas Cross City, which is currently underway, was selected as a priority public transport project to be funded under the current capital plan. In creating a Luas network between the existing Green and Red lines the provision of Luas Cross City will be a critical element in reducing traffic congestion in Dublin City Centre. By reducing dependency on car travel it will also reduce CO₂ and other greenhouse emissions.

A number of large public transport projects for the Dublin area are currently under review. These are covered by the Fingal/North Dublin Transport Study, the updated business case for DART Underground and a preliminary Business Case for the BRT to Swords. This Study is examining all existing proposals (heavy rail, metro, Luas extensions) as well as other options for a rail-based transport solution to meet the area's needs in the long term.

I will consider the outcome of all these reports having regard to the costs and benefits of each project and to available Exchequer funding as well as other possible sources of funds. I expect to finalise this review by mid-2015.

National Driver Licensing Service

584. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason driving test facilities in County Galway do not have public toilet facilities and designated parking for the centre in view of the fact that such facilities are available at other test centres and are important for persons undertaking the driving test; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3926/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The operation of the driver testing service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

National Driver Licensing Service

585. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason driving tests for larger vehicles are not available in County Galway; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that applicants have to travel to Athlone, County Westmeath, which is a considerable distance for persons residing west of Galway city; if in the interests of fairness a suitable venue in Galway city for carrying out such categories of testing will be sought; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3927/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The operation of the driver testing service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Parking Provision

586. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will expand pay and display facilities for car parking at train stations nationwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3298/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The issue raised is a matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Public Transport Provision

587. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if submissions made towards the public consultation on the north Dublin transport strategy will be made public. [3299/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The public consultation process in relation to the Fingal / North Dublin Transport Study is being undertaken by the National Transport Authority (NTA) and the NTA is the recipient of the submissions associated with that consultation. Accordingly, a decision on the publication of those submissions will be a matter for the NTA.

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 Administration

588. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the sports capital programme will next be open for applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3400/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): Detailed preparations are being made at present in my Department for the next round of the Sports Capital Programme. I expect to make an announcement in the near future.

Compulsory Purchase Orders

589. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the legislation under which the National Roads Authority proposes to compulsory purchase order lands for the Dublin to Galway greenway, as that land can only be purchased under CPO for critical infrastructure projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3404/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I understand that both the National Roads Authority and Westmeath County Council both received similar legal advice that the appropriate legislation to compulsorily purchase land required for the purpose of the Dublin to Galway Greenway from Athlone to Galway is section 213 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000. This section makes no reference to critical infrastructure but does to the Local Authority having the power "for the purposes of performing any of its functions".

What is critical is the ability of the Government to protect the significant expenditure that will be incurred for the provision of this wonderful amenity between Dublin and Galway and the rights of cyclist and pedestrians to have permanent access to it for generations to come.

Roadworthiness Testing

590. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding the road testing of vintage vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3413/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Under the Government's 2013-2020 Road Safety Strategy, the Road Safety Authority (RSA) was tasked with conducting a review of the roadworthiness testing of vintage vehicles to determine the safety case and cost benefits, if any, for inclusion in roadworthiness testing.

The RSA has now completed this review which included a public consultation exercise that attracted in the region of 2,000 submissions. The scope of the RSA's review covered those vehicle types for which roadworthiness testing regimes currently exist namely, passenger cars, ambulances, motor caravans, buses, goods vehicles and their trailers.

My Department received the RSA's review findings and proposals recently and these will be examined by my officials with a view to submitting early recommendations to me which I will consider in due course.

Cycling Facilities Provision

591. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to expand bicycle lanes here; the projects ongoing or planned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3490/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): All funding available to my Department for the development of the National Cycle Network is now fully committed up to the end of 2016.

Under the National Cycle Network Funding Programme 2014-2016 three projects shared in €6.3m. for the delivery of three greenways in Kerry, Galway and Waterford. A further 11 greenway/cycleway projects were awarded funding under the €200m Government Stimulus Package for infrastructural development, €10m of which was earmarked for the development of greenways. Details of the projects funded are contained in the tables under.

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 Programme. I understand that a number of local authorities are positioning themselves to benefit from such opportunities

The delivery of a world class National Cycle Network for Ireland continues to be a priority for my Department.

National Cycle Network Funding Programme 2014-2016

County	Project	km	Grant amount
Kerry	Glenbeigh-Reenard Trail (Phase 2 and Phase 3)	26	3,458,281
Galway	Galway to Moycullen Greenway	12.4	2,000,000
Waterford	Clonea to Durrow Greenway (Phase 1)	7.2	897,739

Stimulus Funding 2014

County	Project	km	Grant amount
Clare	West Clare Greenway -Phase 1 - Ennis to Balllymacquiggan	5	400,000
Kerry	Cahersiveen to Reenard Point (Phase 1 Fertha Greenway)	5.75	450,000
Kerry	Tralee Fenit Trail - Phase 1 Rock Street to Casement Station	0.42	345,000
Kildare	Arthur's Way Greenway	25	311,000
Limerick	Patrickswell to Limerick City cycleway	4.14	420,000
Mayo	Monasteries of the Moy - part funding for project	14	250,000
Roscommon	Boyle to Lough Key Forest Park	24	400,000
Tipperary	Clonmel to Carrick-on-Suir Greenway	20	1,900,000
Waterford	Kilmeaden to Bilberry Greenway	9.6	1,100,000
Westmeath	Athlone to Mullingar Greenway	40	4,000,000
Westmeath	Coolnahay to the County Boundary	14.4	700,000

Public Transport Fares

592. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to reduce public transport prices and expand bus and rail services to incentivise the use of pub-

lic transport, particularly in view of the need to lower carbon emissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3491/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have given a commitment to supporting a well-funded public transport system into the future, recognising the vital role it plays in our economy and society generally. I committed to avoid further reductions in the Public Service Obligation (PSO) funding and ensured that in Budget 2015 PSO funding for bus and rail services was maintained at current levels. This is the first time this has happened since 2008. I also recently secured €110 million for public transport as part of the Supplementary Estimate for my Department.

Under the current capital plan the key priority with the level of resources available is to protect investments made to date and to maintain safety standards. If additional funds become available under the next capital plan, which is not certain, there will be many competing projects from all transport modes in all regions. Any additional funds will be prioritised for projects for which there is a clear need, which are affordable, have a sound business case and add value to existing infrastructure.

My Department is currently preparing the transport sector's contribution to the National Mitigation Plan, which is being co-ordinated by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. The obligation to prepare the Mitigation Plan is included in the Climate Action and Local Carbon Development Bill, which was published last Monday. Measures to promote the use of sustainable travel options, including public transport, are being considered in the context of this process.

Matters regarding public transport fares and services are matters 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 response within ten working days.

Local Improvement Scheme

593. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will increase the funding to Kerry County Council for local improvement scheme road projects to address the large waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3496/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Local Improvement Scheme provides funding for roads and laneways that Councils have not taken in charge. However, the maintenance and improvement of these is, in the first instance, a matter for the relevant landowner. There is no separate allocation for the LIS. Instead, local authorities may use up to 15% of their initial Discretionary Grant towards local improvement schemes should they wish to do so. The local contribution for these schemes remains at 20% of the total cost of the project. Furthermore, it is open to local authorities to supplement the percentage of their Discretionary Grant that they can use for the LIS with their own resources.

Some local authorities want a ring-fenced LIS allocation for private roads while others prefer to put the funding into public roads. I think this decision is best made at a local level.

Rail Network

594. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if Iarnród Éireann plans to install indicator points at each DART station to show commuters where each

train carriage will stop; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3506/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The issue raised is a matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Public Transport Fares

595. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views that the recent decrease in oil prices by almost 50% should be reflected by a reduction in public transport ticket prices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3512/15]

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 response within ten working days.

Roadworthiness Testing

596. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views that a change is required to the regulations relating to the definition of vintage cars so that there is a rolling 30-year age criteria rather than the current fixed date of pre-1980 vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3538/15]

601. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to provide exemptions from road worthiness tests to pre-1980 vintage veteran vehicles in order to reduce the regulatory burden on owners of historic vehicles in line with a similar exemption which already applies to pre-1980 vintage cars which do not require national car test road worthiness testing under the provisions of the Road Safety Authority (Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness) Act; the reasons vintage veteran vehicles were excluded from exemptions despite numerous public submissions on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3568/15]

602. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the exemption for testing of vintage vehicles will be changed to a 30-year rolling exemption; if this will also include buses, trucks and trailers in view of the fact that vintage vehicles are important from a hobby, heritage and employment point of view; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3680/15]

608. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way vintage veteran vehicles will be protected; his plans to maintain the exemption from testing for vehicles registered prior to 1 January 1980; his views on changing this to a 30-year rolling exemption; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3814/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 596, 601, 602 and 608 together.

Under the Government's 2013-2020 Road Safety Strategy, the Road Safety Authority (RSA) was tasked with conducting a review of the roadworthiness testing of vintage vehicles to determine the safety case and cost benefits, if any, for inclusion in roadworthiness testing.

The RSA has now completed this review which included a public consultation exercise that attracted in the region of 2,000 submissions. The scope of the RSA's review covered those vehicles types for which roadworthiness testing regimes currently exist namely, passenger cars, ambulances, motor caravans, buses, goods vehicles and their trailers.

My Department received the RSA's review findings and proposals recently and these will be examined by my officials with a view to submitting early recommendations to me which I will consider in due course.

Traffic Calming Measures

597. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will arrange to have traffic calming measures installed in Barraduff Village, County Kerry, especially at the Killarney side, as traffic is travelling at an alarming speed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3544/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects (including traffic calming measures on national roads) is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. I understand that the village of Barraduff, Co. Kerry is on the N72 national road route.

Noting the position as outlined, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Pension Provisions

598. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason his Department has failed to address the pension entitlement issues of those former employees of his Department that transferred to Aer Rianta before April 1970; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3546/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have no function in relation to the administration of the Irish Airlines (General Employees) Superannuation Scheme (IASS). However, I understand that this topic has been the subject of a number of reviews by my predecessors and senior civil servants in my Department over the years in which legal advice was sought on the matter. The position is that former employees of the Department of Transport and Power voluntarily resigned from the civil service upon accepting posts with Aer Rianta.

On transfer to Aer Rianta with their agreement, those employees also transferred from the Civil Service Pension Scheme to the IASS.

It is the Department's view that DAA (formerly Aer Rianta) has complied with its obligations to these former civil servants with regard to their pension entitlement in accordance with the terms agreed at the time they accepted a contract of employment with Aer Rianta.

Taxi Licences Renewals

599. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding a taxi-small public service vehicle licence renewal in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 3; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3555/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including licensing, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Departmental Funding

600. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding a grant in respect of an organisation (details supplied) in Dublin 6W; when all funds will be advanced to this organisation to clear the outstanding balance regarding works carried out on foot of receiving the grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3560/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): The letter of formal approval was issued to the named club on 14 November 2014. My Department received two invoices in January 2015. A payment of €13,506 was made to the club earlier this month. The club has confirmed that it has received this payment.

The remainder of the grant will be payable on receipt of valid paid invoices and the other supporting documentation i.e. bank statements, tax clearance certificates, certificate of compliance and a certificate of completion. The designated club contact should contact the Sports Capital Unit in Killarney if they need further information.

Questions Nos. 601 and 602 answered with Question No. 596.

EU Funding

603. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to apply for EU CER funding in 2015 for the proposed M7 motorway scheme, which involves carrying out necessary widening of the M7 southbound towards its intersection with the M9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3744/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I presume the funding programme the Deputy is referring to is the Connecting Europe Facility (or CEF) which runs for the period 2014-2020.

The current status of Exchequer finances combined with terms and conditions of the methodology and Regulations limits the possibilities for projects being put forward that require Exchequer co-financing for studies and work co-funding.

The co-funding rates under CEF-transport are low. This further limits the ability of organisations with projects requiring Exchequer co-funding to put forward projects and enter into commitments to complete projects within the timeframes specified in the CEF and Ten-T regulation. No Exchequer funding is in place to fund these projects and Ireland will not therefore be putting forward these schemes under this CEF call for proposals.

State Airports

604. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the loss of routes and reduction of services at Cork Airport in recent months; his plans to provide greater autonomy to Cork Airport to make commercial decisions to better enable it to compete with other airports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3753/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, the DAA is the body charged with statutory responsibility to manage, operate and develop Dublin and Cork Airports. In these circumstances, responsibility for routes and services at Cork Airport are matters for DAA and Cork Airport management, and are not matters in which I have a direct role.

That said, I am very conscious of the importance of Cork Airport for business and tourism in the Cork region. I am also very aware of, and concerned about, the continuing decline in passenger numbers at the airport. It was because of this decline that the Cork Airport Development Council (CADC) was established under an initiative of my predecessor, with the intention of bringing key local stakeholders together to foster a common understanding of issues of concern, identify potential opportunities for growth and to address the operating performance of the airport.

In relation to the question of greater autonomy for Cork Airport it should be noted that policy in relation to the future of Cork Airport was decided by Government in May, 2012 in the context of the decision to separate Shannon Airport from DAA. The Government decided at that time that the existing ownership of Cork Airport by DAA would be maintained for the present. Since that decision, DAA has put in place arrangements for the airport to be run as a stand-alone business unit within the Company, properly resourced at management level locally. In addition, two of the members of DAA Board represent Cork, thereby ensuring that issues pertaining to Cork Airport are considered at the highest level.

The new management structure is now bedded down and Cork Airport, the DAA and the CADC are focusing their efforts on identifying new route markets and developing new services. Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland have already invested in developing tourism attractions in the region served by the airport and in generating positive publicity for those attractions. I would encourage Cork Airport to highlight its role as a gateway to the region and to work with stakeholders to develop and market the tourism product.

Road Projects Status

605. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the planned upgrade of the Dunkettle interchange in County Cork; if funding is in place for the project to proceed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3754/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I have made clear in response to a number of similar questions previously, the general approach my Department has taken to future capital projects is to keep under review projects at various stages of planning and design which have been evaluated and appraised in order to have a pipeline of suitable “shovel ready” projects ready to avail of any funding opportunities that may arise. The project mentioned is among these. However as the Deputy will appreciate, given the reduced budget available to my Department for roads, I must prioritise the maintenance and upkeep of existing infrastructure.

The scope for progressing projects such as this will be dependent on the availability of funding in the future.

Cycling Facilities Provision

606. **Deputy Brian Walsh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on cycle greenways being critical infrastructure in the context of the compulsory purchase order process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3793/15]

607. **Deputy Brian Walsh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to use the compulsory purchase order process to facilitate the development of cycle greenways; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3794/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 606 and 607 together.

It is a matter for the County Council in charge of delivering a specific project to consider access to land on a case by case basis and take a multi-criteria approach in the route selection process. In the event of a proposed route traversing private land there are a number of options that can be considered by the authority the first being the permissive access model. This is a worthy mechanism for certain cycling and walking projects, particularly on a local level. It is a low cost community based model that provides access to the natural environment without interfering with the property rights of the landowners.

As stated above, negotiated permissive access from the perspectives of cost and public ownership has value but, for projects of national scale, consideration must be given to land purchase by agreement or if necessary by CPO. In the context of developing major cycling infrastructure projects that traverse long sections of privately owned land and involve major state investment it would be precarious to rely on permissive access where the associated agreements may be withdrawn at any time without recourse to the State.

While I fully support the need to consider negotiated financial agreements or, if required, CPO, I certainly recommend that all other options are considered before land purchase is decided on. There is no one size fits all approach to this.

Question No. 608 answered with Question No. 596.

Rail Services

609. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 993 of 14 January 2015, if his Department has funding available for the opening of railway stations; the extent that private funding is relied upon for the opening of railway stations; his views on the matter of providing railway stations in communities that are less commercially attractive to private investors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3827/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Under the current capital plan the key priority with the level of resources available is to protect investments made to date and to maintain safety standards. There is no Exchequer funding available to open new train stations. If additional funds become available under the next capital plan, which is not certain, there will be many competing projects from all transport modes in all regions.

Any additional funds will be prioritised for projects for which there is a clear need, which are affordable, have a sound business case and add value to existing infrastructure.

In the past there have been circumstances where Developer and Section 49 Levies have contributed, along with Exchequer funding, towards the cost of new railway stations in Cork and Dublin. In addition, some stations have been funded by private developer funding. These were in Strategic Development Zones or in areas of high predicted growth.

Irish Airlines Superannuation Scheme

610. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding changes to the pensions of persons currently in payment under the Irish Aviation Superannuation Scheme; if his attention has been drawn to the hardship this will cause for many persons; the steps being taken to resolve the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3839/15]

611. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he will take to ensure that the deferred members of the Irish airlines superannuation scheme are treated in a fair and equitable manner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3840/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 610 and 611 together.

I would once again like to make it clear that the solution that has been implemented to address the funding difficulties in the IASS is a matter for the Trustees, the companies participating in the scheme, the scheme members and the Pensions Authority.

Pension schemes are closely regulated under Irish and European pension law and the Pensions Authority is the national statutory regulatory authority in Ireland. There are prescribed procedures and limitations in place governing any reductions in pension rights introduced to address funding difficulties in a scheme such as the IASS. Policy in this regard is primarily a matter for my colleague the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection.

Section 50 of the Pensions Act was amended in 2013 by the Oireachtas to broaden the options available to the trustees of a pension scheme facing funding difficulties.

It is a matter for the trustees of the scheme, who are required under trust law to act in the best interest of all scheme members, to determine how the relevant provisions in the Pensions Acts might be applied to address a scheme's funding problems.

The proposal from the IASS trustee was approved by the Pensions Authority and was implemented on 31 December 2014. The IASS trustee has confirmed that these measures are in the overall best interest of the members of the IASS as a whole and are fully compliant with National and EU law.

I am very conscious of the difficulties these necessary changes cause for many scheme members, but the risks that would have arisen for all members, the companies involved and the wider economy if this solution had not been implemented were even greater.

Road Traffic Legislation

612. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 608 and 610 of 20 January 2015, if the road traffic Bill 2015 will include both legislation for the treaty on mutual recognition of disqualified drivers with the UK and legislation for roadside drug testing devices. [3843/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It is my intention that the Road Traffic Bill 2015 will include legislation for the treaty on mutual recognition of disqualified drivers with the UK and legislation for roadside drug testing, including allowing for use of devices.

Question No. 613 answered with Question No. 582.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

614. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason in the recent document, Investing in Our Transport Future: A Strategic Framework for Investment in Land Transport, the role of rail has been given such a low priority, particularly in view of the fact that rail is universally considered to be a low-carbon alternative to road transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3938/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The draft Framework “Investing in Our Transport Future” was published for public consultation in August last. Having considered the submissions made, my Department is in the process of finalising a consultation report and resulting revisions that are proposed to the draft Framework.

Key areas considered included the link between economic growth and transport investment, current investment levels vis-à-vis past levels and international norms, the funding necessary to keep existing land transport infrastructure at its current standard and the likely scale, nature and impact of transport demand on our network in the medium to long term along with an assessment of transport and demographic trends.

A set of principles was proposed to frame and prioritise land transport investment decisions, identifying key corridors and economic drivers for investment rather than mode specific projects. However, the role that investment in public transport can play in reducing emissions, particularly in urban areas, is highlighted in the draft Framework.

The draft Framework concludes that the key challenge with regard to investment in land transport is securing investment levels consistent with maintaining, renewing and improving a transport network that can efficiently support the economic and social needs of the country.

At the end of 2014 I brought forward a Supplementary Estimate which included additional new funding in the public transport capital investment programme of €101 million which along with maintaining the level of current PSO funding will ensure that the existing network can be maintained.

Furthermore, the draft Framework recommends the development of a new rail policy, intended to have regard to social and environmental considerations uniquely addressed by the rail network in addition to the economic and investment context already established in the report. I propose to address that recommendation over the coming months, beginning with a further consultation process on the role of rail in meeting our future transport needs.

Coastal Erosion

615. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps being taken to protect coastal road and rail infrastructure from storms; the projects that are currently under way in this regard; if he views the promised €250 million over the next five years to be sufficient to deal with the current and expected damage occurring as a result of more extreme weather conditions due to global warming; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3939/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I will shortly be making grant allocations to local authorities for 2015 in respect of regional and local roads. The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is of course the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority. It is a matter for local authorities to manage coastal protection works including those affecting coastal roads, in line with resources and in conjunction with national policy by the OPW.

My Department provides funding to Iarnród Éireann for the maintenance and renewal of rail infrastructure under the Infrastructure Manager Multi-Annual Contract (IMMAC). A total of €116m has been allocated for 2015 and it is a matter for Iarnród Éireann to prioritise the funding allocations, depending on a range of risk factors such, as inter alia, the type of asset, the condition of the asset, usage of the asset, or the location of the asset.

In 2014, my Department was retrospectively allocated €16.2m for local authorities to assist in the repair of damaged regional and local roads following the storms of 13 December 2013 - 6 January 2014. A total of €7m in retrospective funding was allocated last year to Iarnród Éireann for the damages arising in the same period.

Apart from carry over of €2.1 million into 2015 (from the €16.2 million referred to above) no further commitments have been given to my Department for funding to protect against the effects of severe weather or in respect of coastal infrastructure.

Road Traffic Legislation

616. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to the Topical Issue debate on 15 January 2015, if he will examine a reply (details supplied) issued by Dublin City Council which contradicts the information he provided to Dáil Éireann on the enforceability of road traffic legislation in public parks; and if he will liaise with Dublin City Council in order that it will be properly established whether local gardaí and local authorities are simply not well enough informed about road traffic legislation or whether there is evidence available from them about difficulties in enforcing road traffic legislation in public parks. [3945/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The reply from Dublin City Council which was attached to the Deputy's Question accurately reflects the position regarding the non-applicability of the Road Traffic Acts to public parks. My response to the Topical Issues Debate of 15 January last dealt with the topic raised, which was the use of 'scrambler bikes in public spaces'. My response would have been more expansive if I had known the full interest of the Deputy.

Road traffic legislation applies to the use of mechanically propelled vehicles in a public place and the Gardaí have responsibility for the enforcement of this legislation. For the pur-

poses of road traffic legislation, a 'public place' means any public road, and any street, road or other place to which the public have access with vehicles whether as of right or by permission and whether subject to or free of charge.

While this includes car parks and the road leading to them in public parks, it does not include parts of a park where mechanically propelled vehicles are not allowed to operate. The rules governing such places are generally contained in bye-laws made by the relevant local authorities and I note in this case that Dublin City Council point out that their bye-laws specifically state that vehicles such as motorbikes and scramblers are not permitted in parks, albeit that the Council said it had difficulty enforcing this.

It remains the position, however, that responsibility for public parks, including enforcement of the applicable bye-laws, is a matter for the relevant local authority.

Military Aircraft Landings

617. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 617 of 20 January 2015 if he will provide a breakdown of the country of origin of the 606 applications for exemptions in 2014 under the Air Navigation Carriage of Munitions of War Weapons and Dangerous Goods Order 1973. [3947/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The nationalities of the airlines making the 606 applications received in 2014 under the Air Navigation Carriage of Munitions of War Weapons and Dangerous Goods Order 1973 are as follows:

USA – 566

Turkey – 11

Ireland – 10

UK – 9

Netherlands – 3

Poland – 3

Russia – 1

Spain – 1

Switzerland – 1

Ukraine – 1

Military Aircraft Landings

618. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 617 of 20 January 2015 if he will clarify the statement on whether a foreign state is entitled to transport a large number of troops on their way to war through a neutral state; and whether or not those troops are carrying arms. [3948/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I have outlined previously, the permits granted by my Department under the Air Navigation (Carriage of

Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order, 1973, as amended, are for the carriage of munitions on civil aircraft in Irish airspace. I have no function as regards the passengers on board such civil aircraft.

I am advised by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade that Ireland's policy of military neutrality is characterised by non-participation in military alliances. Arrangements for the over-flight and landing of US military aircraft at Shannon Airport have been in place continuously under successive Governments for over fifty years. These arrangements, and those relating to the transit of US military personnel, are fully consistent with Ireland's policies and legal requirements, including our traditional policy of military neutrality.

Visual Artist's Workspace Scheme

619. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to the visual artists' workspace scheme; if 83% of that scheme's funding has been allocated to the urban centres of Dublin, Galway and Cork; if her attention has been further drawn to the stated aim of the scheme, which is assisting artists' workspaces throughout the country; the level of support from this scheme received by groups in County Louth; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3701/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Visual Artists' Workspace Scheme is administered by the Arts Council. The Arts Council operates under the provisions of the Arts Act 2003, which provides, inter alia, that the Council is independent in the performance of its functions in funding the Arts. As Minister, I cannot, therefore, review decisions of the Council in relation to such matters.

Special Areas of Conservation Appeals

620. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide a list of all appeals conducted by the Designated Areas Appeals Advisory Board in 2013 and 2014 on objections to the designation of sites to include; the location of each designated site regarding which an appeal was conducted; the outcome of each appeal; if an oral hearing formed part of the appeal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3863/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Following the completion of a Departmental review of an objection to the proposed designation of a site as a special area of conservation or special protection area, landowners may opt to take their cases to the Designated Areas Appeals Advisory Board, an independently chaired Board which makes recommendations to me, as Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, on such cases.

The appeals process includes an oral hearing.

The Board heard 17 Appeals over the period referred to in the Deputy's Question. The location of each site and the outcome of each hearing are outlined in the table below. In each case, the recommendation of the Board was accepted.

	SITE NAME	SITE CODE	COUNTY	DATE OF ORAL HEARING	OUTCOME
1	Derryveagh and Glendowan Mountains SPA	4039	Donegal	08/03/2013	Partly Successful

2	Derryveagh and Glendowan Mountains SPA	4039	Donegal	08/03/2013	Partly Successful
3	Derryveagh and Glendowan Mountains SPA	4039	Donegal	08/03/2013	Partly Successful
4	Derryveagh and Glendowan Mountains SPA	4039	Donegal	08/03/2013	Partly Successful
5	Derryveagh and Glendowan Mountains SPA	4039	Donegal	08/03/2013	Partly Successful
6	Kenmare River SAC	2158	Kerry	11/04/2013	Unsuccessful
7	Inishbofin, Omev, Turbot Islands SPA	4231	Galway	08/05/2013	Partly Successful
8	Inishbofin, Omev, Turbot Islands SPA	4231	Galway	08/05/2013	Partly Successful
9	Inishbofin, Omev, Turbot Islands SPA	4231	Galway	08/05/2013	Partly Successful
10	Inishbofin, Omev, Turbot Islands SPA	4231	Galway	08/05/2013	Partly Successful
11	Inishbofin, Omev, Turbot Islands SPA	4231	Galway	08/05/2013	Partly Successful
12	Inishbofin, Omev, Turbot Islands SPA	4231	Galway	08/05/2013	Partly Successful
13	Inishbofin, Omev, Turbot Islands SPA	4231	Galway	08/05/2013	Successful
14	Inishbofin, Omev, Turbot Islands SPA	4231	Galway	15/05/2013	Unsuccessful
15	Lough Derg (Shannon) SPA	4058	Galway	08/05/2014	Unsuccessful
16	Lough Derg (Shannon) SPA	4058	Clare	11/06/2014	Unsuccessful
17	Falcarragh to Meenlaragh SPA	4149	Donegal	17/04/2014	Successful

Air Services Provision

621. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the tendering for services and aerodrome management between the Aran Islands and Inishbofin and Cleggan, County Galway, will be separated to encourage the use of the latter facilities for north west Connemara, County Galway. [3928/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): The aerodromes on the Aran Islands and at Cleggan and Inishbofin are currently under one management contract. This contract will end on 30 September 2015. My Department is currently seeking tenders from consultants to assist it in relation to the procurement process for this contract as well as the Aran Islands air service contract.

My Department has no plans at this time to seek separate contracts for the management of the Aran Islands and the Cleggan and Inishbofin aerodromes. It is my Department's view that this process will not interfere with any future plans to dispose of the aerodromes at Cleggan and Inishbofin.

27 January 2015