

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].

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

Questions Nos. 7 to 122, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 123 to 131, inclusive, answered orally.

Climate Change Negotiations

132. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport now that the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill has been published, his Department's response in terms of the preparation of a sectoral emissions reduction plan; if he plans to prepare a draft plan in anticipation of the national adaptation plan; if such a plan will be left until the latter end of the 2017 timescale envisaged in the Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4337/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill creates a statutory obligation to develop a National Mitigation Plan for Ireland. My Department is in the process of preparing our contribution to the Plan and, in keeping with commitments under the Aarhus Convention, my officials intend to invite stakeholders to a consultative workshop over the coming weeks on the transport elements of the Plan. As the Deputy will know, the National Plan will also incorporate input from the key sectors of electricity generation, built environment and agriculture.

In terms of the overall timeframe for the development of the National Mitigation Plan, it will be necessary to ensure compliance with the principles and requirements of EU Directives and Regulations associated with Strategic Environmental and Appropriate Assessments. Not only will these assessments include statutory consultative phases but the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill also provides for a consultation process on the draft National Mitigation Plan. I understand the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Minister Alan Kelly, proposes to allow a significant period of time for the public and stakeholders to feed into the continued development of the Plan.

As the Deputy refers, the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill also creates a statutory obligation for my Department to develop a Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the Transport Sector. Good progress has been made to date and, subject to the level of obligation

required in relation to Strategic Environmental and Appropriate Assessments, I would hope to be in a position to publish the Plan by the end of this year.

Land Acquisition

133. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the model being used, including issues such as the land acquisition and access, to develop greenway projects. [4346/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): With regard to the various models used to deliver individual projects 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.

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.

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.

Sale of Aer Lingus

134. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the sale of Aer Lingus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4360/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to my reply to today's Priority PQs 123 and 124 concerning the State's shareholding in Aer Lingus and recent approaches from IAG.

Sale of Aer Lingus

135. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the take-over bid by IAG for Aer Lingus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4362/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to my reply to today's Priority PQs 123 and 124 concerning the State's shareholding in Aer Lingus and the recent approaches from IAG.

Sports Capital Programme Administration

136. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide details of plans his Department may have for a sports capital scheme in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4286/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): In 2012 I was pleased to make allocations totalling €31m under the 2012 round of the Sports Capital Programme. The 2012 round of the SCP was the first round of the Programme since 2008. The absence of an SCP between 2008 and 2012 meant that there was a huge level of demand for grants. As a result there were a record number of applications in 2012 with a total of 2170 applications. I also made changes to the Programme in 2012 to make it accessible to more clubs and organisations than ever before. I believe that these changes also led to the record number of applications in 2012.

I was very pleased to announce a total of €40.5 million last year under the 2014 round of the Sports Capital Programme. A total of 2,036 applications were received under the 2014 Programme, the second highest number ever received. A total of 821 of the successful allocations were towards local sports clubs and organisations, with the remaining 59 allocated to regional or national projects.

I am delighted that I was successful in receiving enough money for 2015 to launch another round of the SCP this year. This will be the third round of the Programme since this Government came into office, a very significant achievement by any standards, particularly against the backdrop of the continuing economic challenges facing the country and it shows this Government's commitment to the excellent work being done by sporting organisations throughout the country.

Detailed preparations are being made at present in my Department for the 2015 SCP. I expect to make an announcement in the near future.

Dublin Bus Services

137. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update on the plans for the Swiftway rapid bus services; and if he will make a commitment to keep the service under the operation of Dublin Bus. [4341/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The National Transport Authority's Integrated Implementation Plan 2013-2018 has proposed three Swiftway BRT schemes, Blanchardstown to UCD, Clongriffin to Tallaght and Swords/Airport to City Centre. The NTA have held two non-statutory public consultations regarding the Swiftway BRT, one focused on introducing BRT as a new public transport mode for Dublin and the second related to the preferred route for the Swords/Airport to City Centre route.

The NTA has been progressing some of the technical arrangements for the Swords BRT route and will submit a preliminary Business Case in February. In relation to the Blanchardstown to UCD proposal work is ongoing on the identified route corridor with a view to producing a Final Route Option Report later this year. Work on the Clongriffin to Tallaght BRT is at an earlier stage but it is hoped to have the Route Option Report finalised next year.

No decision will be taken on the Swords/Airport BRT proposal pending the completion of the Fingal/North Dublin Study which will advise on the best rail project to address the long

term needs of the Swords/Airport corridor. I expect to receive this report at the end of March.

It is accepted that BRT will not, on its own, replace rail-based solutions where a higher capacity solution is required in the long-term, such as on the Swords/Airport corridor.

I will carefully consider the results of the various reports having regard to the costs and benefits of each project, affordability and availability of funding including from non exchequer sources. My aim is to recommend the project that gives best value for money over an appropriate time period.

With regard to the operation of any BRT service, the NTA has entered into a new contract with Dublin Bus for the period up to December 2019. They have advised that Dublin Bus will undertake the operation of any of the three proposed BRT services that become operational during the period of this public service contract.

Tourism Promotion

138. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason a tourism initiative similar to The Gathering is not being developed around the centenary of the 1916 Rising; his plans to commemorate the Rising; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4350/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The development of the national commemorative programme in 2016 is the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. This programme is being developed in conjunction with relevant stakeholders, including my Department. In regard to a specific tourism initiative, I will examine the prospective appeal of the programme of events to overseas visitors but I am acutely aware of the commemorative, solemn and respectful nature of many of these events. I believe that it is fundamental to ensure that is not compromised. Accordingly, when the programme is finalised, the tourism agencies will integrate information about appropriate events into their promotion activities so that visitors to Ireland are well informed of the opportunities to experience these events, without prejudicing these sensitive matters.

The new Tourism Policy Statement, which is due to be published shortly, includes a policy objective to examine how The Gathering or other similar project might be repeated in the future without diluting its impact and to develop the tourism opportunities arising from themed years in other areas of Government. Specific initiatives to boost tourism, both overseas and domestic, can be considered in that context. However, any decision on how best to focus supports will be based on overall tourism prospects and development opportunities, underscored by the need to maximise returns on limited resources.

Traffic Management

139. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way he plans to address the increasing congestion on the M50; the current capacity reached at rush hour on the M50; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4354/15]

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, such as the M50 is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads

Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

A substantial upgrade of the M50 was completed in 2010. This resulted in the addition of a third lane in both directions from the M1 to Sandyford and a fourth auxiliary lane in places together with the development of freeflow junctions and the introduction of barrier free tolling. This major investment has significantly enhanced the capacity of the motorway. There are no proposals at present for further investment in additional capacity.

One of the conditions attached to an Bord Pleanála's approval of the upgrade was the publication of a scheme of demand management measures. The NRA in conjunction with the relevant local authorities published its M50 Demand Management Report in April 2014.

Looking to the future and increased travel demand as the economy recovers further we will need to address congestion across the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) and not just on the M50. In this context I have asked the National Transport Authority, as the agency responsible for strategic traffic management in the GDA, to work with the NRA and the GDA local authorities to prepare a report on congestion and to outline actions and investment that might be required in the short, medium and long term. I expect the report to be completed within a few months.

Air Navigation Orders

140. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide details on his Department's role in the processing of exemptions for the carriage of munitions of war on civil aircraft under the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973; the arrangements between his Department and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in this regard; the number of such exemptions granted by his Department in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4348/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The carriage of weapons and munitions by civilian aircraft is prohibited under the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order, 1973, as amended, unless an exemption has been obtained from the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. My Department's role in the processing of exemptions is to examine and administer applications for exemptions and to issue exemptions to airlines where appropriate, taking account of aviation and other public policy considerations.

As part of this procedure the views of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade are sought in relation to foreign policy issues. The Department of Justice and Equality and the Irish Aviation Authority are also consulted. A copy of each application is also sent to the Department of Defence for information. There were 606 exemption applications in 2014. 584 permits were issued, three were withdrawn and 19 were refused.

Penalty Points System Investigation

141. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views following the latest Garda report revealing widespread continued breaches in the penalty point system, in view of the importance of the system operating correctly in the interests of road safety and the need for all drivers to have confidence in the system. [4332/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The fixed charge and penalty point system is an important element of our overall road safety strategy

and the Government will ensure that the most effective and equitable system is in place to maintain public confidence in the system. In January 2015, the Garda Professional Standards Unit concluded a report following its examination of the Procedures, Policy and Decision Making Processes in relation to cancellations in the Fixed Charge Processing System. The examination was carried out following concerns expressed regarding certain cancellation decisions within the System. While the findings and conclusions of the Report are matters appropriately to be addressed by An Garda Síochána and the Department of Justice and Equality, some of the recommendations contained impact on the functions of my Department. The recommendations are being studied within my Department at present, in consultation with the Criminal Justice Working Group, and they will be advanced as appropriate.

Sale of Aer Lingus

142. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will reject the International Airlines Group takeover bid for Aer Lingus, in the interests of maintaining the future of the airline, its jobs and key strategic role in providing connectivity with the rest of the world for business and tourism. [4333/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to my reply to today's Priority PQs 123 and 124 concerning the State's shareholding in Aer Lingus and the recent approaches from IAG.

Sports Capital Programme Administration

143. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the fraud prevention measures utilised on funding provided through the sports capital grant programme; the investigations that occurred last year; his plans to increase anti-fraud measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4351/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): The Department has in place a number of controls to ensure that SCP grants are only paid out when the terms and conditions of the Sports Capital Programme have been met. These are detailed in the letter of provisional allocation that is sent to each grantee when an allocation is made.

Grantees are warned at application and allocation stage that the submission of false or misleading information to the Department at any stage is treated very seriously and that any organisation that does not comply with the terms and conditions of the Sports Capital Programme may be subject to inspection, have their grant withdrawn, be required to repay all or part of a grant and/or be barred from making applications for a period of time. They are also warned that all serious breaches of the terms and conditions of the Programme will be notified to An Garda Síochána.

The Department has detailed procedures, drawn up in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General, in place for dealing with suspected instances of non-compliance with the terms and conditions of the SCP.

The Department strives at all times to strike an appropriate balance between the need to ensure the funding is used for the purpose for which it is intended and the need to allow grants to be drawn down in an efficient and timely manner. In particular, the introduction in 2010 of the requirements for SCP grantees to provide certificates of compliance and proof of payment

to suppliers has strengthened the controls to further reduce the risk of non-compliance. In addition, in line with Department of Public Expenditure Guidelines, a number of “spot checks” of capital projects are carried out by the Capital Inspections Team within the Finance Division of the Department each year. In 2014 there were 18 such capital inspections of SCP grantees.

Sale of Aer Lingus

144. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the Government's position on International Airlines Group's €1.3 billion takeover bid of Aer Lingus. [4336/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to my reply to today's Priority PQs 123 and 124 concerning the State's shareholding in Aer Lingus and the recent approaches from IAG.

Cross-Border Co-operation

145. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for improving cross-Border transport links; and if he will commit to meeting with his counterparts in Stormont to discuss improvements in access and planning of transport services. [4343/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, transport was specifically identified in the Good Friday Agreement as one of the key areas for North/South cooperation and consequently is one in which the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meets in Sectoral format. The Council meets in this format in order to make decisions on common policies and approaches in the area of transport including areas where there may be scope to better integrate transport provision throughout the island.

The most recent NSMC meeting in Transport Sectoral format took place on 4 November 2014 in Armagh where I met Mark H Durkan MLA, Minister for the Environment in Northern Ireland and Danny Kennedy MLA Minister for Regional Development in Northern Ireland. Amongst the agenda items for this meeting were Strategic Transport Priorities; Cycling/Cross Border Greenways; an update on the A5 and A8 major road projects; a progress report on the work which is under way to allow for the mutual recognition of penalty points; a review of the ongoing cooperation in the areas of road user and vehicle safety as well as a discussion on EU matters which impact on the transport sector in the two jurisdictions. Other items which have previously featured on the agenda at NSMC Transport meetings have included the All Island Freight Forum, developments on the Dublin/Belfast Rail line and cross-border community based rural transport.

The next NSMC meeting in Transport Sectoral format is scheduled for 22 April and the agenda is likely to again feature a number of the issues listed above as well as providing an opportunity for a general discussion on improvements in cross-border transport links. Overall there is excellent cooperation between my Department and the relevant Departments in Northern Ireland in the transport area. I look forward to this cooperation continuing and to availing of any other mutually beneficial opportunities in relation to cross-border transport links in the future.

Road Projects

146. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to confirm funding for the upgraded M7 Naas-Osberstown interchange and Sallins bypass; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that this stretch of motorway is the most dangerous in the State in terms of incidents recorded annually; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4347/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, I have answered many questions regarding the M7 Naas Bypass widening, the Osberstown Interchange and the Sallins bypass since I became Minister last year. Most recently, I took a Topical Issue debate on 15th January 2015 where I set out the current position regarding funding for this scheme. I am happy to once again re-state that position.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding regarding the national roads programme. The construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads, such as the Naas Bypass widening, is a matter for the National Roads Authority under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007, in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. As part of its remit the NRA monitors collisions across the national road network. The assessment and prioritisation of individual national road projects is a matter for the NRA within its capital budget and in accordance with section 19 of the Roads Act.

With regard to the Osberstown interchange and the Sallins bypass the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources, supplemented by State road grants. The selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is, therefore, a matter for the local authority.

Owing to the national financial position, there have been very large reductions in roads expenditure in recent years. The reality is that the available funds do not match the amount of work that needs to be done to maintain existing road infrastructure or address demands for new road improvement projects. Funding in 2008 was €2.3 billion while funding this year is around €730 million for the national, regional and local road network. Unfortunately, the current financial realities are such that the budgets proposed for my Department for 2016 and 2017 indicate that capital funding will continue to be very tight, and my ability to progress new projects and PPPs is limited.

I acknowledge it is important to restore over time capital funding for the transport sector to ensure that infrastructure is maintained but, as of now, I am not in a position to give a commitment in regard to funding of the projects in question, although I acknowledge their national and local importance.

Wild Atlantic Way Project

147. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on a new marketing initiative to promote the winter Wild Atlantic Way, to bring more visitors to drive the Wild Atlantic Way during October to April months; his views on whether the Wild Atlantic Way is as spectacular a winter destination as a summer destination; his views on whether increasing visitor numbers in the winter months would have a significant impact on the tourism sector and wider economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4294/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): The autumn/winter season is already recognised as being of significant importance for the tourism industry as it usually yields as much as 30% of Ireland's annual overseas tourism

business. Figures published last week by the CSO show that the number of overseas visits to Ireland grew by 7.3% between October and December 2014, when compared with the same period in 2013.

The Wild Atlantic Way has been a key focus of Tourism Ireland's extensive overseas promotional activity to sustain and grow tourism in the shoulder and off-peak seasons. For example, Tourism Ireland's €1 million end-of-year campaign, which was rolled out in Great Britain, the United States and Mainland Europe in December 2014, included several Wild Atlantic Way attractions in television, cinema and print advertising.

Decisions on how the Wild Atlantic Way is marketed overseas is a matter for Tourism Ireland Limited, and in the case of the domestic tourism market, it is a matter for Fáilte Ireland. These decisions are not subject to my approval. Accordingly, I have also referred the Deputy's Question to both agencies for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Road Tolls

148. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his discussions with his UK counterpart in view of the new HGV tolls applying to Irish hauliers there; his plans on introducing a similar toll system here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4353/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The introduction of the UK HGV levy was an unwelcome development for Irish hauliers, particularly for those operating in areas around the border with Northern Ireland. My Department lobbied extensively against the application of the UK HGV road user levy in Northern Ireland, but the UK Minister for Transport refused to grant any significant exemption beyond the small sections of NI roads that criss-cross the border.

In relation to the introduction of a pay-as-you-go road user charge regime in Ireland, this is being examined by my Department through the cross-Departmental Group on HGV Road Charging. The Group issued a consultation paper on potential reform of the commercial vehicle motor tax system to stakeholders on 27 November. On completion of the consultation process, the Group will submit a report with its recommendations to myself and the Ministers for Environment and Finance for consideration.

This Government recognises the importance of the haulage sector to the Irish economy and we have introduced a number of initiatives to support Irish hauliers. We have introduced legislation to clamp down on unlicensed hauliers, a new on-line system for haulage licensing has been introduced and we have cut costs for hauliers through the fuel duty rebate, which is worth up to €33 million per annum to the industry.

In November I met with the Minister for Finance and representatives of the Irish hauliers to discuss options for reducing the motor tax burden on the haulage sector. The Minister for Finance at this meeting committed to reducing road tax on HGVs of over 12 tonnes, with a tapering of the reduction for vehicles below that weight, starting in this year's Budget.

Rail Services

149. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his policy

in relation to the development of heavy rail services throughout the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4293/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Priority Question No 127 which I answered earlier.

Sale of Aer Lingus

150. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on widespread concern that the possible takeover of Aer Lingus by IAG could result in large job losses and threaten connectivity to the UK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4365/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have addressed the issue raised in the Deputy's question about connectivity to the UK and jobs in Priority Questions Nos. 123 and 124

I want to add that since the Government's Action Plan for Jobs was initiated in 2012 we have seen the creation of 80,000 new jobs. The plan for 2015 was launched last week, with an emphasis on regional enterprise strategies across the country. It contains a number of important action points to help create employment in particular in tourism, but also in transport and sport.

Public Transport Provision

151. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the six short listed schemes in the Fingal-north Dublin transport study appraisal report; and when there will be a long overdue high capacity light rail public transport solution serving the Swords-Dublin Airport-Dublin city corridor. [4335/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Fingal/North Dublin study currently under way is an independent study commissioned by the National Transport Authority (NTA) to identify the optimum long term public transport solution to meet the needs of the corridor. Phase One of the Study was published on 8th December and six short-listed project options were identified for further detailed evaluation. A public consultation process was also launched at that time. Under the next stage, the six shortlisted projects will be subject to further analysis assessing cost, engineering, environmental and usage forecasts. This will form the basis for the selection of the recommended preferred option.

The NTA has indicated that they expect to have the output of this next phase of the Study available to me at the end of March. That output will then require careful consideration in tandem with other analyses being undertaken, including the updating of a business case for the DART Underground project and the work being carried out in the preparation of a draft Transport Strategy for the GDA. I anticipate that I will finalise this review by mid-year, in conjunction with the development of the transport strategy for the region.

It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the proposed shortlisted projects. Moreover pending the outcome of the study it would be premature to comment on the timeline for delivery of the preferred project.

Cycling Facilities Funding

152. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on the position of the introduction of greenway projects in County Galway. [4345/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Galway County Council received €2 million in funding under the National Cycle Network Funding Programme 2014-2016 for the delivery of a 12.4 kilometre cycleway from Galway to Moycullen.

The project consists of developing a walking/cycling greenway along 11.4 kilometres of the dismantled Connemara railway line between Galway and Clifden with the remaining 1 kilometre along a quiet local road.

This phase, which is the first of two, will start in Galway City and finish just west of Moycullen village. This project forms part of Corridor 2 - Dublin to Clifden as highlighted in the National Cycle Network Scoping Study.

The 277 kilometre Dublin to Galway Greenway is also being delivered as funding becomes available. The preferred route corridor has been selected for the Athlone to Galway section. The preferred route will pass through Shannonbridge, Loughrea, Craughwell, Clarinbridge and Oranmore and will run along the coast to Galway.

In terms of the design of the route, the first stage of public consultation has been completed. I understand that there has been some negative response from a small number of landowners along pockets of the route corridor, however, I expect Galway County Council to make every effort to evaluate the feedback received at the public meetings to refine the route corridor to ensure that all possible alternatives are considered.

Rural Transport Services Provision

153. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to implement the recommendations contained within the CEDRA report pertaining to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4288/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There are five recommendations of the CEDRA Report that come within the remit of my Department, Recommendations 17, 18, 26, 27 and 28. Recommendation 18 relates to the Rural Transport Programme for which Minister for Local, Community and Rural Economic Development, Ann Phelan, has responsibility within this Department.

Recommendation 17 relates to the improvement of the road network. As recognised in the report, financial constraints have meant that investment in road infrastructure has had to be cut back significantly. The priority at present for the DTTS regional and local road grants is the maintenance/renewal of roads and regional road bridges.

On the national side, a limited number of PPP road projects are being progressed, including the important Gort to Tuam scheme on the Atlantic Corridor which is at construction stage with a view to completion in 2018 and the New Ross Bypass and Enniscorthy to Gorey scheme in the south east on which the procurement process is being progressed.

Scope for funding specific improvement projects will depend on the availability of funding under future capital investment plans.

Recommendation 18 relates to improving and integrating the Rural Transport Programme (RTP) into the overall public transport system. In April 2012 responsibility for managing the

RTP was assigned to the National Transport Authority (NTA) as part of new arrangements for integrated local and rural transport approved by Government in January 2012 to deliver on its commitment in the Programme for Government to maintain and extend the RTP with other local transport services as much as practicable. This role for the NTA, coupled with its national remit for securing the provision of public passenger transport services, enables the development of better links between local and rural transport services and scheduled bus and rail services.

A restructuring of the RTP, announced in July 2013, involves the establishment of 17 Transport Co-ordination Units (TCUs) in place of the 35 RTP Groups which have delivered rural transport services until now. To date 11 TCUs have been established and the remainder will be very shortly. The NTA has replaced the RTP groups as the contracting party for service provision and the new TCUs will manage the contracted services on behalf of the NTA.

Recommendations 26, 27 and 28 are tourism related. A new Tourism Policy Statement entitled “People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025” was presented to Cabinet by me on 14th January last and was approved by the Government. The Policy Statement, which will be published shortly, notes the recommendations on tourism that are contained in the CEDRA report. Following publication of the Tourism Policy Statement, I will establish a Tourism Leadership Group (TLG), consisting of representatives of key public sector bodies and representatives of the tourism sector, to begin work on an Action Plan to deliver the objectives in the Tourism Policy Statement. The development and growth of tourism outside the main urban centres will be a central consideration in the deliberations of the Tourism Leadership Group.

The National Cycle Network (NCN) Programme is allocating approximately €23.5 million over the period 2012 to 2016 (including €10 million allocated under the recent stimulus package) to advance routes that will provide valuable transport and recreational infrastructure, with the added potential to enhance tourist activity for the areas concerned. Fifteen cycling projects were completed by local authorities across the country with €7 million in funding provided under the first tranche of NCN funding for the years 2012/2013. A further 3 projects shared in funding of €6.3 million under the second tranche of NCN funding for the years 2014-2016.

Under the €10 million investment package for greenway development announced as part of the €200 million national infrastructure package, 11 cycling projects were selected to share in this funding.

Roadworthiness Testing

154. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will review the regulations covering the commercial vehicle roadworthiness certification; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4287/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Commercial vehicle owners have, for a long number of years, been obliged to test their vehicle annually. This is a legal obligation in Ireland and throughout the EU. Roadworthiness testing standards are aimed at detecting any wear and tear, deterioration or alterations that could affect the roadworthiness or safety of the vehicle.

Since October 2013, the certificate of roadworthiness (CRW) issuing system is aligned to the longstanding obligation to have commercial vehicles tested annually. The period of validity of the CRW is calculated by reference to the last test due date. A delay in completing the test has the effect of reducing the validity period of the CRW. This change was introduced for the purpose of ensuring that an operator who did not test the vehicle by the due date does not gain

any economic advantage over an operator who tested their vehicle in accordance with the legal requirements.

The Road Safety Authority is in the process of reviewing the system as it applies to vehicles which are off the road for more than a year and I expect to receive the outcome of this review later this year. Any adjustments to the system in respect of vehicles overdue the test by more than one year which have been off the road would need to be assessed against a background of strong overall compliance as well as road safety considerations.

Legislative Process

155. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for the implementation of Part 4 of the Taxi Regulation Act 2012 and the relevant Schedules; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that some gardaí have been meeting with some taxi licence holders and telling them they will be disqualified upon implementation; and if this is correct procedure. [4340/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have no role in the implementation of Part 4 of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013 which provides for mandatory disqualification from holding a small public service vehicle (SPSV) driver licence on conviction for specified serious offences. The specification of offences to which mandatory disqualification applies is based on the principle of ensuring the welfare and safety of passengers.

The disqualification has automatic effect under the Act. Where a disqualification arises from convictions obtained before the commencement of the Act, the disqualification is suspended for a period of 12 months. There is also a right of appeal under which the appropriate court can review a range of matters pertinent to the suitability of the appellant to be a SPSV driver.

I understand that, subsequent to the commencement of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013, the National Transport Authority, which is responsible for the regulation of the SPSV sector, contacted holders of SPSV driver licences advising them of the new provisions in relation to such mandatory disqualification and also informing them of the right to make an appeal to the courts where applicable.

Air Navigation Orders

156. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport whether he is satisfied with existing arrangements between his Department and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade regarding the processing of exemptions for carriage of munitions of war on civil aircraft under the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973, and his plans to change the current system. [4331/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am satisfied that the existing arrangements, which provide for consultation between my Department and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade are operating satisfactorily. My Department consults the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on matters of foreign policy on all exemption applications under the 1973 Order.

If that Department has any objections or concerns on grounds of foreign policy, an exemption is not granted.

Taxi Regulations

157. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he had discussions with the National Transport Authority regarding the changes to the taxi fares model and that consultative process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4342/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The review of taxi fares is a matter for the National Transport Authority as the independent regulatory authority for the small public service vehicle sector under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

Pension Provisions

158. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the contact his Department has had with Aer Lingus and the Shannon Airport Authority regarding the way different actuarial assumptions were used in both companies in their recent proposals for future pension provision; and his views regarding same. [4334/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In the context of the Trustee funding proposal for the Irish Airlines (General Employees) Superannuation Scheme (IASS), reference to the actuarial assumptions was included in the Expert Panel report of June 2014. At the request of my Department and the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, the Expert Panel was asked to re-engage with SIPTU and ICTU in relation to matters dealt with in its report, including the actuarial assumptions, and to provide clarity on those matters. There were also discussions immediately before Christmas between the Departments, members of the Expert Panel and ICTU in relation to this engagement which helped to refine the areas of focus for the Panel. The Department is in contact with daa and SAA has been kept informed on relevant matters throughout.

That process is ongoing at present and it is for the Panel to complete its work as effectively and efficiently as possible in providing the clarifications sought. In light of the fact that the Trustees proposal aimed at addressing the significant deficit in the scheme was implemented with effect from 31 December 2014, it is now vital that the industrial relations issues among certain daa/SAA staff are resolved as soon possible.

Tourism Policy

159. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his policy in relation to the development of long distance greenways for cycling and walking; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4292/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The vision of the National Cycle Policy Framework which was adopted in 2009 was to “create a strong cycling culture in Ireland”. Objective 3 of this policy sought to “provide designated rural cycle networks especially for visitors and recreational cycling”. The policy identified the delivery of a National Cycle Network as the key to achieving this objective.

Following the policy launch the National Roads Authority were requested to carry out an initial scoping study into the potential scale and extent of a National Cycle Network for Ireland. An advisory group, including all the necessary stakeholders, was set up under the auspices of the National Trails Advisory Committee to assist in this work. The initial scoping study,

published in 2010, identified routes to connect settlements around Ireland with populations of 10,000 or more and which would tie into tourist attractions around the country. The resulting potential network consisted of 13 corridors totalling around 2,000 kilometres in length.

It is accepted that in order to grow cycling in Ireland as a valuable tourism resource it is necessary to have a network of routes of substantial length and quality in place which will be challenging and attractive to cyclist (and walkers) of all levels.

The 277 kilometre Dublin-Galway corridor was identified as the ideal corridor to progress first for a number of reasons, the main being that the extensive route when completed would make sense in its own right, it also uses, for much of the route, land in State ownership. The route also forms part of Eurovelo 2 which provides a ready-made branding for the project that will assist in attracting overseas visitors.

Sport and Recreational Development

160. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for promoting women in sport in view of the successes of women athletes here. [4344/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): I recognise the importance of promoting women in sport and one of my key goals for sport is to encourage more women and girls to get involved in sport and physical activity. The Government is continuing to promote women in sport through its investment in the Women in Sport Programme operated by the Irish Sports Council. Over €16m has been invested in the Programme since it was established in 2005 to address the issue of female participation in sport in Ireland.

Research published by the Irish Sports Council last year indicates that investment in the Women In Sport Programme is delivering results. The Irish Sports Monitor Report 2013 shows that participation in sport among females has increased from 39% in 2011 to 42.7% in 2013. This is a very encouraging development.

The Irish Sports Council, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the promotion, development and co-ordination of sport, including the development of strategies aimed at increasing female participation in sport.

I have referred the Deputy's question to the Council for further information in relation to its strategies and plans for promoting women in sport. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

Sale of Aer Lingus

161. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on discussions held with trade union representatives and community organisations on the sale of Aer Lingus. [4361/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I meet regularly with trade unions and community organisations in the course of my work. I have had one such meeting specifically dealing with the approaches by IAG to Aer Lingus.

At its request, I met with representatives of ICTU including SIPTU and IMPACT officials on 19 January at which they outlined their concerns about the IAG approaches. I reiterated that

if any offer is made or when the details of any offer emerge, the Government will examine it very carefully against a set of public interest criteria before making any decision. I also undertook to meet with them again in the event that any formal offer is made by IAG.

Driver Licences

162. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on the discrepancies occurring when drivers fail to produce their licences in court, when drivers fail to surrender their licences and when judges omit to announce the number of penalty points in court. [4289/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Under section 22 of the Road Traffic Act 2002, as amended, it is a legal obligation to produce a driving licence or learner permit, as the case may be, and a legible copy of the licence or learner permit in court following a summons for a road traffic offence.

Prosecution of cases where a licence or learner permit has not been produced is a matter for An Garda Síochána.

Where a person is disqualified from driving following court proceedings, the person is required by law to surrender their driving licence to the Road Safety Authority, as the National Driver Licensing Authority. Failure to surrender the licence is an offence.

As a matter of law, penalty points are not imposed by the court. The court imposes a fine and the application of penalty points to a licence record is an administrative consequence following from a conviction. Queries regarding court procedure are matters for the Department of Justice and Equality and the Courts Service.

Tourism Policy

163. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on making 2016 a year of the home gathering, a nationwide year of Irish persons holidaying at home and going someplace here that they have never been before, with communities involved in the hosting of special events to mark a home gathering; his views on whether keeping even an additional 10% of Irish holidaymakers here rather than holidaying abroad would have a significant impact on the tourism sector and wider economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4295/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Tourism is a key driver of social and economic development at both national and regional levels in Ireland. While any increase in domestic tourism would be beneficial for the sector and the wider economy, it should be noted that the number of domestic tourism trips has held up well since 2010 and not declined by as much as the number of overseas trips taken by Irish residents.

The new Tourism Policy Statement, which is due to be published shortly, includes a policy objective to examine how The Gathering or other similar project might be repeated in the future without diluting its impact and to develop the tourism opportunities arising from themed years in other areas of Government. Specific initiatives to boost tourism, both overseas and domestic, can be considered in that context. However, any decision on how best to focus supports will be based on overall tourism prospects and development opportunities, underscored by the need to maximise returns on limited resources.

With specific regard to the question of a Home Gathering, there are no plans for such an initiative in 2016. However, I can assure the Deputy that, as in recent years, Fáilte Ireland will continue to run home holidays marketing campaigns to encourage home holidays and support an extensive programme of festivals and events across the country to drive growth in the domestic market.

Sale of Aer Lingus

164. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he is satisfied that any takeover of Aer Lingus will involve adequate protection for national interests such as continued access without restriction to all existing routes and landing provisions at airports worldwide and fundamental to the viability of the airline into the future; if he is satisfied that the regional airports are likely to be sufficiently provided for in such a way as to ensure not only their existence in the future but their continued growth and expansion; if he is satisfied that staffing levels are not reduced thereby restricting the scale and operations of the airline; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4338/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to my reply to today's Priority PQs 123 and 124 concerning the State's shareholding in Aer Lingus and the recent approaches from IAG.

Sale of Aer Lingus

165. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether the proposed sale of Aer Lingus shares to IAG is in the best interest of the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4359/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to my reply to today's Priority PQs 123 and 124 concerning the State's shareholding in Aer Lingus and the recent approaches from IAG.

Sale of Aer Lingus

166. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether a sale of Aer Lingus will have an impact on employment, pensions, aviation services and tourism. [4363/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have addressed the issues raised by the IAG potential Offer for Aer Lingus in my answers to priority questions 4656/15 and 4666/15.

In relation to pensions, for the last number of years Aer Lingus, together with the other employers in the Irish Airline Superannuation Scheme, has been working with the various stakeholders to put the company's pension funding arrangements on a sustainable footing. The funding proposal from the scheme's trustees was approved last year by the statutory regulator for pensions, the Pensions Authority, and has been implemented since 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 and the wider economy in the event of failure of this solution were even greater.

Public Transport

167. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the current financial situation in the CIÉ group of companies; if he will provide an update on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4352/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): CIÉ remains in a difficult financial situation and has incurred accumulated losses of over €137m in the five years from 2009 to 2013. This trend is unsustainable and is being addressed on a number of fronts.

CIÉ is dependent on continued bank funding and new banking facilities, agreed in 2013, contain a number of financial covenants, all of which were met in 2014. Because of the dependence of CIÉ on its bank facilities, it is important that the Group performs in line with its business plan as submitted to the banks. CIÉ will face more demanding bank covenant targets this year and in later years so it is critical that cost saving measures are delivered.

I gave a commitment to avoid further reductions in the Public Service Obligation funding and for the first time since 2008, the level of Public Service Obligation (PSO) for bus and rail services is being maintained in 2015 at the same level as in 2014. I also recently secured €110 million for public transport as part of the 2014 Supplementary Estimate for my Department, which included €45 million for Irish Rail's network renewal investment and €50 million for bus renewal for Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann.

I remain strongly supportive of the efforts to secure CIÉ's financial sustainability in order to ensure that public transport services can be provided efficiently and cost effectively, with investment needs met over the long term. These measures are necessary components that will contribute to addressing the financial position of the CIÉ Group.

Appointments to State Boards

168. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Taoiseach the total number of representations in written or oral form he, his officials or advisers have received from a person (details supplied) seeking the appointment of persons to positions that fall under his remit since March 2011; if he will provide the details of the persons for whom the member made representations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4284/15]

The Taoiseach: My Department has no record of representations received by me or by my officials or advisers from the person in question seeking persons to be appointed to positions or boards under my remit since March 2011.

Office of the Attorney General

169. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Taoiseach the number of staff currently employed in the Attorney General's office engaged in the drafting of legislation; if he is satisfied that there is sufficient staff and resources available to the office to facilitate the prompt and efficient drafting of the outstanding legislation in the programme for Government; and if he will make a state-

ment on the matter. [4374/15]

The Taoiseach: There are currently the equivalent of 29.6 staff employed to draft legislation in the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel which is a constituent part of the Office of the Attorney General. Two additional staff members are scheduled to join the Office in the next few weeks and one further candidate will be called from a recruitment panel to fill a recent vacancy. This will bring the total to 32.6 wholetime equivalent drafting staff. These drafting staff are supported by clerical and research staff as well as the usual range of administration services.

The numbers and skills of all staff are kept under constant review to ensure that the Office is able to provide the level of drafting services required by the Government. The resources available for drafting have, notwithstanding the increasing demands, been able to meet the needs of the Government.

National Flag

170. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Taoiseach the reason the Tricolour was flown at half-mast recently following the death of the King of Saudi Arabia, which country has the worst human rights record in the world; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4378/15]

173. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Taoiseach if the flag over Government Buildings was flown at half-mast on 23 January 2015 to mark the death of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia; if his office decided this action; if he requested other Departments to do the same; and the number of times flags have been flown at half-mast over Government Buildings for the death of foreign leaders since March 2011. [4519/15]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 170 and 173 together.

It is customary for the National Flag to be flown at half mast on prominent Government Buildings on the death in office of a Head of State as a mark of respect for a nation with which we have close connections or have had recent engagements.

The flag was flown at half mast on Government Buildings on 23 January to mark the death of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. The flag was also half-masted at Áras an Uachtaráin, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the Department of Transport, Leinster House and the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The decision to half-mast the flag was made in light of advice from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and our Embassy in Riyadh .

The following table gives details of recent occasions when the flag has been flown at half-mast.

President Lech Kaczynski of Poland	18/04/2010
King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia	23/01/2015

Departmental Expenditure

171. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide in tabular form for the years 2007 to 2010 the total photography costs for his Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[4500/15]

172. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide in tabular form for the years 1997 to 2007 the total photography costs for his Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4516/15]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 171 and 172 together.

The total photography costs in my Department from 2002 to 2010 were €445,616.75. Details are provided in the table below. My Department does not hold financial records from 1997 to 2001 in a readily accessible format. In addition a breakdown of costs from 2002 to 2010 by supplier name, function and cost is not available within the timeframe allowed to respond to the Deputy's question.

Year	€
2002	34,192.43
2003	39,489.18
2004	46,367.35
2005	43,796.26
2006	81,327.92
2007	64,671.92
2008	83,397.75
2009	27,455.15
2010	24,918.79

Question No. 173 answered with Question No. 170.

Public Relations Contracts Data

174. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide in tabular form a list of all external public relations firms hired by his Department and associated costs incurred from 2007 to 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4550/15]

The Taoiseach: The following table provides details of all external public relations firms hired by my Department from 2007 to 2010. Expenditure relates to the National Forum on Europe and the Taskforce on Active Citizenship, both of which were discontinued in 2009.

Year	Company	Amount
2007	Caroline Erskine	€ 150,524.00
2008	Long Grass Promotions	€ 5,445.00
++	Young Social Innovators LTD	€ 800.00
2009	++	Nil
2010	++	Nil

Paternity Leave Costs

175. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the cost associated with allowing four weeks of paternity benefit to fathers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4328/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): While male employees are not entitled under Irish law to either paid or unpaid paternity leave, they may be entitled to parental leave. Parental leave entitles parents who qualify to take a period of up to 18 weeks of unpaid leave from employment, generally in respect of children aged up to eight years. There is no provision for a social insurance based payment for periods of parental leave, but employees may be entitled to credited contributions to maintain their social insurance record for the period.

The introduction of paid parental leave or paternity leave would have significant cost implications for employers, the Exchequer and the social insurance fund. In addition, the question of introducing a paternity benefit payment would depend on establishing an underlying entitlement to statutory paternity leave in the first instance and in the case of paternity leave would require legislation on the part of the Minister for Justice and Equality.

Disability Allowance Appeals

176. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a decision has been made on an appeal of a decision on a disability allowance application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry. [4330/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, has decided to disallow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

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

Question No. 177 withdrawn.

Disability Allowance Appeals

178. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an appealed decision to refuse a disability allowance on 3 July 2014 in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4416/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The application, based upon the evidence submitted, was refused by a deciding officer (DO) on medical grounds. The person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 30 July 2014.

Further medical evidence was received in this case and a review was carried out by a DO. However, this review did not result in a revision of the original decision. The person concerned was notified of the outcome of the review on 16 January 2015 and of her right to lodge an appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office within 21 days.

Questions - Written Answers
Carer's Allowance Delays

179. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if and when all arrears in respect of a carer's allowance application will be paid in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare who applied in May 2014 but whose arrears have only been backdated to September 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4432/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person in question on 10 September 2014. There is no trace of an earlier application from the person in question. The person concerned was refused CA on the grounds that the medical conditions were not satisfied. She was notified of this decision on 18 December 2014, the reasons for it and of her right of review or appeal.

The person concerned requested a review of this decision and following that review the application was awarded on January 14 2015. The claim was awarded from the date of receipt of the application. The person in question also requested that the payment be backdated to May 2014. This request for back-dating was considered by a DO and it was refused. She was notified of this decision on January 14 2015 and of her right of appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

Question No. 180 withdrawn.

Labour Activation Measures

181. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide a list of education, training and activation measures that are open to persons who are unemployed but who are not in receipt of a jobseeker's allowance by virtue of the means test; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4438/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): 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.

Unemployed persons not in receipt of payments may however be eligible to avail of upskilling opportunities, for example through ETB training for unemployed people (at present there are 1,009 upcoming day courses and 552 upcoming evening courses). Although not eligible to receive a training allowance while undertaking the course, they may receive some support for expenses on travel, meals and accommodation.

An unemployed person who does not qualify for a social welfare payment due to the assessment of their means may be eligible to sign for social insurance contribution credits.

Persons who sign for credits for three months (78 days) of the last six months are eligible to participate in the JobBridge programme.

Persons signing on for credits for 12 months or longer over the previous 18 months are entitled to participate on Momentum courses through Solas, provided that they have been actively

seeking work, however they will not receive any payment.

Persons signing for credits for six months or more are entitled to participate on ETB-run VTOS courses subject to availability. In the case of VTOS courses, participants do not receive a training allowance but may receive travel and lunch allowances.

Springboard and Skillnets courses for unemployed people, funded through the Department of Education and Skills, are also open to people regardless of their social welfare status.

Many other services are also available to people who are not in receipt of a social welfare payment. For example employment services, such as advice on job-search activities and the use of online job search tools, are available to people if they register with the Department's employment services offices regardless of their social welfare status.

In short, the Government is committed to supporting as many people as possible to participate more fully in employment and to become more self-sufficient by providing supports that address barriers they may encounter in finding and sustaining employment.

Jobseeker's Allowance Data

182. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if her Department has estimates of the number of persons who are unemployed but who are not in receipt of a jobseeker's allowance by virtue of the means test and are therefore not included in the live register; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4439/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department of Social Protection does not have estimates of the number of persons who are unemployed and who are not in receipt of jobseeker's allowance by virtue of the means test.

Unemployment is officially measured by the Central Statistics Office on a quarterly basis in the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) and the latest estimated number of persons unemployed as of the third quarter of 2014 was 245,500. The Live Register is not designed to measure unemployment. It includes part-time workers (those who work up to three days a week), seasonal and casual workers entitled to Jobseeker's Benefit (JB) or Jobseeker's Allowance (JA). It also includes persons who are signing for Social Insurance credit purposes and are out of work.

Question No. 183 withdrawn.

Job Initiatives

184. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide details of all library and archiving related JobBridge positions in publicly funded bodies since the establishment of the scheme, including their duration and location. [4452/15]

191. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if there are circumstances in which a person can commence an internship prior to completing three months on jobseeker's allowance; her plans to change this restrictive rule in the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4572/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): I propose to take Questions 184 and 191 together.

Details of library and archiving related JobBridge positions in Public Bodies are set out in Table 1.

There are no circumstances in which a jobseeker may commence a JobBridge internship prior to accumulating the 3 months (78 days) out of the previous 6 months in receipt of an eligible payment or signing for credits. However, those 3 months may be accumulated in any combination of eligible payments or credits. This enables the Department to target the JobBridge scheme at those jobseekers that are most likely to fall into longer term unemployment. There are no plans at present to change this provision.

Table 1. Library and Archiving related JobBridge positions in Public Bodies.

Public Body	Description	Category
Pearse College Of Further Education	Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Meath County Council	WPP Conversion Graduate Trainee Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Dept of Environment, Community & Local Government	WPP Conversion Archivist [SEE FOLLOWUP]	ARCHIVIST
Oireachtas Library & Research Service	WPP Conversion Library & Research Services Historian	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE
Carlow County Council	WPP Conversion Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Cavan Local Authorities	WPP Conversion Library Website Developer	I.T.- WEB DESIGN
Donegal County Council	Accounts Officer / Book keeper - Clo & The Living Archive	CLERK - ACCOUNTS
Monastery School	Administration/Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Coláiste Pobail Setanta	Administrator / Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Royal Irish Academy	Archival Internships	ARCHIVIST
Limerick City Council	Archive Assistant	ARCHIVIST
University College Dublin	Archive Assistant (In the Sound Archive of National Folklore Collection)	ARCHIVIST
Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	Archives Assistant (Data Entry of Catalogue Information)	ARCHIVIST
Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	Archives Assistant (Data Entry of Catalogue Information)	ARCHIVIST
Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	Archives Assistant (Data Entry of Catalogue Information)	ARCHIVIST
Sligo County Council	Archives Assistants	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Sligo County Council	Archives Assistants	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Kerry County Council	Archives Cataloguer - Local History & Archives	ARCHIVIST
Clare County Council	Archives Preservation Assistant	ARCHIVIST

Public Body	Description	Category
Donegal County Council	Archives Research Assistant	ARCHIVIST
Office of Public Works	Archivist	ARCHIVIST
Cork City Council	Archivist	ARCHIVIST
Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses and Estates	Archivist	ARCHITECT - BUILDINGS
Office of Public Works	Archivist	ARCHIVIST
National Museum of Ireland	Archivist	ARCHIVIST
Defence Forces Ireland	Archivist - Military Archives	ARCHIVIST
Defence Forces Ireland	Archivist - Military Archives	ARCHIVIST
Defence Forces Ireland	Archivist - Naval Service	ARCHIVIST
Dept of Environment, Community & Local Government	Archivist - Valentia Observatory	ARCHIVIST
Trinity College Dublin (Head Office)	Archivist (Engineering)	ARCHIVIST
Trinity College Dublin (Head Office)	Archivist (Engineering)	ARCHIVIST
Defence Forces Ireland	Archivist- Air Corps Museum	ARCHIVIST
Defence Forces Ireland	Archivist- Air Corps Museum	ARCHIVIST
Defence Forces Ireland	Archivist- Air Corps Museum	ARCHIVIST
Defence Forces Ireland	Archivist- Air Corps Museum	ARCHIVIST
Dublin City Council - Woodquay	Archivist Assistant	ARCHIVIST
Dublin City Council - Woodquay	Archivist Assistant	ARCHIVIST
Department of Justice and Equality	Archivist/Librarian - Irish Prison Service	LIBRARIAN
Department of Justice and Equality	Archivist/Librarian - Irish Prison Service	ARCHIVIST
Department of Justice and Equality	Archivist/Librarian - Irish Prison Service	LIBRARIAN
Department of Justice and Equality	Archivist/Librarian - Irish Prison Service	ARCHIVIST
Galway County Council	Archivist/Records Manager	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Galway County Council	Archivist/Records Manager	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Galway County Council	Archivist/Records Manager	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Fingal County Council	Arts & Libraries Marketing Assistant	EXECUTIVE - MARKETING
Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	Assistant Archivist	ARCHIVIST
University College Cork	Assistant Archivist	ARCHIVIST
The Kylemore Trust	Assistant Archivist	ARCHIVIST

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Public Body	Description	Category
Limerick City Council	Assistant Archivist	ARCHIVIST
Waterford County Council	Assistant Archivist	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Limerick City Council	Assistant Archivist	ARCHIVIST
Defence Forces Ireland	Assistant Archivist	ARCHIVIST
University College Cork	Assistant Archivist - Folklore & Oral History	ARCHIVIST
University College Dublin	Assistant Audio Technician (Sound Archive of National Folklore Collection)	AUDIO / VIDEO TECHNICIAN
Holy Child Community School	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Scoil Mhichi-l Naofa	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Deansrath Community College	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Department of Education & Skills	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Cork Education and Training Board	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Cork Education and Training Board	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Food Safety Authority of Ireland	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Holy Child Community School	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Institute of Technology Carlow	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Food Safety Authority of Ireland	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Revenue	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Pearse College Of Further Education	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Kildare Wicklow ETB	Assistant Librarian (Bray Institute of Further Education)	LIBRARIAN
Kildare Wicklow ETB	Assistant Librarian (Bray Institute of Further Education)	LIBRARIAN
Kildare Wicklow ETB	Assistant Librarian in Bray Institute of Further Education, Co. Wicklow	LIBRARIAN
Boyne Community School	Assistant School Librarian	LIBRARIAN
St. Joseph s National School	Assistant School Librarian	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
St. Joseph s National School	Assistant School Librarian	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Radio Telefis Eireann	Cataloguing Assistant - RTE Archives	ARCHIVIST

Public Body	Description	Category
Radio Telefis Eireann	Cataloguing Assistant - RTE Archives	ARCHIVIST
St. Peters National School	Classroom / Library Assistant	ASSISTANT - CLASSROOM
Dunboyne Junior Primary School	Clerical / Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Dunboyne Junior Primary School	Clerical / Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Waterford County Council	Community Project Assistants (Library Service)	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Waterford County Council	Computer Archiving Assistant -Housing Department Construction Contracts/Drawings	ARCHIVIST
Longford County Council	Coordinator - Library Service	LIBRARIAN
NUI Galway	Cúntóir(i) Cartlannaíochta/Archival Archivist(s)	ARCHIVIST
Dundalk Institute of Technology	Digital Archivist	ARCHIVIST
Dundalk Institute of Technology	Digital Archivist	ARCHIVIST
Dundalk Institute of Technology	Digital Archivist	ARCHIVIST
Kerry County Council	Digital Content Archivist	ARCHIVIST
Cavan County Council	Digital Content Library Support Officer	I.T.- NETWORK ADMINISTRATION
Cavan County Council	Digital Content Library Support Officer	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Cavan County Council	Digital Content Library Support Officer	I.T.- NETWORK ADMINISTRATION
Cavan County Council	Digital Content Library Support Officer	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
University of Limerick (1)	Digital Librarian/Archivist (UL 40 Digital Library)	ARCHIVIST
University of Limerick (1)	Digital Librarian/Archivist (UL 40 Digital Library)	ARCHIVIST
Cork County Council	Genealogy Assistant (Library)	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Cork County Council	Genealogy Assistant (Library)	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Cork County Council	Genealogy Assistant (Library)	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
St. Kevin s Boys School	Historian / Archivist	ARCHIVIST
Limerick City Council	History/Archive Person	ARCHIVIST
St Dominics Secondary School	Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Waterford College of Further Education	Librarian	LIBRARIAN

Questions - Written Answers

Public Body	Description	Category
Offaly County Council	Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Cork City Council	Librarian	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE
Beneavin De La Salle College	Librarian	LIBRARIAN
St. Josephs Primary School	Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Kilkenny and Carlow ETB	Librarian	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
St. Louis Secondary School Dundalk	Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Scoil Mhuire Community School, Clane	Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Naas CBS Secondary School	Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Offaly County Council	Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Firhouse Community College	Librarian	LIBRARIAN
St. Leos College (Carlow)	Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Cork City Council	Librarian	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE
Cork City Council	Librarian	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE
Beneavin De La Salle College	Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Limerick College of Further Education	Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Limerick College of Further Education	Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Old Bawn Community School	Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Old Bawn Community School	Librarian	LIBRARIAN
St. Joseph s National School	Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Waterford College of Further Education	Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Mount Buis N.S.	Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Donegal Education & Training Board	Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Donegal Education & Training Board	Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Donegal Education & Training Board	Librarian - Coláiste Ailigh	LIBRARIAN
University College Cork	Librarian - Special Collections & Archives	LIBRARIAN
University College Cork	Librarian - Special Collections & Archives	LIBRARIAN

Public Body	Description	Category
Wicklow County Council	Librarian (Bray)	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE
Wicklow County Council	Librarian (Wicklow Town)	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE
Gaelscoil na Cruaiche	Librarian Assistant	LIBRARIAN
CBS Secondary School Tralee	Librarian Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Gaelscoil na Cruaiche	Librarian Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Gaelscoil na Cruaiche	Librarian Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Liberties College	Librarian in Further Education	LIBRARIAN
Donegal Education & Training Board	Librarian, Errigal College, Letterkenny	LIBRARIAN
Donegal Education & Training Board	Librarian, Errigal College, Letterkenny	LIBRARIAN
St. Josephs Primary School	Librarian/Assistant Secretary	LIBRARIAN
Donegal Education & Training Board	Librarian/Homework Club Supervisor	LIBRARIAN
Faithlegg N.S.	Librarian/Literacy Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Coláiste Pobail Setanta	Librarian/Literacy Leader	LIBRARIAN
Scoil Chearbhaill Ui Dhalaiigh	Librarian/Resources Administrator	LIBRARIAN
The Honorable Society of Kings Inns	Library & Conservation Assistant	LIBRARIAN
The Honorable Society of Kings Inns	Library & Conservation Assistant	LIBRARIAN
The Honorable Society of Kings Inns	Library & Conservation Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Institute of Technology Blanchardstown	Library & Information Desk Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Clare County Council	Library & Theatre Attendant	AGENT - THEATRICAL
St Ultans	Library Administrator	
St. Malachy s Girls School	Library and IT Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Scoil Cholmcille	Library and Reading Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Clare County Council	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Scoil Thomais	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
South Tipperary VEC	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Pobalscoil Inbhear Scéine	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
County Tipperary Joint Libraries Committee	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE

Questions - Written Answers

Public Body	Description	Category
County Tipperary Joint Libraries Committee	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Teagasc (Head Office) Carlow	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Department of Social Protection	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Dundalk Institute of Technology	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Cork Education and Training Board	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Co. Meath VEC	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Irish Management Institute	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Carlow County Council	Library Assistant	MANAGER - ADMINISTRATION
Tipperary ETB - Nenagh Office	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Holy Child Secondary School	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
County Tipperary Joint Libraries Committee	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
County Tipperary Joint Libraries Committee	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Department of Social Protection	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Fingal Community College	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
University College Cork	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE
Royal Irish Academy	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Louth Meath ETB	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Royal Irish Academy	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Royal Irish Academy	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Ratoath College	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
St. Wolstan s Community School	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Carlow County Council	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Tipperary ETB - Nenagh Office	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Tipperary ETB - Nenagh Office	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Naas CBS Secondary School	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Loreto Abbey Secondary School	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE

Public Body	Description	Category
Cork Education and Training Board	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
St. Senan s N.S.	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Cavan & Monaghan Education & Training Board	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
St Malachys Infants School	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Kildare Wicklow ETB	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Cork County Council	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE
Scoil Eoghain Moville	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Royal Irish Academy	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Carlow County Council	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Galway County Council	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Galway County Council	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Galway County Council	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Galway County Council	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Galway County Council	Library Assistant - Ballinasloe Branch Library	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE
Galway County Council	Library Assistant - Ballinasloe Branch Library	LIBRARIAN
Galway County Council	Library Assistant - Ballybane Library, Galway	LIBRARIAN
Kildare Wicklow ETB	Library Assistant - Bray	LIBRARIAN
Kildare Wicklow ETB	Library Assistant - Bray	LIBRARIAN
Galway County Council	Library Assistant - Carraroe Branch Library	LIBRARIAN
Limerick Institute of Technology	Library Assistant - Clare Street Campus	LIBRARIAN
Limerick Institute of Technology	Library Assistant - Clonmel Campus	LIBRARIAN
Cavan & Monaghan Education & Training Board	Library Assistant - Monaghan	LIBRARIAN
Cavan & Monaghan Education & Training Board	Library Assistant - Monaghan	LIBRARIAN
Limerick Institute of Technology	Library Assistant - Thurles Campus	LIBRARIAN
South Tipperary VEC	Library Assistant - Tipperary Town	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE

Questions - Written Answers

Public Body	Description	Category
Offaly County Council	Library Assistant - Tullamore Library	LIBRARIAN
Galway County Council	Library Assistant - Westside Library	LIBRARIAN
Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies	Library Assistant (Cataloguing)	LIBRARIAN
Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies	Library Assistant (Cataloguing)	LIBRARIAN
South Tipperary VEC	Library Assistant (Coláiste Dún Iascaigh, Cahir)	LIBRARIAN
Defence Forces Ireland	Library Assistant (Curragh)	LIBRARIAN
Laois & Offaly Education & Training Board	Library Assistant (Portlaoise)	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Offaly County Council	Library Assistant /Birr Library	LIBRARIAN
Lisboduff National School	Library Assistant /Primary School	LIBRARIAN
Royal Irish Academy	Library Assistant -Cataloguing	LIBRARIAN
Royal Irish Academy	Library Assistant -Cataloguing	LIBRARIAN
Galway County Council	Library Assistant -Galway City Library	LIBRARIAN
Galway County Council	Library Assistant -Galway City Library	LIBRARIAN
Galway County Council	Library Assistant -Loughrea Library	LIBRARIAN
Galway County Council	Library Assistant -Tuam Library	LIBRARIAN
Saint Eunans College	Library Assistant/Archivist	LIBRARIAN
Saint Eunans College	Library Assistant/Archivist	LIBRARIAN
Saint Eunans College	Library Assistant/Archivist	LIBRARIAN
Saint Eunans College	Library Assistant/Archivist	LIBRARIAN
Saint Eunans College	Library Assistant/Archivist	LIBRARIAN
Saint Eunans College	Library Assistant/Archivist	LIBRARIAN
Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology	Library Asssitant	LIBRARIAN
Waterford Adult Education Centre	Library Attendant	LIBRARIAN
Waterford City & County Council	Library Attendant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Waterford City & County Council	Library Attendant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Carlow County Council	Library Catalogue Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	Library Cataloguer	LIBRARIAN
Westmeath County Council	Library Cataloguer (Aidan Heavey Public Library, Athlone)	LIBRARIAN
Waterford City Council	Library Cataloguing Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Sligo County Council	Library Children s Literature & Activities Programme Assistant - Sligo	GROUP FACILITATOR
Sligo County Council	Library Children s Literature & Activities Programme Assistant - Sligo	GROUP FACILITATOR

Public Body	Description	Category
Monaghan County Council	Library Computerisation Project Phase 2 - Backstock Cataloguer	LIBRARIAN
Monaghan County Council	Library Computerisation Project Phase 2 - Backstock Cataloguer	LIBRARIAN
St Patricks College	Library Conversion / Cataloguing Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Carlow County Council	Library Desk Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Cavan County Council	Library Information Officer	OFFICER - INFORMATION
Leitrim County Council	Library IT Assistant.	I.T.- DATABASE ADMINISTRATOR
Carlow County Council	Library Office Manager	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
St. Leos College (Carlow)	Library Organiser/Researcher	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Institute of Technology Tallaght	Library Postgraduate Trainee	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE
Carlow County Council	Library Processing Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Carlow County Council	Library Project Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Mayo County Council	Library Research Assistant	HISTORIAN
Cork Education and Training Board	Library Resource Administrator	LIBRARIAN
Cork Education and Training Board	Library Resource Administrator	LIBRARIAN
The Honorable Society of Kings Inns	Library Services Officer	LIBRARIAN
The Honorable Society of Kings Inns	Library Services Officer	LIBRARIAN
The Honorable Society of Kings Inns	Library Services Officer	LIBRARIAN
St Vincents Secondary School	Library Supervisors Administrative Assistant	LIBRARIAN
St Vincents Secondary School	Library Supervisors Administrative Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Ballyfermot College of Further Education	Library Technical Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Donegal County Council	Library Technology Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Donegal County Council	Library Technology Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Donegal County Council	Library Technology Assistant	I.T.- DATABASE ADMINISTRATOR
Donegal County Council	Library Technology Assistant	I.T.- DATABASE ADMINISTRATOR
Donegal County Council	Library Technology Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN

Questions - Written Answers

Public Body	Description	Category
Donegal County Council	Library Technology Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Teagasc (Head Office) Carlow	Library Trainee (Ashtown, Dublin 15)	LIBRARIAN
Scoil Mhuire na nAingal	Library/Administrative Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Scoil Mhuire na nAingal	Library/Administrative Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Fingal County Council	Library/Arts Office Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Dun Laoghaire VEC	Library/Data Management Assistant	LIBRARIAN
Limerick City Council	Limerick Leader Photographic Archive Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Limerick City Council	Limerick Leader Photographic Archive Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Limerick City Council	Limerick Leader Photographic Archive Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
University College Dublin	Manuscript - Photographic Archive Assistant (of National Folklore Collection)	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Monaghan County Council	Museum Digital Archivist	ARCHIVIST
Mercy School	Office / Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Dunshaughlin Community College	Office Administrator/Librarian	LIBRARIAN
St Ultans	Office and Library Administrator	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Oireachtas Library & Research Service	Online Resource Librarian	LIBRARIAN
St. Michael s G.N.S.	Primary School Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Killygarry National School	Primary School Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Killygarry National School	Primary School Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Donegal County Council	Project Coordinator - Clo and the Living Archive	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
University College Dublin	Project Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Cavan County Council	Research and Administrator Collection Archivist	ARCHIVIST
Cavan County Council	Research and Administrator Collection Archivist	ARCHIVIST
Cavan County Council	Research and Administrator Collection Archivist	ARCHIVIST
Donegal Education & Training Board	Research Archivist (SEE FOLLOW UP)	ANALYST - MARKETING RESEARCH
St. Macartans College	School Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Tarbert Comprehensive School	School Librarian	LIBRARIAN

Public Body	Description	Category
Rockford Manor Secondary School	School Librarian	LIBRARIAN
St. Macartans College	School Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Presentation College, Headford	School Librarian	LIBRARIAN
St Patrick s NS	School Librarian	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Rockford Manor Secondary School	School Librarian	LIBRARIAN
St. Leos College (Carlow)	School Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Burgess National School	School Librarian	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Pobalscoil Inbhear Scéine	School Librarian	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE
St. Michaels Junior Boys School	School Librarian	LIBRARIAN
Scoil Oilibhéir	School Librarian / Leabharlannaí Scoile	LIBRARIAN
St. Colmcille s National School	School Librarian / Literacy Support	LIBRARIAN
St. Colmcille s National School	School Librarian / Literacy Support	LIBRARIAN
Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne	School Library Administrator	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Drogheda Grammar School	School Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN
St. Marys National School - Ballygarrett	School Secretary/Librarian	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
St Edwards N.S.	School/Community Library & Learning Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
St Edwards N.S.	School/Community Library & Learning Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
St Edwards N.S.	School/Community Library & Learning Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Good Shepherd N.S.L	SNA/Librarian	ASSISTANT - CLASSROOM
Wexford Local Authorities	Trainee Archivist	ARCHIVIST
Clare County Council	WPP Conversion Archives Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN
Cork County Council	WPP Conversion Data Processor - Computerisation of library records	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN

Work Placement Programmes

185. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on permitting persons on disability allowance to access Gateway and Tús schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4465/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Tús and Gateway are work placement initiatives which aim to provide short-term work opportunities for those who are unemployed and on the live register for more than a year with respect to Tús and two years for Gateway. The eligibility criteria for both initiatives are in line with the Government's policies on focusing resources on maintaining the work readiness and employability of job-seekers who suffered jobs losses in recent years. In order to maintain this focus, persons not in receipt of a jobseeker's payment from the Department are not eligible for selection for these initiatives.

The Deputy should note, however, that persons in receipt of disability allowance (DA), and certain other payments for the Department, are eligible for a range of other activation initiatives. These include JobBridge, the rural social scheme, and community employment, back to work and back to education allowances, as well as other education and training supports. Additionally, a range of supports designed specifically to support people with disabilities and employers (to offer and maintain job opportunities for people with disabilities) are funded and delivered by the Department. These include a wage subsidy scheme and resources to offset the costs of providing reasonable accommodation for the employment of a person with disability or restricted mobility.

A person in receipt of DA is permitted and encouraged to work if their medical advisor recommends that such work is of a rehabilitative or therapeutic nature. They can earn €120 per week without it affecting their DA claim. Persons in receipt of DA also have the option of giving up their allowance in favour of jobseeker's allowance if they wish to be considered for schemes such as Gateway and Tús, once they meet the eligibility criteria.

Advice on opportunities across a range of work placement, internships, self-employment, training and educational supports and options can be accessed via the Department's offices and Intreo centres and further information is available on the Department's website - *www.welfare.ie*.

Departmental Expenditure

186. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide, in tabular form, for the years 2007 to 2010, inclusive, the total photography costs in her Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and a breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4499/15]

187. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide, in tabular form, for the years 1997 to 2007, inclusive, the total photography costs in her Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4515/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Question Nos. 186 and 187 together.

Photography services are used, in conjunction with some press releases and conferences, to communicate the Department's initiatives, schemes and services to customers and to the regional and national media. The total photography costs incurred by my Department for the period 1998 to 2010 are set out in the table below. No details are available for 1997.

The procurement of these photography services is carried out in accordance with national

and EU procurement procedures and since March 2012, the Department has been procuring photography services under the Framework Agreement established by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in February 2012.

Full details of the Framework are available online via the National Procurement Services contract list at www.procurement.ie.

Date:	Photographer:	Cost (€)
5/2/2010	Maxwells	781
5/2/2010	Maxwells	212
4/3/2010	Maxwells	811
23/4/2010	Maxwells	621
13/5/2010	Dave G Kelly	100
22/6/2010	Maxwells	579
	2010 Total	3,104
29/11/2008 (paid in 2009)	SKP & Associates	528
30/1/2009	Maxwells	784
30/1/2009	Maxwells	91
29/10/2009	Maxwells	525
30/10/2009	Maxwells	502
	2009 Total	2,430
8/5/2007 (paid in 2008)	Maxwells	611
4/1/2008	Maxwells	583
28/2/2008	Maxwells	619
1/4/2008	Maxwells	669
8/4/2008	Maxwells	220
18/4/2008	Maxwells	561
18/4/2008	John Power	216
15/5/2008	Maxwells	64
22/5/2008	Maxwells	953
26/5/2008	Maxwells	220
29/5/2008	Maxwells	607
25/6/2008	Maxwells	1,610
18/7/2008	Dave Meehan	944
21/7/2008	Maxwells	83
25/7/2008	Maxwells	1,469
16/9/2008	Maxwells	830
16/9/2008	Maxwells	621
17/9/2008	Maxwells	966
23/9/2008	Maxwells	682
15/10/2008	Mac Innes	99
15/10/2008	Maxwells	30
23/10/2008	Maxwells	678
31/10/2008	Maxwells	962
26/11/2008	Maxwells	470
	2008 Total	14,767

Questions - Written Answers

Date:	Photographer:	Cost (€)
17/01/2007	Maxwell Photography	392
17/01/2007	Maxwell Photography	755
17/01/2007	Maxwell Photography	916
22/01/2007	Maxwell Photography	485
22/01/2007	Maxwell Photography	526
15/02/2007	Maxwell Photography	562
23/03/2007	Patrick J. Browne Photography	579
23/03/2007	Maxwell Photography	854
30/03/2007	Maxwell Photography	619
30/03/2007	Maxwell Photography	663
30/03/2007	Maxwell Photography	748
20/04/2007	Maxwell Photography	56
20/04/2007	Maxwell Photography	242
27/04/2007	OSD Photo Agency	780
27/04/2007	Brian Farrell	922
01/06/2007	Maxwell Photography	626
19/06/2007	Brian Farrell	24
19/06/2007	Brian Farrell	109
19/06/2007	Brian Farrell	290
26/07/2007	Maxwell Photography	226
27/08/2007	SKP & Associates Ltd	268
27/08/2007	SKP & Associates Ltd	437
30/08/2007	Maxwell Photography	526
07/11/2007	Maxwell Photography	696
07/11/2007	Maxwell Photography	774
26/11/2007	Maxwell Photography	57
26/11/2007	Maxwell Photography	170
26/11/2007	Maxwell Photography	206
26/11/2007	Maxwell Photography	242
26/11/2007	Maxwell Photography	583
26/11/2007	Maxwell Photography	583
26/11/2007	Maxwell Photography	1,104
28/11/2007	Fennell Photography	58
05/12/2007	Aengus McMahon Photography	364
05/12/2007	Lensmen & Associates	794
14/12/2007	Maxwell Photography	57
14/12/2007	Maxwell Photography	119
	2007 Total	17,412
20/01/2006	Maxwell Photography	384
20/01/2006	Maxwell Photography	413
27/01/2006	Maxwell Photography	56
07/03/2006	Maxwell Photography	85
07/03/2006	Clive Wasson Photography	477
07/03/2006	Maxwell Photography	554

Date:	Photographer:	Cost (€)
14/04/2006	SKP & Associates Ltd	27
14/04/2006	SKP & Associates Ltd	106
14/04/2006	SKP & Associates Ltd	186
14/04/2006	SKP & Associates Ltd	386
14/04/2006	SKP & Associates Ltd	428
19/04/2006	Maxwell Photography	170
19/04/2006	Maxwell Photography	534
15/05/2006	SKP & Associates Ltd	303
15/05/2006	Maxwell Photography	696
01/06/2006	Andrew Downes	266
28/06/2006	Maxwell Photography	554
04/07/2006	SKP & Associates Ltd	47
04/07/2006	William Farrell Photography	375
21/07/2006	Brian Farrell	264
14/08/2006	Maxwell Photography	85
08/09/2006	SKP & Associates Ltd	47
08/09/2006	Fergal Megannety Photography	175
27/09/2006	Frank Dolan Photographer	182
03/10/2006	Maxwell Photography	56
03/10/2006	Maxwell Photography	526
16/10/2006	Fergal Megannety Photography	150
26/10/2006	Maxwell Photography	490
26/10/2006	Maxwell Photography	583
26/10/2006	Maxwell Photography	650
26/10/2006	Maxwell Photography	761
20/11/2006	Maxwell Photography	51
20/11/2006	Lensmen Limited	182
22/11/2006	Maxwell Photography	28
18/12/2006	Maxwell Photography	85
18/12/2006	Maxwell Photography	235
22/12/2006	Maxwell Photography	242
	2006 Total	10,839
10/01/2005	Patrick O'Leary (Photographer)	424
04/02/2005	Maxwell Photography	450
04/02/2005	Maxwell Photography	450
18/02/2005	Patrick O'Leary (Photographer)	341
18/02/2005	Patrick O'Leary (Photographer)	341
13/04/2005	Maxwell Photography	159
13/04/2005	Maxwell Photography	195
13/04/2005	Maxwell Photography	317
13/04/2005	William Farrell Photography	363
06/05/2005	Patrick O'Leary (Photographer)	341
06/05/2005	Patrick O'Leary (Photographer)	341
06/05/2005	Maxwell Photography	461

Questions - Written Answers

Date:	Photographer:	Cost (€)
18/05/2005	PicSell8 Ltd, Photography	180
06/07/2005	SKP & Associates Ltd	375
14/07/2005	Maxwell Photography	159
14/07/2005	Maxwell Photography	159
14/07/2005	Maxwell Photography	159
14/07/2005	Maxwell Photography	184
14/07/2005	Maxwell Photography	209
14/07/2005	Maxwell Photography	210
14/07/2005	Maxwell Photography	210
14/07/2005	Maxwell Photography	210
14/07/2005	Maxwell Photography	252
14/07/2005	Maxwell Photography	257
14/07/2005	Maxwell Photography	306
14/07/2005	Maxwell Photography	516
14/07/2005	Maxwell Photography	629
14/07/2005	Maxwell Photography	654
14/07/2005	Maxwell Photography	802
02/08/2005	Maxwell Photography	309
05/08/2005	Maxwell Photography	543
18/08/2005	Maxwell Photography	195
18/08/2005	Maxwell Photography	348
25/08/2005	Dominick Walsh	114
09/09/2005	William Farrell Photography	136
21/09/2005	Maxwell Photography	1,568
03/10/2005	Patrick O'Leary (Photographer)	341
06/10/2005	Patrick O'Leary (Photographer)	341
21/10/2005	Maxwell Photography	50
21/10/2005	Buzzworld Ltd	323
21/10/2005	Maxwell Photography	472
21/10/2005	Maxwell Photography	472
21/10/2005	Maxwell Photography	472
21/10/2005	Maxwell Photography	472
01/11/2005	Maxwell Photography	490
04/11/2005	Maxwell Photography	284
07/11/2005	Maxwell Photography	472
22/11/2005	Maxwell Photography	498
22/11/2005	Maxwell Photography	498
	2005 Total	18,052
26/01/2004	Maxwell Photography	19
26/01/2004	PicSell8	180
04/02/2004	Michael O'Donnell	95
18/02/2004	Maxwell Photography	284
25/02/2004	Maxwell Photography	440
12/03/2004	Maxwell Photography	151

Date:	Photographer:	Cost (€)
12/03/2004	William Farrell Photography	540
12/03/2004	Maxwell Photography	703
23/04/2004	Brian Farrell	290
12/05/2004	Clive Wasson Photography	669
12/05/2004	Clive Wasson Photography	1,461
19/05/2004	Maxwell Photography	468
28/05/2004	Maxwell Photography	865
02/06/2004	Maxwell Photography	505
17/06/2004	Maxwell Photography	523
21/06/2004	Maxwell Photography	389
20/07/2004	Maxwell Photography	384
26/07/2004	Conor Sinclair Photography	75
10/08/2004	Maxwell Photography	96
10/08/2004	Maxwell Photography	159
10/08/2004	Maxwell Photography	168
10/08/2004	Maxwell Photography	431
19/08/2004	Maxwell Photography	204
19/08/2004	Maxwell Photography	346
19/08/2004	Maxwell Photography	757
29/09/2004	Maxwell Photography	388
15/10/2004	Michael O'Donnell	95
15/10/2004	Maxwell Photography	388
15/10/2004	Lensman/SKP & Associates	685
05/11/2004	Maxwell Photography	276
05/11/2004	Maxwell Photography	276
16/11/2004	Maxwell Photography	79
16/11/2004	Brian Farrell	194
03/12/2004	Maxwell Photography	123
03/12/2004	Maxwell Photography	123
03/12/2004	Maxwell Photography	123
03/12/2004	Maxwell Photography	123
03/12/2004	Maxwell Photography	202
03/12/2004	Maxwell Photography	202
03/12/2004	Maxwell Photography	216
03/12/2004	Maxwell Photography	264
03/12/2004	Maxwell Photography	301
03/12/2004	Maxwell Photography	486
03/12/2004	Maxwell Photography	524
08/12/2004	Maxwell Photography	213
08/12/2004	Maxwell Photography	227
08/12/2004	Maxwell Photography	227
08/12/2004	Maxwell Photography	227
08/12/2004	Maxwell Photography	238
08/12/2004	Maxwell Photography	274

Questions - Written Answers

Date:	Photographer:	Cost (€)
08/12/2004	Maxwell Photography	300
08/12/2004	Maxwell Photography	348
08/12/2004	Maxwell Photography	373
	2004 Total	17,697
05/02/2003	Maxwell Photography	527
28/02/2003	Maxwell Photography	191
28/02/2003	Maxwell Photography	676
10/04/2003	Maxwell Photography	138
10/04/2003	Maxwell Photography	726
15/04/2003	PicSell8	362
15/04/2003	PicSell8	540
25/04/2003	Maxwell Picture Agency	159
25/04/2003	Maxwell Picture Agency	183
28/04/2003	Maxwell Picture Agency	1,282
06/05/2003	Maxwell Photography	356
16/05/2003	Lensman/SKP & Associates	356
16/05/2003	Harvey Images	431
22/05/2003	Clive Wasson Photography	195
11/06/2003	Maxwell Photography	874
17/06/2003	Barry's Photographic Services	284
07/07/2003	Maxwell Photography	123
11/07/2003	Michael O'Donnell	880
23/07/2003	Maxwell Photography	34
31/07/2003	Maxwell Photography	581
15/08/2003	Maxwell Photography	28
15/08/2003	Maxwell Photography	159
25/09/2003	Maxwell Photography	1,605
08/10/2003	Maxwell Photography	1,184
15/10/2003	Maxwell Photography	976
20/10/2003	Tom Brett Photography	204
20/10/2003	Maxwell Photography	612
03/11/2003	Maxwell Photography	442
11/11/2003	Maxwell Photography	213
03/12/2003	Maxwell Photography	318
03/12/2003	Provision	860
10/12/2003	Maxwell Photography	159
16/12/2003	Maxwell Photography	670
22/12/2003	Maxwell Photography	114
	2003 Total	16,442
14/01/2002	Maxwell Photography	86
14/01/2002	Ken Finegan NewsPics	232
22/02/2002	Ken Finegan NewsPics	249
11/03/2002	Ken Finegan NewsPics	186
15/03/2002	Ken Finegan NewsPics	21

Date:	Photographer:	Cost (€)
15/03/2002	Maxwell Photography	1,189
05/04/2002	Maxwell Photography	122
05/04/2002	Maxwell Picture Agency	157
12/04/2002	Press 22	257
09/05/2002	Jason Clarke Photography	26
04/06/2002	Maxwell Picture Agency	544
04/06/2002	Maxwell Picture Agency	545
04/06/2002	Ken Finegan NewsPics	608
04/06/2002	Maxwell Picture Agency	695
04/06/2002	Tom Conachy Photographer	878
19/06/2002	Eyecon Photography Ltd	21
19/06/2002	Maxwell Picture Agency	302
19/06/2002	Dominick Walsh Photographer	349
04/07/2002	Maxwell Picture Agency	56
26/07/2002	Maxwell Picture Agency	273
26/07/2002	Maxwell Picture Agency	517
02/08/2002	Jason Clarke Photography	186
02/08/2002	Maxwell Photography	280
02/08/2002	Maxwell Photography	661
21/08/2002	Maxwell Picture Agency	45
21/08/2002	Maxwell Picture Agency	56
21/08/2002	Maxwell Picture Agency	56
04/09/2002	Conor Sinclair Photography	120
04/09/2002	Maxwell Picture Agency	320
17/09/2002	Maxwell Picture Agency	176
17/09/2002	Maxwell Picture Agency	324
26/09/2002	Maxwell Picture Agency	21
17/10/2002	Maxwell Photography	236
06/11/2002	Maxwell Picture Agency	495
06/11/2002	Lensman/SKP & Associates	567
20/11/2002	Noel Kennedy Photography	120
29/11/2002	Maxwell Picture Agency	157
29/11/2002	Maxwell Picture Agency	382
11/12/2002	Maxwell Picture Agency	299
11/12/2002	Maxwell Photography	369
11/12/2002	Eye Con Photography Ltd	907
19/12/2002	Maxwell Photography	122
19/12/2002	Maxwell Photography	248
19/12/2002	Maxwell Photography	302
19/12/2002	Maxwell Photography	315
24/12/2002	Maxwell Photography	149
	2002 Total	14,226
10/01/2001	William Farrell Photography	48
26/01/2001	Maxwell Photography	444

Questions - Written Answers

Date:	Photographer:	Cost (€)
05/02/2001	Maxwell Photography	22
05/02/2001	Press 22	163
05/02/2001	Ken Finegan NewsPics	193
05/02/2001	Photozone	253
05/03/2001	Ken Finegan NewsPics	181
05/03/2001	Maxwell Photography	789
30/04/2001	Maxwell Picture Agency	534
30/04/2001	Maxwell Photography	984
01/06/2001	Maxwell Photography	73
01/06/2001	Ken Finegan NewsPics	280
01/06/2001	Eye Con Photography Ltd	1,292
07/06/2001	Maxwell Photography	96
11/06/2001	Eye Con Photography Ltd	70
11/06/2001	Maxwell Photography	96
11/06/2001	Eye Con Photography Ltd	289
11/06/2001	Maxwell Photography	602
04/07/2001	Press 22	98
04/07/2001	Maxwell Photography	461
06/07/2001	Eye Con Photography Ltd	897
10/08/2001	Dylan Vaughan Photography	35
10/08/2001	Eye.Con Photography	49
10/08/2001	Maxwell Photography	360
10/08/2001	Dylan Vaughan Photography	434
22/08/2001	Maxwell Photography	379
28/08/2001	Maxwell Photography	169
31/08/2001	Maxwell Photography	209
12/09/2001	Eye.Con Photography	113
12/09/2001	William Farrell Photography	450
12/09/2001	News Monitoring Services Ltd	541
26/09/2001	Ken Finegan NewsPics	169
23/10/2001	News Monitoring Services Ltd	35
01/11/2001	Maxwell Photography	208
28/11/2001	Eye Con Photography Ltd	28
28/11/2001	Ken Finegan NewsPics	143
29/11/2001	Graphic Photo Service	50
29/11/2001	Maxwell Photography	208
29/11/2001	Maxwell Photography	219
29/11/2001	Ken Finegan NewsPics	309
13/12/2001	Maxwell Photography	681
19/12/2001	Arthur Kinahan Photographer	85
24/12/2001	Maxwell Photography	444
	2001 Total	13,183
20/01/2000	Maxwell Photography	292
04/02/2000	Maxwell Photography	84

Date:	Photographer:	Cost (€)
04/02/2000	Maxwell Photography	84
20/03/2000	Maxwell Photography	107
20/03/2000	Maxwell Photography	186
20/03/2000	Maxwell Photography	242
20/03/2000	Maxwell Photography	277
07/04/2000	Maxwell Photography	540
18/04/2000	Maxwell Photography	284
25/04/2000	Maxwell Photography	245
12/05/2000	Tony Parkes Pictures Ltd	164
12/05/2000	Maxwell Photography	173
12/05/2000	Maxwell Photography	191
12/05/2000	Tony Parkes Pictures Ltd	237
12/05/2000	Maxwell Photography	242
07/06/2000	Donohue Studios	214
16/06/2000	Lensman/SKP & Associates	29
16/06/2000	Maxwell Photography	96
23/06/2000	NewsPics	219
30/06/2000	NewsPics	159
04/08/2000	Tony Parkes Pictures Ltd	197
04/08/2000	Maxwell Photography	270
04/08/2000	Maxwell Photography	383
10/08/2000	William Farrell Photography	621
09/10/2000	Maxwell Photography	293
10/10/2000	Tony Parkes Pictures Ltd	197
13/10/2000	O'Brien Photographic Studios	146
20/10/2000	Maxwell Photography	366
25/10/2000	John Cleary Photographer	428
10/11/2000	Maxwell Photography	349
01/12/2000	Maxwell Photography	226
12/12/2000	Frank Dolan Photographer	84
15/12/2000	Maxwell Photography	371
29/12/2000	Tony Parkes Pictures Ltd	22
	2000 Total	8,018
13/01/1999	Andrea Duncan Photos	165
29/01/1999	Maxwell Photography	163
03/02/1999	Thomas Sunderland Photographer	25
19/02/1999	Thomas Sunderland Photographer	223
05/03/1999	Michael Martin Photography	145
05/03/1999	Maxwell Photography	255
11/05/1999	Maxwell Photography	197
11/05/1999	Maxwell Photography	208
11/05/1999	Maxwell Photography	248
25/05/1999	Maxwell Photography	484
13/07/1999	Yann Studios	105

Questions - Written Answers

Date:	Photographer:	Cost (€)
04/08/1999	Photocall Ireland	11
04/08/1999	John Sheehan Photography	372
24/08/1999	Press 22	124
03/09/1999	NewsPics	236
10/09/1999	Maxwell Photography	129
10/09/1999	Maxwell Photography	163
10/09/1999	Maxwell Photography	174
10/09/1999	Maxwell Photography	174
10/09/1999	Maxwell Photography	174
10/09/1999	Maxwell Photography	210
10/09/1999	Maxwell Photography	219
10/09/1999	Maxwell Photography	231
10/09/1999	Maxwell Photography	429
14/09/1999	NewsPics	73
15/10/1999	Maxwell Photography	41
19/10/1999	Maxwell Photography	40
22/10/1999	Yann Studios	68
12/11/1999	Maxwell Photography	24
12/11/1999	Tom Brett Photography	45
12/11/1999	Joe McGrath	90
12/11/1999	Maxwell Photography	96
12/11/1999	Maxwell Photography	281
15/12/1999	Maxwell Photography	517
20/12/1999	Maxwell Photography	90
	1999 Total	6,229
11/02/1998	Maxwell Photography	433
03/03/1998	Tony Parkes Pictures Ltd	149
03/03/1998	NewsPics	206
05/03/1998	Maxwell Photography	236
10/03/1998	NewsPics	34
10/03/1998	Devaney Photo Services	35
10/03/1998	NewsPics	88
12/03/1998	Barrys Photographic Services	206
12/03/1998	Maxwell Photography	208
23/04/1998	City Photographics	44
28/04/1998	NewsPics	114
28/04/1998	Maxwell Photography	242
21/05/1998	Tony Parkes Pictures Ltd	292
02/06/1998	Lensman/SKP & Associates	33
02/06/1998	Norton Associates	53
12/06/1998	The Munster Express Ltd	20
12/06/1998	Maxwell Photography	227
12/06/1998	Maxwell Photography	270
09/07/1998	Tony Parkes Pictures Ltd	18

Date:	Photographer:	Cost (€)
09/07/1998	Tony Parkes Pictures Ltd	178
09/07/1998	Maxwell Photography	428
05/08/1998	Tony Parkes Pictures Ltd	17
05/08/1998	City Photographics	80
14/08/1998	Tony Parkes Pictures Ltd	143
04/09/1998	Barrys Photographic Services	8
04/09/1998	Maxwell Photography	186
11/09/1998	Thomas O Neill Photographer	50
16/10/1998	Maxwell Photography	43
16/10/1998	Gerard Hore Photography	60
06/11/1998	Aherne & Mathews	45
27/11/1998	Maxwell Photography	124
27/11/1998	Maxwell Photography	174
27/11/1998	NewsPics	304
04/12/1998	NewsPics	317
11/12/1998	Gerard Hore Photography	101
18/12/1998	NewsPics	112
24/12/1998	Thomas Sunderland Photographer	75
	1998 Total	5,353

Question No. 188 withdrawn.

Public Relations Contracts Data

189. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide, in tabular form, a list of all external public relations firms hired by her Department and associated costs incurred from 2007 to 2010, inclusive; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4549/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department of Social Protection did not hire public relations firms during the years 2007 to 2010, and accordingly, no costs were incurred. The Department's Press Office generally deals with media queries and public relations matters.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

190. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if and when an oral hearing in respect of a carer's allowance application will take place in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4566/15]

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 1 December 2014. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be

sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

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

Question No. 191 answered with Question No. 184.

Domiciliary Care Allowance

192. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a decision has been made on an application for domiciliary care allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4578/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received from the person concerned on 8 December 2014. This application has been forwarded to one of the Department's Medical Assessors for their medical opinion. Following receipt of this opinion, a decision will be made by a Deciding Officer and notified to the person concerned. It can currently take 10 weeks to process an application for DCA.

Jobseeker's Allowance Data

193. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of persons under 25 years of age who are on an age-related social welfare payments, with a breakdown by the number in each year of age. [4601/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The only Working Age scheme with a specified differential rate of payment for those under 25 is Jobseekers' Allowance. A breakdown of the number of recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance under the age of 25 as at 31 December 2014 by age is detailed in the following tabular statement.

Number of Recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance aged under 25 as at 1 December 2014.

Age	Number of Recipients
18	3,486
19	5,244
20	5,598
21	5,622
22	6,177
23	7,099
24	7,566
Total	40,792

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

194. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the grounds on which a new rent supplement form is required in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4606/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): It was brought to the attention of the Department by the Deputy in Parliamentary Question No 63 of 27 November 2014 that the client concerned was seeking an increase in Rent Supplement as rent was being increased from €700 to €800 per month. Subsequently the client was requested to provide the Department with an up to date Rent Supplement application form and lease agreement that would confirm this increase in monthly rent and allow the Department to reassess clients entitlement accordingly. This documentation was not received by the Department.

In Parliamentary question No 57 of 22 January 2015 the Deputy again enquired if increased Rent Supplement could be granted as client's rent had been increased to €800 per month. As the previously requested documentation had not been received by the Department the Deputy was advised again that on receipt of same the client's rate of Rent Supplement could be assessed.

On 27 January 2015 the Department received an up to date lease agreement from the Deputy for the client concerned. This 12-month lease agreement signed by the client and landlord and dated 14 December 2014 confirmed client's rent remains €700 per calendar month. The Department now notes that the Deputy states that client's rent has been increased to €750 per month. The Department will now seek to clarify with the client that this is correct and request the necessary documentation required.

Living Alone Allowance

195. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the reason elderly persons living here who are in receipt of a United Kingdom pension are discriminated against by not being entitled to a living alone allowance, in view of the fact that this is not a means-tested benefit. [4612/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Expenditure on pensions is the largest block of expenditure in the Department, representing about a third of overall expenditure. Because of demographic changes the Department's spending on older people is increasing year on year. Accordingly, the overall concern of the Government in Budget 2015 and previous Budgets has been to protect the primary social welfare rates.

The living alone allowance is an increase of €9.00 per week to the rate of certain social welfare payments, including State pensions, made to people living alone. It is considered secondary, rather than primary, in nature.

As the increase is not a payment in its own right but an increase to an Irish social welfare payment, it cannot be paid to people who are not in receipt of such a payment in the first place.

There are no plans to change the rules or nature of this allowance. In relation to those receiving payments exclusively from other countries, the needs of older people are often provided for in different ways by these countries. While the Irish system provides a basic pension, supplemented by allowances and other benefits, the approach adopted by other countries can be very different, with each country providing for the needs of older people in the way it sees fit. The fact that a living alone allowance is not paid by another administration merely reflects a different approach to providing for the needs of older people.

It is, of course, open to recipients of pensions from other countries to apply for pensions

under the Irish system and they can do this in a number of ways. Those with a mixture of social insurance contributions from this country, other EU countries or from countries with which Ireland has reciprocal agreements, may qualify for a pro-rata contributory pension. Alternatively, they may qualify for a non-contributory pension if they can satisfy a means test. Improvements made to the income disregard in recent years have made it easier for people to qualify for a pension and receive the additional support provided under our pension system for those who live alone.

Carer's Benefit Payments

196. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a person in receipt of carer's benefit and working 15 hours per week is entitled to be paid for public holidays under the Organisation of Working Time Act, for example, if that person can receive payment for a public holiday that is not a normally scheduled working day for that person; if that person will exceed the threshold of 15 hours per week working; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4620/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Where a carer receives a paid public holiday for a day which is not a normal scheduled working day, s/he is not considered to have exceeded the 15 hour threshold for the purposes of qualifying for Carer's Benefit.

The Department of Jobs Enterprise and Innovation has responsibility for the operation of the legislation to which the deputy refers and has advised that in relation to public holidays that, during an absence on carer's leave, an employee can benefit from public holiday entitlements for the first 13 weeks of the leave (under Section 13(3) of the Carer's Leave Act 2001). This entitlement is not conditional on the employee having worked during those 13 weeks. After the 13-week period referred to in Section 13(3) of the Carer's Leave Act, the general rules regarding public holidays, set out in Sections 21 and 22 of the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997, apply to employees on Carer's Leave. Section 21(4) of the 1997 Act provides that a part-time employee must have worked at least 40 hours for their employer during the 5-week period ending on the day before the public holiday to qualify for the public holiday entitlement. Public holiday entitlement can take the form of whichever of the following the employer determines: (a) A paid day off on the public holiday (if the public holiday falls on a day that the employee normally works) (b) A paid day off within a month of that day (c) An additional day of annual leave (d) An additional day's pay Calculation of pay for public holiday entitlement is determined by S.I. No. 475/1997 – Organisation of Working Time (Determination of Pay for Holidays) Regulations 1997.

Questions Nos. 197 to 199, inclusive, withdrawn.

Disability Allowance

200. **Deputy Michael P. Kitt** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if persons with cystic fibrosis in receipt of disability allowance are allowed an easing of means-testing if, in the event of marriage, there are changes to their circumstances; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4720/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The provisions governing the assessment of means for disability allowance (DA) purposes are contained in Part 1 & 2 of Schedule 3 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005.

Where a person is married, the means of the spouse are taken into account as well as the claimant's own means. All DA recipients are treated equally in relation to this provision, regardless of their specific medical condition or illness.

Free Travel Scheme

201. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide assurance that there are no plans to abolish the free travel passes for companions of the elderly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4735/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): There are currently approximately 800,000 people in Ireland in receipt of free travel at an annual cost of €77 million per annum. The free travel scheme is available to all people aged over 66 living permanently in the State. Applicants who are under age 66 must be in receipt of a qualifying payment in order to qualify for the scheme. The qualifying payments for those aged under 66 are invalidity pension, blind pension, disability allowance, carer's allowance or an equivalent social security payment from a country covered by EC Regulations or one with which Ireland has a Bilateral Social Security Agreement.

I am pleased to note that in its recent "Statement of Government Priorities, 2014-2016" the Government committed itself to the full retention of the free travel scheme.

Departmental Programmes

202. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of persons on the JobBridge programme as at 28 January 2015; the number of persons on community employment schemes, rural social schemes and any other job activation or social welfare schemes which remove persons from the live register, broken down by each scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4741/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): The following table shows the current placement figures as of the specified dates:

Programme/Scheme	Current Participants	Effective Date(most recent available)
JobBridge	6,220 participants	29/01/2015
Community Employment	24,089 participants and supervisors	02/02/2015
Rural Social Scheme	2,572 Participants	29/01/2015
Tús	7,865 Participants	29/01/2015
Gateway	1,781 Participants	29/01/2015
Back to work enterprise Allowance	11,167 Participants	31/12/2014
Short Term enterprise Allowance	479 Participants	31/12/2014
CSP	2,800 Participants	31/12/2014

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

203. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a person aged over 55 years who commenced a community employment scheme in April 2013, having spent 156 weeks in receipt of a qualifying social welfare payment, can spend a maximum of six years of participation on a community employment scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4742/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): A person aged over 55 years and who commenced a community employment (CE) scheme in April 2013 (having no previous CE participation since April 2000) and having spent 156 continuous weeks in receipt of a qualifying social welfare payment can spend a maximum of six years of participation on a CE scheme, subject to the availability of a place and budgetary constraints.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

204. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Longford will receive notification from the social welfare appeals office regarding their current appeal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4780/15]

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 21 January 2015. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

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

Registration of Births

205. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to IT difficulties being experienced in the Dublin office of the registrar of births; if these IT difficulties have resulted in difficulties for clients in obtaining certificates (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4785/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Registrar General is responsible for the management and control of the Civil Registration Service. This includes the provision and maintenance of the Civil Registration Computer System.

Prior to December 2014 the Managed Services required to support the Civil Registration Computer System was provided by an external service provider at a substantial cost to the taxpayer. In 2014 it was decided to transfer these services into the Department as it had the capacity and expertise necessary to provide these services and such transfer would result in a significant saving to the taxpayer.

This project involved the development and configuration of a new matrix system and the transfer of all data from the external service provider. The services were transferred into the Department in early December 2014.

Following the transfer there were a small number of outages on the system resulting in the system being unavailable for short periods of time. The causes of the outages have been investigated and some have been resolved. Work is on-going to resolve any outstanding issues and the Department is continuing to monitor the system to ensure that any further issues that may arise as a result of this complex development are quickly identified and resolved.

There are manual fall back procedures in place in all Civil Registration Offices which allow the registrar to proceed with registrations in the event that the computer system is not available.

It is unfortunate that a number of people have been inconvenienced by these problems. Any of the persons affected may contact the General Register Office and that Office will be happy to resolve any outstanding issues.

Departmental Investigations

206. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status, for social welfare purposes, of ESB meter readers; if they are considered self-employed or sub-contractors by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4787/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): This matter is the subject of ongoing investigation in my Department.

It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the likely outcome of these investigations at this stage.

Question No. 207 withdrawn.

Social Welfare Overpayments

208. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the weekly amount by which repayment of overpayment in the period January 2013 to May 2014 in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare who is unemployed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4807/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department has no record of overpayment deductions for this client as information required to determine and process a possible overpayment remains outstanding. The Department will now correspond again with the client to request the outstanding information. If no reply is received the Department will progress the overpayment process based on information to hand.

Community Employment Schemes Operation

209. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 184 of 4 November 2014 and in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 22 who was in dispute with the community employment sponsor, the role her Department has in cases where the person believes their representations to the sponsor and her Department have not been adequately dealt with; the mechanisms in place to deal with disputes between community employment participants and sponsors or her Department; her Department's policy on evidence required from participants relating to fitness to work; and the rights participants have to access information relating to them held by the sponsor organisations

or her Department. [4832/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The issues raised by the person concerned related to his employment, his employer in this case being the Community Employment (CE) sponsor. The Department has no role in relation to the employment of staff participating on CE. As provided for in the Contract Agreement between the Department and a CE Sponsoring Body; CE employers are at all times an independent contractor for all purposes and all persons recruited by the sponsors are their responsibility. The CE procedures manual provides that if there is a dispute between a CE participant and the employer this needs to be resolved between both parties through the employer's grievance procedure. Furthermore it is open to the person concerned, if he wishes, to seek redress through the various dispute resolution forum such as the Labour Relations Commission.

In relation to sick leave, the CE procedures manual provides that:

- For certified sick leave: "Each participant is eligible to claim up to 56 hours certified sick leave during their 52 weeks of participation for which DSP provides grant support. Payments to any participant on certified sick leave beyond this will not be granted-aided by DSP. All medical/doctor certificates must be available for inspection by DSP until the audit is completed. If an instance of sick leave extends beyond 6 consecutive days (from 6th January 2014), an application can be made for Illness Benefit using the application form (MC1) supplied by the GP who furnished the medical certificate".

- For uncertified sick leave "There is no provision for grant payment in such circumstances. However, the local DSP Officer may exercise some discretion in relation to a participant on uncertified sick leave. Payment may not, in any circumstances, exceed 2 working days (i.e. 8 hours total) in any 12-month period for any participant."

Participants can access personal information held by the Department if they request it in writing or through the FOI process. Access to personal information held by a CE sponsor is a matter for them.

Social Insurance Payments

210. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to set out her views on the risk and if she will acknowledge the challenge in moving from unemployment to self-employment by considering an arrangement where self-employed persons contributing to social insurance fund at class S would be entitled to one jobseeker's benefit claim, in other words, on the same basis as for class A contributors, but extending to no more than 15 months over the course of their career in self-employment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4835/15]

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 September 2013, I published the report of the Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare on Extending Social Insurance Coverage for the self-employed. The Group was asked to examine and report on issues involved in extending social insurance coverage for self-employed people in order to establish whether or not such cover is technically feasible and financially sustainable, with the requirement that any proposals for change must be cost neutral.

The Group found that the current system of means tested jobseeker's allowance payments adequately provides cover to self-employed people for the risks associated with unemployment. In this context, the Group noted that almost 9 out of every 10 self-employed people who claimed the means tested jobseeker's allowance during the three-year period from 2009 to 2011 received payment. Consequently, the Group was not convinced that there was a need for the extension of social insurance for the self-employed to provide cover for jobseeker's benefit.

On the basis of the findings of the report of the Advisory Group I am satisfied that the self-employed have adequate access to income support in the event of business failure. There are no plans to change provision in this area.

Rent Supplement Scheme Administration

211. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to set out the amount expended on rent allowance in each of the years from 2008 to 2013, inclusive, for Dublin city, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal and south County Dublin local authorities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4836/15]

212. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she is satisfied that people at risk of homelessness in the greater Dublin area, that is, Dublin city, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal and south County Dublin, are treated no less favourably on the basis of the local authority they happen to be dealing with; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4837/15]

213. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to outline her views in respect of whether, when providing statistics on a local authority basis, her Department should provide figures separately, and generally, for each of the four Dublin local authority areas, that is, Dublin city, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal, and south County Dublin, rather than aggregating same, in view of the fact that no other sets of local authority areas are aggregated for statistical purposes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4838/15]

219. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if the rent supplement payment is permitted if the owner of the property is the son or daughter of the resident and potential recipient of the payment. [4949/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 211 to 213, inclusive, and 219 together.

The rent supplement scheme provides support to eligible people living in private rented accommodation whose means are insufficient to meet their accommodation costs and who do not have accommodation available to them from any other source.

There are approximately 71,500 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €298 million for 2015. Rent supplement recipients and expenditure each year since 2008 is provided in the attached tabular statement. A county breakdown by recipients is also provided for 2014. The Department does not maintain statistics on rent supplement on a housing authority basis. Statistical reporting on a housing authority basis is a matter for my col-

league the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government.

Under the legislation governing entitlement to rent supplement, the Department must establish that the applicant is a bona fide tenant. There is no specific restriction on landlords renting to family members provided all of the qualifying criteria for the scheme have been met. In determining whether the applicant is a bona fide tenant the Department will generally require documentary evidence including:

- Details of the lease agreement,
- Proof of ownership of the property,
- Documentation that the tenancy has been registered with the Private Residential Tenancies Board,
- Documentation detailing payments made to the landlord.

In view of the current supply difficulties in the private rented sector, the Department has put a number of measures in place to support rent supplement recipients at risk of homelessness through increased flexibility within the administration of the rent supplement scheme. The Interim Tenancy Sustainment Protocol introduced in the Dublin region during 2014, has provided support for some 340 families to date through increased rental payments.

Engagement with the various Dublin housing authorities by individuals at risk of homelessness is also a matter for my colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government.

Table 1: Rent Supplement End of Year Recipient Numbers & Expenditure: 2008 to 2014

Year	Recipients	Cost €000
2008	74,038	440,548
2009	93,030	510,751
2010	97,260	516,538
2011	96,803	502,747
2012	87,684	422,536
2013	79,788	372,909
2014	71,533	338,135

2014 Revised Estimate

Table 2: Rent Supplement by County, December 2014

COUNTY	RECIPIENTS
CARLOW	1,086
CAVAN	414
CLARE	1,336
CORK	8,273
DONEGAL	1,812
DUBLIN	26,453
GALWAY	3,591
KERRY	1,736
KILDARE	3,698

COUNTY	RECIPIENTS
KILKENNY	1,011
LAOIS	1,008
LEITRIM	324
LIMERICK	2,461
LONGFORD	476
LOUTH	2,211
MAYO	1,619
MEATH	1,726
MONAGHAN	352
OFFALY	1,041
ROSCOMMON	687
SLIGO	451
TIPPERARY	1,961
WATERFORD	1,443
WESTMEATH	1,533
WEXFORD	2,700
WICKLOW	2,130
Total	71,533

Social Insurance Refunds

214. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will report on the current one-year backlog for processing PRSI refunds; and the measures that will be put in place to ensure citizens receive entitled refunds in a timely manner. [4889/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): My Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications for PRSI refunds are processed as quickly as possible.

I am aware of the backlog in claims for PRSI refunds and my Department is actively working on reducing this backlog. If the Deputy has a particular case that he wishes to query I would be happy to have my officials look into it.

Question No. 215 withdrawn.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

216. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to reports that the community employment and employment services programmes are now only accepting persons on training if they can confirm they have a job secured when they leave the training; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4939/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): The eligibility criteria for community employment (CE) is published on the Department’s website – www.welfare.ie. There is no requirement to “have a job secured” prior to commencing a CE placement, indeed if the applicant had a job secured this would prohibit them from participating on CE as the criteria for entry for the majority of clients is to be unemployed for a minimum of 1 year. As the Deputy is aware, the purpose of CE is to prepare jobseekers for

employment.

Water Conservation Grant

217. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to set out the total anticipated cost of the water conservation grant to her Department including any additional administration requirements and so on; if she will provide a breakdown of these costs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4941/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department of Social Protection will administer, on behalf of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, a €100 water conservation grant for households that complete a valid response to Irish Water's customer registration process. The grant will be paid to the registered householders annually, in respect of their primary dwellings, with the first payment to be paid in September 2015 and each subsequent year up to and including 2018.

The Department is in consultation with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform with regard to the staffing and funding required to administer the scheme. The administration and payment of this grant represents a significant project for the Department of Social Protection. The Department is currently carrying out a scoping exercise to explore the most effective and efficient approach to its implementation. This will include estimates of resources required to undertake the initial work involved and ongoing administration of the grant.

Question No. 218 withdrawn.

Question No. 219 answered with Question No. 211.

Questions Nos. 220 and 221 withdrawn.

Community Employment Schemes Places

222. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if there will be an adequate training budget to meet the three-year training requirements for participants in health and social care services community employment schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4961/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department hopes to commence rolling out a new Health and Social Care Programme for CE participants during the course of this year. This programme will ensure participants have access to qualifications in the health and social care sector in order to take up employment opportunities in this area and to support local service delivery. The Department has been consulting with key stakeholders and service providers in this sector in preparation for the implementation of the programme and on-going support will be provided to the CE Sponsoring Organisations who manage these schemes.

As part of the programme, it is intended that CE participants who work directly with service users in the health and social care sector, will be provided with a dedicated programme comprising formal learning and supervised work experience. This programme will lead to a FETAC Level 5 Major Award in the health and social care sector which is the minimum entry requirement for a social care practitioner.

Work on rolling out the programme and finalising what training budget will be required to support it will continue over the coming months.

Community Employment Schemes Places

223. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if the positions of participants on community employment schemes in the health and social care area remain with the existing main sponsor groups, as is the current situation throughout the country; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4962/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): The Department hopes to commence rolling out a new Health and Social Care Programme for CE participants during the course of this year. The programme will ensure that participants have adequate access to qualifications in the health and social care sector in order to take up employment opportunities in this area and to support local service delivery. The Department has been consulting with key stakeholders and service providers in this sector in preparation for the roll-out of the programme, and this will continue. On-going support will be provided to the CE Sponsoring Organisations who manage these schemes throughout the process.

The main consideration in determining this approach is to ensure that CE participants who are working directly with service users are adequately trained and receive the appropriate supervision that pertains to this sector.

Question No. 224 withdrawn.

Public Services Card Provision

225. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 17 and 30 of 5 March 2014, the progress that has been made with the roll-out of the new public services card to social welfare recipients; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5020/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The purpose of the Public Services Card (PSC) is to enable individuals to 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 of this Department and to make it easy for providers of public services to verify the identity of customers.

Considerable progress continues to be made in the roll out of the Public Service Card. Approximately 1,190,000 cards have now been produced. These include approximately 343,000 PSC Free Travel variants.

Face-to-Face registration is taking place countrywide in 89 offices of the Department for individual applicants for a Personal Public Service (PPS) Number and people applying for or in receipt of social protection payments or benefits, including Jobseeker payments, Free Travel entitlement, Child Benefit payments, State Pensions, and One Parent Family payments.

Selected low-risk customers have also been invited to avail of postal registration processes which involves either the utilisation, with consent, of information already provided to other

Government agencies, (for example, a photograph supplied in connection with an application for a passport), or, in the case of selected pensioners over 66 who collect their payments at a Post Office, the provision of passport-standard photographs.

The PSC project has been earmarked as a key initiative in the Public Service Reform Plan with the aim to “expand the use of the PSC to cover a greater range of services”. PSC registration is being expanded to encompass all Departmental scheme customers and over time, the adult population of Ireland.

Community Welfare Services

226. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection whether front-line services provided by her Department to the individual citizen have suffered dramatically, given that many urban centres are without community welfare officer access and rely instead on a telephone number which is often not answered; whether she is aware that many persons attempting to make contact with CWOs are doing so in distressing situations; whether communication with these citizens has fallen to an unacceptable level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5024/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): Following the transfer of the Community Welfare Service (CWS) from the Health Service Executive to the Department in 2011, the Department has re-engineered its business model to support the provision of integrated services across all business streams involved in the delivery of localised services. As part of this strategy, the Department is engaged in the delivery of integrated Intreo centres, which provide a full range of services, including the CWS, generally available in one location.

I am satisfied that where the service has been re-structured, alternative arrangements have been put in place to ensure that customers are provided with on-going access to the supports provided by the CWS. In general, the frequency and staffing levels of public clinics has increased providing customers improved access to services. If a person is unable to travel to a clinic, for example due to illness, alternative arrangements can be put place including arranging a visit to the client’s home if necessary.

People claiming supports under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme generally only interact with the Department on an occasional basis, for example, when seeking an exceptional needs payment or in claiming additional supports such as rent supplement, which are usually reviewed once to twice yearly.

The staffing needs for all areas within the Department are continuously reviewed, to ensure that the best use is made of all available resources with a view to providing an efficient service to those who rely on the schemes operated by the Department. If the Deputy is aware of a difficulty which may have arisen in relation to a specific case she should bring the matter to the attention of the Department.

Family Income Supplement Data

227. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of public servants in receipt of family income supplement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47835/14]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Family income supplement (FIS) is designed to provide support for employees on low earnings with families.

At the end of December 2014, there were 50,306 people in receipt of FIS, of which 3,902 (7.8%) are recorded as public servants.

Child Poverty

228. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if her Department has undertaken any impact analysis studies on the effect on children of the cut to the lone parent allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2179/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Social impact assessment is an evidence-based methodology to estimate the likely distributive effects of policy proposals on poverty and social inequality, including impacts on family types, lifestyle groups, and gender.

The Department of Social Protection has published an integrated social impact assessment of Budgets 2013, 2014 and earlier this week of Budget 2015, using the ESRI SWITCH model. The Department's social impact assessments include the main social welfare and tax measures including the ongoing changes to the one-parent family payment. In addition, the 2015 analysis takes into account the Government's decisions in relation to water charges and affordability measures.

Furthermore, the Government has committed itself to carrying out a social impact assessment of the main social welfare and tax measures for 2016 and subsequent years before the publishing of budgets. The social impact assessment will be conducted by a cross-Departmental body led by the Departments of Finance, Social Protection, and Public Expenditure and Reform.

Social Insurance Payments

229. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her plans to alter the tax collection structure in a manner which would enable self-employed persons to make contributions that would provide income support in the event of business failure in view of the fact that the current social insurance system does not provide non-means tested support in the short term in such instances. [4690/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): In general, PRSI contribution classes are decided by the nature of a person's employment.

Social insurance contributions paid under Pay Related Social Insurance (PRSI) by employers, employees, the self-employed and voluntary contributors are collected primarily through the income tax system and are paid into the Social Insurance Fund (SIF).

In general the current system of social insurance operates on a mandatory basis and therefore contributors pay PRSI contributions at the rate appropriate to their PRSI class.

Ordinary employees who have access to the full range of social insurance benefits pay class A PRSI at the rate of 4%. In addition, their employers pay 10.75% in respect of their employees, resulting in the payment of a combined 14.75% rate per employee under full-rate PRSI class A. (For employees earning less than €356 per week, the rate of employer's PRSI is 8.5%)

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 guardians payment (contributory), maternity benefit and adoptive benefit.

Self-employed workers may 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 and the 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.

In September 2013, I published the report of the Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare on Extending Social Insurance Coverage for the self-employed. The Group was asked to examine and report on issues involved in extending social insurance coverage for self-employed people in order to establish whether or not such cover is technically feasible and financially sustainable, with the requirement that any proposals for change must be cost neutral.

The Group found that the current system of means tested jobseeker's allowance payments adequately provides cover to self-employed people for the risks associated with unemployment. In this context, the Group noted that almost 9 out of every 10 self-employed people who claimed the means tested jobseeker's allowance during the three-year period from 2009 to 2011 received payment. Consequently, the Group was not convinced that there was a need for the extension of social insurance for the self-employed to provide cover for jobseeker's benefit.

On the basis of the findings of the report of the Advisory Group I am satisfied that the self-employed have access to income support in the event of business failure and I do not propose to make any changes to the PRSI system at this time. I will keep the situation under review.

Corporation Tax Regime

230. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide, in tabular form, the number of companies operating in the Irish tonnage tax regime in each year from 2003 to 2014; the number of persons employed in shore based positions with Irish tonnage tax companies; the total tax paid each year under the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4327/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the number of companies that returned profits under the tonnage tax regime on Corporation Tax returns for the years 2003 to 2012, the latest year available, is as set out in the following table:

Year	Number of Companies	Estimated Corporation Tax Liability on Profits Returned Under the Tonnage Tax Regime €m
2003	*	*
2004	8	0.1
2005	10	0.2
2006	13	0.4
2007	20	0.6
2008	29	0.2
2009	32	0.3
2010	37	0.5
2011	38	0.6
2012	39	0.6

* Given the small number of companies in 2003, this information cannot be provided to protect the confidentiality of taxpayer data.

In relation to the number of persons employed in shore based positions with Irish tonnage tax companies, I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that this information is not identifiable from the Commissioners' records.

Energy Prices

231. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which his Department monitors the economic impact of energy costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5003/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): My Department monitors and advises on all developments that can impact on the economy, including oil price movements. The price of Brent crude oil has fallen by about 45 per cent in euro terms (nearly 50 per cent in US dollar terms) since the end of September, when the macroeconomic projections that underpin Budget 2015 were finalised. For the most part this is a positive development, and will likely have a favourable impact on real economic activity in Ireland.

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

In terms of quantifying the impact, a reasonable rule of thumb is that, everything else being equal, each sustained €10 per barrel reduction in the price of oil boosts the level of real GDP by somewhere in the region of 0.1 to 0.2 percentage points.

Tax Code

232. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 79 of 22 January 2015, the process in place in the Revenue Commissioners to verify entitlement to a personal fund threshold when one is requested; the documentation which must be furnished in support of such a claim if the Revenue Commissioners audit holders of personal fund thresholds to ensure compliance is maintained; and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [4322/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that 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 his or her lifetime from all of that individual's pension arrangements. This is known as the Standard Fund Threshold (SFT) and was introduced on 7 December 2005 and reduced on a number of occasions 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 (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 various dates on which it was reduced. Accordingly, the legislation provided that such individuals could protect his or her higher pension values, subject to certain ceilings and conditions, by applying to the Revenue Commissioners for a PFT certificate.

In order to be in a position to make a correct application for a PFT the individual concerned had to request a statement from the administrator of his or her defined benefit and/or defined contribution arrangement certifying the capital value of that individual's pension rights at that date, as calculated in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 2C of Part 30 of, and Schedule 23B to, the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997.

Up to June 2014, when the PFT process was paper based, each application was examined and documentary evidence was requested to verify the accuracy of the submission and that the correct amount of a PFT was being claimed.

Since the advent of the new electronic system in July 2014 an individual is required, when making an application for a PFT, to provide basic identifying information about him or herself and the various pension arrangements of which he or she is a member. In addition, the individual has to obtain from the administrator of each pension arrangement of which he or she is a member, a statement certifying the amount of the individual's pension rights as at 1 January 2014 relating to that arrangement, calculated in accordance with the provisions of the relevant legislation.

The legislation places an obligation on both the individual making the PFT application and the administrator(s) of the pension arrangement(s) to retain the certifying statements for a period of 6 years after the last benefit is paid out and to make them available to an officer of the Revenue Commissioners on being required by a notice in writing to do so.

Section 787P (2) (b) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 requires the PFT applications to be made electronically within 12 months of the electronic system becoming available (1 July 2015). After this closing date for applications, Revenue will launch a compliance program to ensure the electronic applications are correct and comply fully with the terms of the legislation.

Since 1 January 2014 when the SFT was reduced to €2 million, Revenue has issued 159 PFT certificates.

Financial Services Regulation

233. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his view on draft proposals from the European Commission on the capital buffer which must be held by constant net asset value funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4326/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Ireland supports enhanced regulation of money market funds to minimise system-wide risks and we are open to the consideration of necessary change in this area. However, the European Commission's original proposal on Money Market Funds (MMF) and in particular the proposed capital buffer to be applied to constant net asset value MMFs, would in my view do considerable damage to the constant net asset value MMF industry, and we have argued to this effect at the Council's working group.

Constant net asset value funds are an important source of funding for banks and corporates and the buffer proposal which would constitute an effective ban could lead to a sudden and large scale outflow of funds to third countries and a loss of liquidity in the real economy.

Reform of MMFs should be considered and proportionate. It should also be consistent with developments elsewhere globally so as to ensure no harmful impact on the EU market or disparity between the EU and the United States. The US rules did not include a capital buffer and will, in effect, preserve most of constant net asset value funds in the U.S. Ireland will work with other member states and with the Commission to develop a better approach to regulation of MMFs in Europe. It is my view that both constant and variable net asset value MMFs could be more effectively regulated through a package of enhanced regulation which includes fees and gates and this remains my preferred solution.

Eurozone Issues

234. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the amounts in which and the dates on which Ireland's contribution to the EU loans to Greece will be repaid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4395/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Since May 2010, the euro area Member States and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been providing financial support to Greece through an Economic Adjustment Programme in the context of a sharp deterioration in its financing conditions. The Eurogroup agreed to activate stability support to Greece via bilateral loans centrally pooled by the European Commission. At year-end 31 December 2014 the total amount owing to Ireland on the Greek loan facility was €347,437,121.03.

Currently Ireland is in receipt of interest paid quarterly based on the 3 Month EURIBOR rate plus a margin of 0.5%. Capital repayments will be repaid quarterly beginning in June 2020 with the final capital repayment scheduled for June 2040.

Pension Provisions

235. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons subject simultaneously to both the public service pension levy and the private pension levy for each of the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4421/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): It is understood that the Deputy's reference to the public service pension levy relates to the Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR)

Not all of the information sought by the Deputy is available. This is due in particular to the fact that members of pension schemes are not charged with paying the stamp duty levy on pension fund assets introduced in 2011 to pay for the Jobs Initiative and which ends this year. The levy is a charge on the trustees of funded pension schemes and on the insurers and administrators who manage the assets of such schemes and personal pension plans and it is they who are

liable to pay the levy. It is up to those trustees and administrators to decide in each case whether and how the levy should be passed on and who should be impacted and to what extent, given the particular circumstances of the pension funds or pension plans for which they are responsible. I have no detailed or specific information on the decisions taken by trustees and administrators in this regard.

With regard to the numbers of persons to whom the public service pension reduction (PSPR) applies, I am informed by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform that the number of public service pensions in payment at the end of each of the years 2012, 2013 and 2014 is estimated to have been 140,000, 144,500 and 149,000 respectively. A breakdown of these figures by individual public service scheme is not available.

An estimated 40% of public service pensions are exempt from the PSPR because of the applicable thresholds; in particular public service pensions below €12,000 awarded to persons who retired up to end-February 2012 are exempt from PSPR.

I am also informed by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform that the PSPR does not apply to pensions paid by public service pension schemes that are funded and subject to the Minimum Funding Standard as specified in the Pensions Act 1990. I understand that this particular exemption is provided for in section 1 of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2010 (FEMPI) by way of the definition therein of public service pension scheme.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

236. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding recruitment in the Revenue Commissioners (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4431/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that based on current staffing levels and projected retirements during 2015 Revenue will require to fill critical posts at all grades this year.

Under a delegated sanction received from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform the Revenue Commissioners are obliged to fill posts in the first instance by reference to the Public Service Resource panel before considering open recruitment.

Revenue has already commenced recruiting staff from Public Appointments Service panels and from existing Revenue open recruitment panels. Using its recruitment licence from the Commission for Public Service Appointments, Revenue also plans to recruit specialist staff at Principal, Assistant Principal, Administrative Officer and Executive Officer levels.

Revenue is currently engaged in running open competitions at Assistant Principal Level for a panel of tax professionals and two ICT specialists. These competitions have been advertised nationally and on the Public Appointments Service (PAS) website. Recruitment competitions for Principal Officer (Data Analyst), Administrative Officer (Compliance and ICT) and Executive Officer (Compliance) are planned for the first six months of 2015. The number of posts to be filled will depend on critical vacancies arising, projected business needs and the number of posts that can be filled through redeployment and from internal promotion panels. Overall Revenue expects to fill around 400 posts from open competitions advertised in 2014 and 2015.

All Revenue's open competitions will be advertised nationally and on the PAS website.

Bond Markets

237. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether there is a bubble in the sovereign bond market; his views on whether Irish sovereign bonds are currently overvalued; the risk assessment he has carried out in respect of any market correction to the current valuation of Irish sovereign bonds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4461/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware bond market yields and their valuations are determined by market participants and not by the Irish authorities. Investors will continue to value Irish sovereign bonds based on Ireland's underlying economic and fiscal fundamentals and relative to its sovereign peers. Ireland is making good economic and fiscal progress after a number of difficult years and is now perceived by the market as a semi-core sovereign borrower rather than a peripheral.

As the issuer of Irish sovereign bonds, the NTMA constantly monitors and evaluates bond market developments. In recent months, prior to the European Central Bank's (ECB) announcement on 22 January 2015 of the expanded asset purchase programme, also referred to as quantitative easing, Irish Government bond yields declined steadily. It is reasonable to suggest that the expectation, on the part of financial market participants, of such an announcement by the ECB was a contributory factor in this decline.

European Central Bank

238. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether the recent measures announced by the European Central Bank will be of benefit to Ireland in terms of measurable indicators; his views on what would constitute the criteria of success for these measures with respect to the Irish economy; his views on whether quantitative easing poses a risk of inflating asset bubbles in stocks, bonds, commodities and-or property; if so, the way he will address that risk; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4462/15]

239. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Finance with reference to the recent measures announced by the European Central Bank, the ceiling the ECB will place on the total holdings of Irish Government bonds held by the Central Bank of Ireland; the current total holdings of Irish Government bonds held by the Central Bank of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4463/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 238 and 239 together.

Price stability in the euro area has been defined as annual inflation of close to but not exceeding 2 per cent (inflation being measured by the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices). Inflation in the euro area has been below levels consistent with price stability for some time and, in fact, has been in negative territory for two months in a row now.

With policy rates effectively at zero per cent, the ECB announced an expanded asset purchase programme on January 22nd to include bonds issued by euro area central governments, agencies and European institutions. This programme will be carried out from March until at least the end-September 2016, or until the path for inflation is consistent with price stability.

The Irish economy should benefit through a number of channels. For example, the economy should benefit directly through improved financing conditions for households and firms. In addition, the euro area is Ireland's single largest export destination; therefore, by supporting

real economic activity and raising inflation in the euro area this will underpin export growth in Ireland. Monetary policy also works through the exchange rate channel the depreciation of the euro will provide a boost to Irish exports. Raising the rate of inflation in the euro area will also help Ireland achieve our twin goals of improving competitiveness and increasing tax revenue. So, over time, the success of quantitative easing will be seen in terms of stronger growth rates in Ireland and across the euro area, and inflation rates consistent with price stability.

Of course, the accommodative stance of monetary policy in the euro area raises the possibility of asset price bubbles. This must, however, be seen in the context of weak credit growth both in Ireland and in the euro area as a whole. Moreover, the macroprudential tools that the Central Bank is to impose are designed to reduce the probability of property market bubbles.

At a European level, there has been a strengthening of institutional arrangements governing the risk architecture since the global financial crisis with, for example, the establishment of the European Systemic Risk Board.

Many details in terms of the implementation of the ECB's expanded asset purchase programme are not, as yet, publicly available and these are, of course, an internal matter for the ECB and National Central Banks. The ECB has, however, indicated that its asset purchase programme in relation to sovereign bonds will be restricted to bonds with a remaining maturity of greater than 2 years but less than 30 years. It has also indicated limits on the Eurosystem's holdings of any one issuer's bonds, taking into account existing holdings. These limits refer to the same 2-year to 30-year maturity window. To be precise, holdings within the 2-year to 30-year remaining maturity window will not exceed 33 per cent of an issuer's tradeable bonds within the same window. In summary therefore, the limits imposed on the holding of bonds are limits on the Eurosystem as a whole, rather than on the Central Bank of Ireland, and relate to bonds within the purchasable window, that is, those with between 2 and 30 years remaining maturity.

The majority of the bonds acquired by the CBI in exchange for the Promissory Notes have more than 30 years remaining. Currently, this is the case for €19 billion out of the original €25 billion nominal issuance. Therefore, the holding of these bonds by the Central Bank of Ireland will, in practice, have no impact on the amounts that can be purchased by the CBI. While other bonds within the 2-year to 30-year maturity window that are already held by the CBI and other National Central Banks will be taken into account for the purposes of calculating the amounts that can be purchased, I understand that this still leaves ample room for participation by the CBI in the asset purchase programme. In addition, I understand that the Bank's disposal strategy for its Special Portfolio - those bonds acquired following the liquidation of IBRC and the exchange of the Promissory Notes remains as previously announced, that is, it will continue to dispose of the bonds as soon as possible, provided conditions of financial stability permit. Disposals may or may not impact on the purchasable amounts under the asset purchase programme depending on whether the bonds sold are within the 2-year to 30-year maturity window.

I also wish that note be taken of the fact that, as the Central Bank of Ireland and other Eurosystem National Central Banks do not generally make regular detailed statements of their investment holdings available, I do not have information on these holdings to hand. The Central Bank will report on the holdings in its Special Portfolio - those bonds acquired following the liquidation of IBRC and the exchange of the Promissory Notes in its regular Annual Report which is scheduled to appear in April. In addition, the Eurosystem makes available information on bonds purchased in its previous Securities Market Programme on its website but this information does not cover the investment holdings to which I have already referred.

Banks Recapitalisation

240. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Finance the actions he will take in the Court of Justice of the European Union with respect to the actions of either or both the European Central Bank or the European Commission in addressing the banking crisis here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4464/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): There is no intention to take the actions which the Deputy has referred to.

Departmental Expenditure

241. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide, in tabular form, for the years from 2007 to 2010, inclusive, the total photography costs in his Department, including a list of the photographers who were booked, the photographers used and a breakdown of costs associated with each occasion a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4493/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The information requested by the Deputy could not be collated in the time available. I will respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Departmental Expenditure

242. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide in tabular form for the years 1997 to 2007 the total photography costs in his Department, including a list of the photographers who were booked, the photographers used and a breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4509/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The information requested by the Deputy could not be collated in the time available. I will respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

VAT Rate Application

243. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if it is legally possible to charge a different, higher VAT rate for goods bought online; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4528/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that in general the VAT Directive does not permit Member States to have a rate of VAT that is higher for goods sold online than for the same goods sold in a high street shop. There may be circumstances where differential rates apply to similar supplies; these arise where the on-line supply constitutes the supply of a service and the high street equivalent is a supply of goods. For example, eBooks, like other electronic services, are liable to VAT at the standard rate, while books are liable at the zero rate.

Public Relations Contracts Data

244. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide, in tabular form, a list of all external public relations firms hired by his Department and associated costs incurred from 2007 to 2010, inclusive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4543/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): My Department did not hire any external public relations firms during the period 2007-10.

Tax Rebates

245. **Deputy Derek Keating** asked the Minister for Finance if VRT paid on cars in 2009, which had been imported from the UK throughout 2008 and kept in storage never having been driven on Irish roads and eventually both scrapped, can be refunded. [4564/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that section 134(6), Finance Act 1992 provides for a repayment of Vehicle Registration Tax where the deletion of a vehicle from the register is warranted by exceptional circumstances which arose within 7 working days after the registration of the vehicle by Revenue and where the vehicle has not been "motor taxed" under the Finance (Excise Duties) (Vehicles) Act 1952. The vehicles in question do not satisfy this provision and there are no further provisions to allow for the repayment of VRT in the circumstances outlined.

Exchequer Revenue

246. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide, in tabular form, the currencies which the State's financial reserves, as managed by the National Treasury Management Agency, are denominated in; if the recent major currency fluctuations have had any positive or negative impact upon the State's financial situation. [4574/15]

248. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide, in tabular form, the currencies the gross debt of the State is denominated in; and if the recent major currency fluctuations have had any positive or negative impact upon the State's financial situation. [4576/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 246 and 248 together.

At end-2014 the gross National Debt under the management of the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) stood at €197.1 billion. Where there are non-euro borrowings such as those from the UK Treasury and International Monetary Fund (IMF) which form part of the EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support as well as some short-term paper liabilities, the NTMA as part of its debt and risk management strategy has in place a hedging programme whereby non-euro borrowings are swapped back into euro using derivative instruments such as currency swaps and foreign exchange contracts. The aim of the hedging programme is to manage exchange rate risks and protect the Exchequer from potential currency volatility. As the vast majority of the gross National Debt is either denominated in, or swapped into, euro there is practically no impact on the value of the debt as a result of recent currency fluctuations.

The main non-euro borrowings are from the UK Treasury and International Monetary Fund (IMF) under the EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support. At end-2014 the outstanding balances on these loans were Sterling 3.2 billion and SDR 11.8 billion respectively. IMF loans are denominated in SDRs (Special Drawing Rights), an international reserve asset created by

the IMF. Its value is based on a basket of four key international currencies euro, Japanese yen, pound sterling and U.S. dollar. There are also some short-term paper non-euro borrowings with outstanding balances of £0.15 billion and US \$2.3 billion respectively at end-2014.

At end-2014 the Exchequer had cash and other financial asset balances of €14.8 billion. In calculating National Debt these cash and other financial asset balances are netted off Gross National Debt. With the exception of one very small US Dollar deposit, all of the cash and other financial assets are denominated in euro.

The Ireland Strategic Investment Fund follows a policy of reducing its foreign currency risk by in excess of 50%. Following this currency hedge, the Fund has approximately €1 billion worth of exposure to foreign currencies from non-Euro denominated investments. The Fund has therefore, purely from a currency perspective, benefited from the recent strengthening of foreign currencies.

Central Bank of Ireland

247. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide figures, in tabular form, the currencies the financial reserves of the Central Bank of Ireland are denominated in; and if the recent major currency fluctuations have had any impact upon the Central Bank of Ireland's financial reserves. [4575/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been informed by the Central Bank that as at 31 December 2014, the Central Bank held less than 1% of its total investment portfolio in foreign currencies. Given the low level of exposure to foreign currency and the Central Bank's hedging strategy, recent major currency fluctuations have not had a material impact on the Central Bank's financial reserves.

While the Question seeks currency figures in tabular form, the Central Bank does not disclose details of specific exposures within its own investment portfolio. The Central Bank is independent in the exercise of its functions and the management of its investment holdings is a matter for the Central Bank itself. Neither I nor the Department of Finance have any role in those matters.

Further information on the make-up of the Central Bank's investment portfolio is available from the Central Bank's Annual Report. The Annual Report for 2013 is available on the Central Bank website. The Annual Report for 2014 is due for publication in April 2015. The Annual Report is the normal channel through which the Central Bank comments on the make-up of its investment portfolio.

Question No. 248 answered with Question No. 246.

Bank Charges

249. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance if he will introduce a change in regulations to the way bank charges will be applied on accounts with low balances; where the charging of fees greatly reduces the balance or brings the balance to zero; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4588/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): All credit institutions in Ireland are independent commercial entities. I have no statutory role in relation to the charges applied by credit institutions. Section 149 of the Consumer Credit Act 1995 requires that credit institutions, pre-

scribed credit institutions and bureaux de change must make a submission to the Central Bank if they wish to introduce any new customer charges or increase any existing customer charges in respect of certain services. Section 149 does not cover interest rates rather it applies to fees and commissions only. The Central Bank may direct the institution not to impose the new or increased charge or it may approve the charge, or approve it at a lower level than requested by the institution. Once approved, the bank is entitled to impose the charge.

The Central Bank's Consumer Protection Code 2012 contains requirements in relation to the provision of information on charges to consumers.

The constituent may be referring to the application of stamp duty for holding a debit card. Stamp duty of €5 per annum applies to all debit cards issued to account holders and I have no plans to remove this charge at present. However, as you may be aware a Standard Bank Account was tested in a pilot project in 3 locations over a period of 9 months in 2012 and 2013. The aim was to design a bank account that has low or no cost associated with it. Officials in my Department are currently examining how to further advance this issue.

Irish Fiscal Advisory Council

250. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46772/14]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Irish Fiscal Advisory Council was established on a statutory basis on the 31 December 2012 under the Fiscal Responsibility Act 2012. The Act sets out the Council's functions, which can only be amended through primary legislation.

Further, Regulation (EU) 473/2013 introduced a requirement that draft budgets and the stability programme update must be based on macroeconomic forecasts that are produced or endorsed by an independent body. This endorsement function has been set out in an amendment to the Fiscal Responsibility Act 2012 and has been assigned to the Fiscal Council.

Since its establishment, the Council has published seven Fiscal Assessment Reports, all of which can be found on the Fiscal Council's website.

In its most recent report, the Fiscal Council acknowledged that Ireland is likely to record a deficit for 2015 of less than the 3% of GDP ceiling and the fiscal stance adopted in Budget 2015 is conducive to prudent economic and budgetary management. I responded to the Fiscal Assessment Report on 9 January 2015 and this response is published on my Department's website.

Economic Statements

251. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the spring statement planned by the Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3279/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Under European Council Regulation 1175/2011, each Member State is required to present an annual update of its Stability Programme to the European Commission and European Council by end-April.

The Stability Programme Update (SPU) sets out the Government's budgetary objectives and the main economic assumptions underpinning them for the following three years or - as

applies to Ireland - in accordance with the relevant EU Regulation until the time at which the medium-term budgetary objective (MTO) of a balanced budget in structural terms is reached. It is projected that Ireland will reach its MTO in 2018. As part of the annual European Semester process, the European Commission assesses the budgetary strategy of each Member State by reference to its SPU.

This year, Ireland's SPU will be accompanied by a Spring Economic Statement (SES). The SES will set out in broad terms the Government's economic priorities and fiscal strategy over the medium term. The Government would envisage that the SES would become an important part of the annual budgetary cycle.

Home Renovation Incentive Scheme Applications

252. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide in tabular form the total number of applications received under the home renovation incentive to date; the total value of activity under the scheme; if he will provide a breakdown of the activities carried out under the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4647/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, the Home Renovation Incentive was introduced on 25 October 2013 for repairs, renovations and improvements carried out on a person's main residence. The scheme was extended in the recent Budget to include repairs, renovations and improvements carried out on rental properties whose owners are liable to income tax. Only works carried out by a tax compliant contractor qualify under the Incentive. It is clear from the figures provided that the Incentive has been very successful in boosting activity in the legitimate construction sector and ancillary services.

The electronic facility to allow homeowners claim their tax credit has been available since 13 January 2015. To date, 1,970 claims have been processed, representing total tax credits of €4.3m. The approach of linking activity to tax compliance is proving to be a successful means of levelling the playing pitch when legitimate traders are competing with those operating in the shadow economy. This approach will be continued and I would encourage those in the shadow economy to regularise their tax affairs and avail of the opportunities that will continue to come on stream in the construction sector.

The information requested is as follows:

Table 1 General Statistics on Home Renovation activity at 29 January 2015

Number of Works	20,334
Number of Properties	15,487
Number of Contractors	4,133
Value of Works	€318m

Table 2 Top 5 Activities by Value

Home Extensions	36%
General Repairs & Renovations	21%
Window Replacement	13%
Kitchen Renovations	10%
Bathroom/Shower/En Suite Improvements	3%

Table 3 - Top 5 Activities by Number of Works

Window Replacement	24%
Kitchen Renovations	19%
General Repairs & Renovations	12%
Home Extensions	10%
Bathroom/Shower/En Suite Improvements	6%

Credit Register Establishment

253. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank of Ireland will outsource the operation of the new credit register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4679/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Central Bank of Ireland that it is nearing the conclusion of a public procurement process to select a partner to build and operate the Central Credit Register (CCR) on its behalf. The strategy pursued has been to seek proposals from experienced operators with:

- a deep understanding of the business processes and specialised data processing involved, in particular, to match data to create a Single Borrower View and to develop reliable matching and credit scoring algorithms;
- a proven capacity to provide and maintain modern IT facilities and information security capabilities;
- a reputation for reliability and accuracy.

The Central Bank considered alternative approaches to delivering the CCR, such as developing or buying a software solution and building the necessary operational capability within the Bank. Options were compared across a number of criteria, including risk, timeline to implement and cost. Awarding a contract to an experienced operator is favoured as the safest approach to delivering the CCR in a cost effective and timely manner.

Negative Equity Mortgages Data

254. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons whose homes are in negative equity. [4682/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Negative equity occurs when the price of a property falls below the value of the outstanding mortgage secured on that property.

While regular data is not collected on the number of persons whose homes are in negative equity, the Deputy may wish to note that there has been some independent assessment of the issue conducted recently by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). The ESRI published a paper in August 2014 *Updated Estimates on the Extent of Negative Equity in the Irish Housing Market*. This paper can be accessed at the following link : http://www.esri.ie/publications/search_for_a_publication/search_results/view/index.xml?id=4048

The paper estimates the extent of negative equity based on certain assumptions regarding the volume of mortgages, house prices, mortgage term, interest rate, buyer type, Loan-to-Value ratio and level of arrears. The paper estimates that the total number of mortgage loans in negative equity reached a peak of over 314,000 by the end of 2012. However, the subsequent recovery of house prices reduced that number - the ESRI estimates that the numbers in negative

equity fell by 15% in 2013 and would further improved in 2014 as prices increased.

Mortgage Applications Approvals

255. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if new mortgage rules apply to a person who currently has mortgage approval but has not yet drawn down their mortgage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4685/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank has advised me that a borrower who has mortgage approval in principle, supported by a full credit assessment, prior to the effective date of the new macro prudential regulations on residential mortgage lending, will not be impacted by these regulations for the duration of the mortgage approval.

Mortgage Applications Approvals

256. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views that it is an anomaly that the 20% minimum deposit rule applies to non-first-time buyers with equity in their home who wish to trade up but does not apply to someone in negative equity who similarly wishes to purchase a new home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4686/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank is responsible for formulating and implementing macro prudential policy. In the context of negative equity, the Central Bank considers that it is necessary to provide for an exemption for households in such a situation to avoid unduly limiting mobility for such borrowers. The Central Bank has indicated that there is currently little new lending to such borrowers (less than 300 mortgages were issued by the main banks to borrowers in negative equity in 2014).

Accordingly, the Central Bank do not consider it necessary at this time, for macro-prudential purposes, to introduce a special Loan to Value regime for such borrowers. However, if unintended consequences or adverse behaviour is observed as a consequence of this exemption, or for any other reason it appears appropriate, the Central Bank has indicated that it reserves the right to amend the exemption accordingly. As with all these macro prudential limits, this does not preclude a lender from applying stricter lending standards than contained in the Regulations.

Tax Reliefs Application

257. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance the number of taxpayers that claimed for medical expenses in their tax returns in 2013 and 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4728/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that a wide range of statistical information is available on their new, enhanced, statistics webpage at www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/index.html. There is a section of that page dedicated to Income Tax and Corporation Tax data at www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/index.html#section4 in which information on the cost of credits, allowances and reliefs for the years 2004 to 2012 (the most recent figures available) can be found, under the heading "Cost of Credits, Allowances and Reliefs". This shows the cost of the claims for tax relief on health expenses, which includes medical and dental expenses.

Medical Card Data

258. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance the number of taxpayers that had a medical card in 2013 and 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4729/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that, while not directly available from tax records, recent data exchanges between Revenue and the HSE has allowed medical card holders to be identified and linked to Revenue's taxpayer records. On this basis, for the income tax year 2012 (the most recent tax year for which data are available), the number of income earners who had a medical card is estimated to be approximately 379,000 out of a total of 2.1 million income earners.

Universal Social Charge Yield

259. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of money collected by the State in 2014 through the universal social charge on the portion of income between €0 and €10,036 of all persons who pay the charge. [4753/15]

260. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of money collected by the State in 2014 through the universal social charge on the portion of income between €10,036 and €20,000 of all persons who pay the charge. [4754/15]

261. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of money collected by the State in 2014 through the universal social charge on the portion of income between €20,001 and €30,000 of all persons who pay the charge. [4755/15]

262. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of money collected by the State in 2014 through the universal social charge on the portion of income between €30,001 and €40,000 of all persons who pay the charge. [4756/15]

263. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of money collected by the State in 2014 through the universal social charge on the portion of income between €40,001 and €50,000 of all persons who pay the charge. [4757/15]

264. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of money collected by the State in 2014 through the universal social charge on the portion of income between €50,001 and €60,000 of all persons who pay the charge. [4758/15]

265. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of money collected by the State in 2014 through the universal social charge on the portion of income between €60,001 and €70,000 of all persons who pay the charge. [4759/15]

266. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of money collected by the State in 2014 through the universal social charge on the portion of income between €70,001 and €80,000 of all persons who pay the charge. [4760/15]

267. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of money collected by the State in 2014 through the universal social charge on the portion of income between €80,001 and €90,000 of all persons who pay the charge. [4761/15]

268. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of money collected by the State in 2014 through the universal social charge on the portion of income between €90,001 and €100,000 of all persons who pay the charge. [4762/15]

269. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of money collected by the State in 2014 through the universal social charge on the portion of income above €100,000 of all persons who pay the charge. [4763/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 259 to 269, inclusive, together.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the breakdown of the Universal Social Charge (USC) receipts requested by the Deputy is not available. It is not possible to isolate the USC paid on certain ranges of income, nor are detailed data for 2014 available as yet.

However, the Deputy may be interested to note that a wide range of statistical information is now available on the Revenue Commissioners' new, enhanced, statistics webpage at www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/index.html. In particular, at www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/pssn/rv01/homepagefiles/rv01_statbank.asp, detailed information on the breakdowns of gross income and USC paid by income range can be found under the heading "Income Tax and Corporation Tax Distribution Statistics", where Table RVA03 shows USC payments by income range.

This recently released facility provides breakdowns on the annual distribution of Income Tax from 2004 to 2012 and USC from 2011 to 2012 using the Central Statistics Office data toolset. Whereas previously information of this nature was provided by way of static tables in documents, these data are now published in a format which may be dynamically accessed by a range of user defined queries. If the Deputy requires assistance locating the information on the Revenue webpages, the Commissioners are available to assist and may be contacted by email at statistics@revenue.ie.

Figures are available currently for years up to 2012, the last year for which returns have been filed and fully processed. Updates will be published in due course.

Tax Rebates

270. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners has a policy of withholding tax refunds until a person has paid their property tax for the coming year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4773/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that Section 960H of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (as amended) provides that where a taxpayer is due a refund of tax, the Commissioners can offset that amount in full, or in part, to satisfy outstanding liabilities in any other tax head. Any balance (of the refund) that remains after the offset is completed is repaid to the taxpayer.

With specific regard to Local Property Tax (LPT), the Deputy will be aware that Revenue has provided a wide variety of payment methods, including a number of phased payment options such as direct debit (DD), deduction at source (DaS) from salary or pension and payments via various approved service providers. Revenue has also provided the Single Debit Authority (SDA) option, which operates like an electronic cheque and which is not deducted from current accounts until 21 March, unless an earlier date is specified by the liable person.

Where the liable person opts for one of these payment options and confirms his/her preference to Revenue in advance of the LPT due date, or where a phased payment arrangement is already in place, then no amount is withheld from any pending tax refund for offset. However, where the liable person fails to confirm a preferred option and does not pay the full amount of LPT by the due date, then Revenue will deduct the outstanding amount from the pending

refund.

Tax Code

271. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the current structure relating to DIRT on investments and long-term investments; if concessions in respect of DIRT exist for persons who are unemployed or on low incomes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4796/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the legislation governing the operation of *appropriate tax* on interest earned on deposits held in the State, referred to as Deposit Interest Retention Tax (DIRT), is set out in Chapters 4 and 5 of Part 8 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (the Act).

Except in the circumstances listed below, as and from the 1 January 2014 DIRT is deducted at a rate of 41% on interest earned on all relevant deposits, irrespective of the term of the investment.

Relevant deposits are deposits held by deposit takers in the State, other than certain State Bodies, on behalf of individuals who are resident in the State.

There is no exemption for interest paid on deposit accounts held by unemployed individuals or individuals on low incomes.

Interest is exempted from DIRT in the following circumstances:

Individuals aged 65 or older

An account held by an individual where the individual or his or her spouse or civil partner is aged 65 or older, and his or her total income in a year (including interest earned) is below the annual exemption limit, is exempt from DIRT.

The annual exemption limits for 2015 are €18,000 in the case of a single person and €36,000 in the case of a married couple or civil partnership.

Permanently Incapacitated Individuals

An account held by an individual where that individual or his or her spouse or civil partner is permanently incapacitated by reason of physical or mental infirmity from maintaining himself or herself and is not liable to pay income tax because of the level of his or her income, is exempt from DIRT.

Medium and Long Term Deposits

Prior to the enactment of the Finance (No.2) Act of 2013 a portion of interest earnings on all medium and long term deposits was exempted from DIRT in accordance with s.261A of the Act. For this purpose medium term deposits are defined as deposits which are held by a deposit taker for a minimum of three years and long term deposits are those held for a minimum of five years. These provisions continue to apply to medium and long term deposit accounts opened prior to 16 October 2013 for a duration of three and five years respectively from that date. In these cases the first €480 of interest earned in any year on medium term accounts, and the first €635 of interest earned in any year on long term accounts, is exempt from DIRT.

European Fund for Strategic Infrastructure

272. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on Ireland investing in the European Fund for Strategic Investments; his further views regarding Ireland potentially being left out of the steering board of EFSI if the fund is not invested in; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4797/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware the legislative proposal for the European Fund for Strategic Infrastructure (EFSI) was only published on 13 January last. The Working Group discussions under the Latvian Presidency commenced as recently as 19 January and matters such as the Governance arrangements for the EFSI are an important part of those discussions. At this stage given the ongoing discussion amongst Member States on how the Governance of the fund should operate it is still an open question whether any Member States will participate at the level of the EFSI Steering Board. Regardless of this Ireland, like other Member States, is also giving close consideration to participation at the level of the Investment Platforms envisaged as part of the EFSI and through investment in individual projects which are of clear benefit to Ireland.

European Central Bank

273. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the performance of the European Central Bank in regard to its role in respect of the prudential supervision of credit institutions as laid out in article 127(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union in recent years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4826/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The tasks of the European System of Central Banks (ESCB) and the Eurosystem are laid down in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). They are specified in the Statute of the European System of Central Banks and of the European Central Bank. The Statute is a protocol attached to the TFEU. The Deputy refers to Article 127(2) of the TFEU which defines the basic tasks to be carried out through the Eurosystem to be:

- to define and implement the monetary policy of the Union
- to conduct foreign-exchange operations consistent with the provisions of Article 219 of the TFEU
- to hold and manage the official foreign reserves of the Member States
- to promote the smooth operation of payment systems.

The ECB is independent in carrying out its mandate and tasks. However, accountability is an important counterpart of its independence. As a European institution, the ECB is accountable in the first instance to the European Parliament.

The President of the ECB regularly reports on the ECB's monetary policy and its other tasks at his hearings before the European Parliament Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs. Other members of the ECB's Executive Board also appear before the European Parliament to address specific issues. Beyond that, the ECB replies to written questions by MEPs, which are published together with the ECB's answers in the Official Journal of the EU and on the ECB's website.

As part of the ECB's reporting obligations, the President also appears before the plenary

session of the Parliament to present the ECB's Annual Report, on which Parliament, as a rule, adopts a resolution.

The Central Bank of Ireland is a member of the Eurosystem, which consists of the European Central Bank (ECB) and the National Central Banks (NCBs) of the nineteen Member States that have adopted the euro. This group of institutions is responsible for conducting and implementing the single monetary policy for the currency union with the primary objective of maintaining price stability. Further details of the Central Bank's involvement in monetary policy formulation at Eurosystem level are set out in its Annual Report. In addition to its monetary policy role, on the basis of Article 127(6) of the TFEU and of the Council Regulation (EC) No 1024/2013 (the "SSM Regulation"), the ECB is responsible for specific tasks concerning the prudential supervision of credit institutions established in participating Member States. It carries out these tasks within a Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM) composed of the ECB and the national competent authorities. The SSM is responsible for the prudential supervision of all credit institutions in participating Member States. It confers key supervisory tasks on the ECB and establishes the framework in which the ECB and the national competent authorities, including the Central Bank of Ireland, are to co-operate on the prudential supervision of credit institutions.

The SSM took effect from 4 November 2014, and it is early days yet to be making judgement on its performance. In line with the SSM Regulation the ECB is required to report to Council and to Parliament on an annual basis in relation to the execution of the tasks conferred on it. In addition there is democratic accountability at both the European and national levels. National parliaments of the participating Member States, through their own procedures, may request the ECB to reply in writing to any observations or questions submitted by them to the ECB in respect of the tasks of the ECB under the SSM Regulation. The national parliament of a participating Member State may also invite the Chair or a member of the Supervisory Board to participate in an exchange of views in relation to the supervision of credit institutions in that Member State together with a representative of the national competent authority.

Real Estate Investment Trusts

274. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a list of investment funds and real estate investment trusts to which the National Asset Management Agency has sold commercial and residential properties; the value of sales to each; the value of the loan with which the property was bought by the original developer; and if he will provide a list of each of the properties concerned. [4839/15]

275. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a breakdown of Irish properties sold by the National Asset Management Agency detailing their original owners; the buyers of same; the profits or loss on each transaction relative to the original face value of the loan; and the price for which NAMA purchased the property from the banks. [4840/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 274 and 275 together.

From inception to the end of 2014, NAMA and its debtors and receivers were involved in more than 4,000 transactions involving sales of Irish assets. These transactions yielded total sales proceeds of €5.5 billion.

Under Section 202 of the NAMA Act 2009, NAMA is prohibited from disclosing confidential information. Confidential information is defined to include information relating to debtors, including the property assets securing their loans. The Act also provides that, on acquisition of a loan, NAMA takes over the obligations of the participating institution, one of which is the

contractual duty of confidentiality to debtors. NAMA cannot, therefore, disclose details about debtors as to do so would leave it open to litigation. Information about individual debtors or guarantors is also protected against disclosure by the Data Protection Acts with which NAMA must comply as a data controller.

Confidential information is also defined to include information which, if disclosed, would tend to place NAMA at a commercial disadvantage. The disclosure by NAMA of the identity of the purchasers of its loans and property assets and the commercial terms of individual sales transactions would place it at a significant commercial disadvantage relative to its competitors. Other financial institutions engaged in deleveraging their loan portfolios in Ireland are not required to disclose such information. It is important that NAMA, which is seeking to maximise the return to Irish taxpayers from its loan portfolio, should not be placed at a commercial disadvantage by disclosing information which would benefit its competitors and potential future counter-parties. It is also likely that some potential purchasers would decline to bid on NAMA assets and loan sale transactions if they were aware that transaction details were to be published subsequently.

I am satisfied therefore that disclosure by NAMA of the details of purchasers and of the commercial terms of sales transactions, other than what purchasers themselves choose to put into the public domain, would ultimately have the effect of reducing NAMA's financial return. This would be completely contrary to its statutory obligation, under Section 10 of the NAMA Act, to obtain the best achievable financial return for the State.

The Deputy may be aware, and it is a matter of public record, that the IRES REIT has purchased two residential portfolios (the Orange and Rockbrook portfolios) that were offered for sale by NAMA and that the proceeds from these sales have been used to reduce debtor indebtedness. It is also a matter of public record that Green REIT has been a purchaser of assets sold by NAMA debtors and receivers, including part of the Central Park portfolio in Dublin. I am also advised that the Hibernia REIT purchased the Observatory Building which is located in the South Docks area of Dublin and which was offered for sale as part of NAMA's Redwood portfolio.

NAMA acquired and manages loans, not property, and its financial statements are prepared on this basis in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards. In its financial statements, NAMA discloses aggregate information about its sales activity and the overall profit or loss generated by it. NAMA's Section 55 Report and Accounts for the third quarter of 2014 was published recently and is available on www.nama.ie. It includes information on the overall profit generated on property and loan sale transactions by NAMA since its inception. It shows that, from inception to 30 September 2014, the overall profit recorded in respect of property and loan sale transactions was €432m.

Tax Code

276. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to make changes in the next budget to treat cohabiting couples the same as married couples in terms of their income tax; the cost to the Exchequer of such a change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4847/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Where a couple is cohabiting, rather than married or in a civil partnership, each partner is treated for the purposes of income tax as a separate and unconnected individual. Because they are treated separately for tax purposes, credits and tax bands cannot be transferred from one partner to the other. Cohabitants do not

have the same legal rights and obligations as a married couple or couples in civil partnerships.

The basis for the current tax treatment of married couples derives from the Supreme Court decision in *Murphy vs. Attorney General* (1980), which held that it was contrary to the Constitution for a married couple, both of whom are working, to pay more tax than two single people living together and having the same income.

From a practical perspective, it would be very difficult to administer a regime for cohabitants which would be the same as that for married couples or civil partners. Married couples and civil partners have a verifiable official confirmation of their status. It would be difficult, intrusive and time-consuming to confirm declarations by individuals that they were actually cohabiting. It would also be difficult to establish when cohabitation started or ceased.

There would also be legal issues with regard to 'connected persons'. To counter tax avoidance, 'connected persons' are frequently defined throughout the various Tax Acts. The definitions extend to relatives and children of spouses and civil partners. This would be very difficult to prove and enforce in respect of persons connected with a cohabiting couple where the couple has no legal recognition. There may be an advantage in tax legislation for a married couple or civil partners as regards the extended rate band and the ability to transfer credits. However, their legal status has wider consequences from a tax perspective both for themselves and for persons connected with them.

With regard to the cost to the Exchequer, I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that unmarried cohabiting couples are not separately identified in tax statistics. It is not possible, therefore, to provide the information requested by the Deputy.

However, it is estimated that the cost of extending married treatment under the income tax code to such couples could be of the order of €1 million per annum for every 1,000 cohabiting couples registered.

Any change in the tax treatment of cohabiting couples can only be addressed in the broader context of future social and legal policy development in relation to such couples.

Revenue Commissioners Investigations

277. Deputy David Stanton asked the Minister for Finance the actions being taken to detect the illegal use of green diesel; the number of detections in 2013 and 2014 of such illegal activity; the actions taken as a result of any such detection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4869/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Diesel that is used in agricultural tractors and for certain other specified purposes is subject to a lower rate of excise duty and must contain prescribed markers, including a dye which gives it a green colouration, to distinguish it from diesel that may be used in motor vehicles. It is an offence, under section 102 (1) (b) (ii) of the Finance Act 1999, to use marked diesel in a motor vehicle and a person convicted of that offence is liable to a fine of €5,000.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that they undertake action on an ongoing basis to detect the illegal use of marked diesel in motor vehicles, including, in particular, the stopping of vehicles and checking of their fuel. As a result of this action, 1,318 detections of the illegal use of marked fuel were made in 2013 and 1,111 in 2014.

The numbers of convictions that were obtained in 2013 and 2014 arising from detections

of the illegal use of marked fuel were 228 and 286, resulting in the imposition in those years of total fines of €620,100 and €772,250 respectively. In addition, 177 vehicles were seized in 2013 and 155 in 2014.

I am advised also that, in certain defined categories of cases where marked fuel is detected in a vehicle, Revenue is prepared to refrain from the institution of legal proceedings where the person concerned agrees to pay a compromise sum in lieu of prosecution. These would include cases where a person is detected for the first time in charge of a motor vehicle, other than a commercial vehicle, where marked fuel is illegally present. The numbers of cases dealt with in this way in 2013 and 2014 were 627 and 614, resulting in payments to Revenue by the persons in question of €822,145 and €819,630 respectively.

Action against the illegal use of marked fuel is an integral part of Revenue's wide-ranging programme of action against all forms of fuel fraud. An extensive range of new measures have been introduced over recent years to tackle such fraud, including enhanced supply chain controls and the acquisition of a more effective fuel marker. Key measures include the following:

- The licensing regime for auto fuel traders was strengthened with effect from September 2011 to limit the ability of fuel criminals to get laundered fuel on to the market.

- A new licensing regime was introduced for marked fuel traders from October 2012, which was designed to limit the ability of criminals to source marked fuel for laundering.

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

- New supply chain controls were introduced from January 2013 following significant investment in new IT systems. These returns require all licensed fuel traders to make monthly electronic returns to Revenue of their fuel transactions, to allow the detection of suspicious or anomalous transactions and patterns of distribution.

- An intensified targeting, in cooperation with other law enforcement agencies on both sides of the border, of enforcement action against suspected fuel laundering operations. In addition, Revenue has, in partnership with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs in the UK, identified a more effective fuel marker. The new marker will come into operation in both jurisdictions from midnight on the 31 March 2015.

To support further the integrity of the fuel distribution system and to minimise the risk of fraud, I introduced a provision in the Finance (No. 2) Act 2013 which will make a supplier who is reckless in supplying rebated fuel for a use connected with excise fraud liable for the duty at the standard rate of tax. This strengthens Revenue's hand in dealing with such traders.

I am assured by the Revenue Commissioners that they will continue to act robustly against all forms of fuel fraud, including the illegal use of marked fuel in motor vehicles.

Credit Availability

278. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance in view of survey results by ISME that 57% of companies which had applied for loans were refused, if he will significantly increase the target for lending in 2015 and consider options to make more money available to small businesses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4876/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I assume the Deputy is referring to the

ISME Q3 2013 survey where it was reported that 57% of companies who applied for funding were refused credit by their banks. The Deputy may be interested to note that the ISME Q4 2014 survey reports a refusal rate of 38%.

The SME Credit demand survey April-September 2014 conducted by Red C on behalf of my Department is the most comprehensive survey of SME credit demand in Ireland, covering 1,500 respondents and involving over 5,000 direct calls to SMEs. This survey reports the refusal rate for this period at 14%.

As the Deputy may be aware, the Credit Review Office helps SME or Farm borrowers who have had an application for credit of up to €3 million declined or reduced by either Bank of Ireland or Allied Irish Banks, and who feel that they have a viable business proposition. They also examine cases where borrowers feel that the terms and conditions of their existing loan, or a new loan offer, are unfairly onerous or have been unreasonably changed to their detriment. This is a strictly confidential process between the business, the Credit Review Office and the bank. The Credit Reviewer John Trethowan and his team have overturned 55% of the refusals that have been appealed to the Office to date. Further details are available at www.creditreview.ie.

The Government recognises that small businesses play a central role in the sustainable recovery of the Irish economy. To facilitate this, Government policy since 2011 has been focused on ensuring that all viable SMEs have access to an appropriate supply of credit from a diverse range of bank and non-bank sources.

Since the beginning of 2014 the focus has shifted towards the collation and examination, on a monthly basis, of more granular data on the funding of the activities of SMEs from both AIB and Bank of Ireland, the wider banking sector and increasingly the non-bank funding sector. Having completed a process of deleveraging, both AIB and Bank of Ireland are now concentrating on growing their balance sheets. In this context, both banks recognise the need to increase business lending in the period up to 2016, particularly lending to the domestic market, and have put on record their commitment to the SME sector. Both banks have recently reported increased year on year sanctioning activity for lending to the SME sector.

My Department has been involved in a range of initiatives to encourage access to credit for small and medium sized businesses, and the SME State Bodies Group provides a forum for the development and implementation of policy measures to enhance SMEs' access to a stable and appropriate supply of finance.

Some of the main policies introduced by this Government to encourage access to credit for small and medium businesses include:

- The Supporting SMEs Online Tool, a cross-government initiative, was launched in May 2014. On answering 8 simple questions, the small business will receive a list of available Government supports. The Supporting SMEs Online Tool is available at www.localenterprise.ie/smeonlinetool.

- The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland has been established as a means of ensuring that SMEs are provided with sufficient finance for growth and also ensuring that credit provided to SMEs meets their needs rather than the needs of those who offer the credit. The SBCI, from available funding of some €800 million initially, will provide a more extensive range of financing than is currently offered in Ireland such as loans of longer duration that encourage and enable growth of our SMEs. The SBCI will have a lower cost of funding and this benefit must be passed onto SMEs. The SBCI is working with its first lending partners to provide initial funding to the SME sector by the end of 2014. The initial products will be launched in Q1 2015

with traditional bank lenders and importantly, new credit providers from beyond the traditional bank sector being involved which means SMEs will benefit from greater choice as well as more funding. More information on the SBCI can be found on www.sbc.gov.ie.

- The Credit Guarantee Scheme encourages additional lending to small businesses by offering a partial Government guarantee to banks against losses on qualifying loans to eligible SMEs. My colleague, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, will shortly bring legislation to the Oireachtas which enable the development of a more flexible Credit Guarantee Scheme.

- The Microenterprise Loan Fund, administered by Microfinance Ireland, provides loans of up to €25,000 to small businesses who have been refused credit by commercial banks. Microfinance Ireland works in partnership with the Local Enterprise Offices nationally to administer this fund. This scheme is currently being reviewed by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation with a view to making proposed changes to enhance its effectiveness.

The Government remains committed to the SME sector and sees it as the key engine of ongoing economic growth. Consequently the Department of Finance, working with the other relevant Departments and Agencies, will continue to monitor the availability of both bank and non-bank credit with a view to taking appropriate actions as warranted to ensure that SMEs in Ireland have the opportunity to reach their full potential in terms of growth and employment generation. In this context, the Action Plan for Jobs 2015 includes a dedicated chapter and associated integrated set of actions to support the financing for growth in the SME sector.

Property Tax Exemptions

279. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the local property tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4878/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Government decided a universal liability to the LPT should apply to all owners of residential property with limited exemptions. Limiting the exemptions available allows the rate to be kept low for those liable persons who do not qualify for an exemption.

The Local Property Tax (LPT) legislation does not contain a relief from Local Property Tax for Stamp Duty payments. The inter-Departmental group, chaired by Dr Don Thornhill, which was established to consider the structures and modalities of a property tax (the “Thornhill Group”) gave detailed consideration to this issue. The Thornhill Group recommended against giving a relief for Stamp Duty, not least because such a relief would not be targeted at cases of need.

While some individuals had a significant Stamp Duty liability, they may have been able to claim mortgage interest relief on interest up to €20,000 per annum; and individuals who bought properties since 2004 can continue to claim mortgage interest relief until 2017.

There are no plans to provide relief from LPT for those who paid stamp duty.

Debt Restructuring

280. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the call for a eurozone debt conference in response to the recent Greek election result; and his further views

on chairing such a conference in Dublin. [4900/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): My view is that when countries encounter difficulties, a process of negotiation is always better than one of conflict.

Specifically in the case of euro area Member States, all programme negotiations have been conducted within the Eurogroup and Ecofin, with IMF involvement as appropriate. My view is that these are the appropriate fora for resolving outstanding issues such as this.

National Debt

281. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if he has estimated the likely impact on the Irish fiscal situation from a write-down of Greek debt of the suggested minimum order of 50% in view of the Irish loan of €350 million to Greece, which he has referred to recently; and if he will take a leading role in ensuring economic justice for the Greek persons. [4901/15]

282. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if he has examined the net benefits which may accrue to Ireland from significant write-offs of Greek debt during 2015, especially in view of his and the Irish Government's piggybacking on the successful earlier efforts of previous Greek Governments to reduce repayment interest rates and alleviate repayment conditions. [4902/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 281 and 282 together.

At the end of last year, the total amount owing to Ireland under the Greek loan facility was €347 million (0.2 per cent of GDP). This arises by way of bilateral loans provided to Greece, prior to Ireland's entry into a programme in late-2010.

The bulk of Greece's obligations are to the official sector, and policy over the past five years has been to ensure that the repayment burden is affordable. As a result, there have been maturity extensions, interest rate reductions and interest holidays by the official sector. Accordingly, there is no suggestion that there should be any writing down of Greece's debt.

Tax Reliefs Cost

283. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance the amount the child care services tax relief cost the State for each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4997/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Tax relief is not available to parents in respect of crèche fees or child care costs. A relief did exist in the form of a benefit-in-kind exemption where child care facilities were provided by an employer. However, this was abolished in Finance Act 2011, following a recommendation made by the Commission on Taxation, which cited equity issues in relation to those parents whose employers did not provide such facilities. No official figures are available for this exemption as it was not required to be reported to Revenue. However, it was estimated that the yield to the Exchequer from the abolition of the exemption would be €6 million in a full year.

An exemption from tax is available on income of up to €15,000 per annum for individuals who mind up to three children in their own home and the Deputy's question may be in relation

to this scheme. The following table shows the cost of this relief for the 5 years up to and including 2012, the most recent year for which figures are available:

Cost of relief

Year	Cost €M	Numbers Availing
2008	0.8	440
2009	0.8	470
2010	0.8	450
2011	0.9	510
2012	1	560

I would like to assure the Deputy that the Government acknowledges the continuing cost pressures on parents, particularly those with young children. In recognition of these cost pressures, a number of support measures are in place to ease the burden on working parents. These include the Community Child care Subvention (CCS) programme, which funds community child care services to enable them to charge reduced child care fees to qualifying parents, the Child care Education and Training Support (CETS) programme which provides free child care places to qualifying Solas and VEC trainees and the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme which provides for a free pre-school year for children in the year before commencing primary school. Generous entitlements to paid and unpaid maternity leave as well as child benefit payments are also provided.

National Payments Plan Implementation

284. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied with the implementation of the national payments plan launched in April 2013; the progress in rolling out of basic bank accounts; the number of such accounts now in existence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5000/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The National Payments Plan, published in April 2013, targets improving consumer payments systems, modernising business payments, promoting electronic payment methods, reducing costly cheque usage and increasing the efficiency of the use of cash. The National Payments Plan outlines that if Ireland were to match best practice in Europe, savings of up to €1 billion per annum could be made to the economy.

Good progress has been made in a number of areas. Data published by IPSO (now BPI) shows a 41% reduction in the volume of cheques and other debit paper instruments used in Ireland from 2008 to 2013, a 29% reduction in the aggregate value of cash withdrawn from ATMs, while debit card usage has increased 88% over the same period. This migration has been supported by the implementation of a number of recommendations in the NPP, such as the implementation of 'e-Day' by Government on 19 September last year, the date from which Government Departments, Local Authorities and State Agencies will no longer use cheques in their dealings with businesses.

On the specific queries that the Deputy has raised regarding basic bank accounts, the Strategy for Financial Inclusion called for the nationwide launch of a Standard Bank Account as a first step in promoting Financial Inclusion. A pilot project for a Basic Bank Account was run, which finished on 31 March 2013 after a 9-month pilot period. A total of 205 accounts were opened during the Pilot, which the Financial Inclusion Working Group (FIWG) felt was disap-

pointing.

The Report of the Working Group on the Pilot project noted a number of reasons for this, including the view of stakeholders that one of the key elements required as part of the preparations for a successful national roll-out of a Standard Bank Account is greater involvement by An Post and the credit unions. My Department is currently exploring with the relevant stakeholders how to make progress on this issue.

Tax Data

285. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Finance the number of self-assessed taxpayers by county for the years 2011 to 2014, inclusive; the number and type of attachment orders placed by the Revenue Commissioners by county for 2011 to 2014, inclusive, and to date in 2015; the amount of income collected by these means; the way taxpayers are notified if there is an attachment order; the average length of time these were in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5018/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In regard to the first part of the Deputy's Question, I am advised by Revenue that the total number of chargeable self-assessed Income Tax payers is set out in Table 1. It was not possible for Revenue to breakdown the data on a county basis in the timeframe available for responding to the Question.

In regard to the second part of the Deputy's Question on the use of Attachment Orders, I am advised that the data requested is set out in Tables 2 and 3 for the years 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014. The data in relation to January 2015 is not yet available.

By way of general information in regard to the deployment of its various debt collection and enforcement options, including Attachment, Revenue has assured me that before any such action is considered, the defaulting taxpayer is given every opportunity to engage and agree mutually acceptable arrangements in respect of the outstanding debt. The enforcement process only starts where there is no meaningful engagement by the taxpayer in seeking realistic solutions. Revenue has also assured me that Attachment Orders are normally only deployed where other enforcement options have failed to secure the outstanding tax debt.

The deployment of Attachment Orders is provided for by Section 1002 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, which allows Revenue to instruct financial institutions to transfer funds from any account in the name of a defaulting taxpayer, or, to instruct any third party 'relevant person' that owes a debt to the defaulting taxpayer to pay those funds directly to Revenue.

When Revenue serves an Attachment Order (or a Revocation Order) on a 'relevant person' in respect of a taxpayer, it also forwards a copy of the Notice to the taxpayer for information. Within ten days of receiving the Attachment Order, the 'relevant person' must deliver a written 'return' to Revenue, confirming whether or not any debt is due to the specified taxpayer. Where there is a debt due to the taxpayer, this amount must also be paid directly to Revenue within the ten day period.

Table 1

Tax Year	Number of Self-Assessed Income Tax Tax-payers
2010	554,715
2011	557,174

Tax Year	Number of Self-Assessed Income Tax Tax-payers
2012	570,364
2013	590,459

[Data in relation to the tax year 2014 is not yet available]

Table 2 Attachment Orders 2011-2014

	2011			2012			2013			2014						
County	No.	Value €000	Payments €000	Avg. No. Days	No.	Value €000	Payments €000	Avg. No. Days	No.	Value €000	Payments €000	Avg. No. Days	No.	Value €000	Payments €000	Avg. No. Days
Carlow	51	1,383	185	77	63	3,884	334	132	23	981	117	99	41	1,053	200	47
Cavan	53	2,952	888	128	33	3,007	307	106	51	1,139	371	99	29	889	153	55
Clare	132	4,333	452	103	105	3,665	403	139	163	3,555	410	123	89	2,262	383	60
Cork	597	23,940	2,887	108	619	20,523	3,943	102	569	23,130	4,320	84	737	24,858	3,951	54
Donegal	80	5,822	1,266	75	65	2,683	361	98	52	3,326	303	128	55	1,157	191	66
Dublin	1,528	74,132	10,641	122	1,466	73,069	11,721	91	1,521	70,606	11,652	76	1,670	60,168	10,188	41
Galway	174	7,158	773	111	169	8,418	1,133	96	171	7,925	955	95	270	6,366	1,267	50
Kerry	151	9,813	3,705	142	93	3,244	270	133	95	1,970	220	109	99	2,086	568	47
Kildare	190	7,477	1,647	91	127	6,218	732	99	104	4,345	915	65	148	4,797	582	44
Kilkenny	72	3,824	657	168	67	3,555	331	116	37	654	267	89	54	1,286	99	54
Laois	35	968	82	181	47	1,526	141	159	24	866	218	25	22	839	134	23
Leitrim	24	885	67	153	17	1,274	180	62	20	356	28	47	17	462	70	26
Limerick	164	9,988	851	122	156	5,817	1,408	112	210	6,965	745	97	433	10,869	2,114	46
Longford	35	1,023	101	104	28	1,196	56	100	28	1,234	162	72	31	803	119	26
Louth	132	9,801	517	156	115	4,157	726	139	120	4,650	481	49	155	5,008	636	41
Mayo	68	3,536	649	221	87	3,986	735	163	115	5,510	576	126	248	7,031	884	57
Meath	224	8,189	1,290	169	196	8,022	1,207	115	160	5,613	1,055	94	164	6,137	1,303	53
Monaghan	46	2,496	317	166	27	1,420	672	77	51	1,547	666	72	23	875	414	65
Offaly	57	2,681	271	155	60	2,344	269	226	83	3,104	1,394	70	73	2,825	296	56
Roscommon	34	1,078	224	157	24	2,236	149	136	36	4,899	284	113	36	991	246	46
Sligo	40	1,706	357	59	43	1,020	62	56	58	1,891	368	37	47	3,467	77	44
Tipperary	99	7,117	565	74	106	4,071	605	81	108	4,907	733	57	69	3,084	290	54
Waterford	88	5,466	513	112	37	2,459	358	129	68	2,091	152	56	31	3,068	125	63
Westmeath	67	2,852	352	252	67	2,738	261	90	104	3,462	651	78	112	4,217	859	46
Wexford	146	8,765	661	124	120	3,789	1,083	93	98	3,831	675	100	123	2,942	1,090	35
Wicklow	176	5,653	733	84	102	4,155	1,073	43	130	4,975	907	79	159	3,681	937	40
Total	4,463	213,037	30,651	123	4,039	178,476	28,519	103	4,199	173,532	28,625	83	4,935	161,223	27,176	47

Table 3 - Attachment Orders Issued to Relevant Persons by Category 2011-2014

	2011			2012			2013			2014		
Relevant Person -Category	No.	Value €000	Payments €000	No.	Value €000	Payments €000	No.	Value €000	Payments €000	No.	Value €000	Payments €000
An Post	14	451	216	16	544	88	13	183	98	8	132	13
Banks/ Building Society	3,646	174,570	23,959	3,325	146,852	20,453	3,444	143,680	20,866	4,005	128,747	20,477

Questions - Written Answers

-	-	2011	-	-	2012	-	-	2013	-	-	2014	-
Co-op/ Cream- ery	4	188	4	3	85	0	7	132	33	3	72	17
Credit Union	45	1,484	91	44	1,786	122	37	1,211	53	49	886	145
Dept of Agricul- ture & Food	73	4,045	816	113	5,773	1,317	105	3,485	1,211	158	4,178	1,421
Dept of Arts, Sport & Tourism	3	9	2	1	16	6	3	26	0	0	0	9
Dept of Justice, Equality & Law Reform	11	371	139	16	275	119	23	494	196	24	532	138
Dept of Social & Family Affairs	6	208	8	4	80	12	8	147	21	8	202	51
Em- ployer				6	132	28	6	483	51	3	49	78
Health Service Executive	51	2,101	759	55	3,009	1,833	72	4,889	1,726	53	1,627	484
Insur- ance Company	19	2,306	176	13	891	268	13	2,607	161	20	2,856	367
Limited Company	108	5,992	300	64	3,233	383	74	3,634	446	124	5,529	761
Local Author- ity	112	4,114	1,948	96	2,597	862	108	2,057	984	84	2,209	639
Office of Public Works	10	330	119	14	1,038	294	13	326	235	14	831	246
Other	273	13,244	1,776	227	10,930	2,159	230	8,557	2,381	315	11,695	2,020
Principal Contractor	75	3,046	303	35	1,097	441	33	1,366	125	56	1,299	271
Supplier	13	578	35	7	137	133	10	257	37	11	378	38
Total	4,463	213,037	30,651	4,039	178,476	28,519	4,199	173,532	28,625	4,935	161,223	27,176

Tax Yield

286. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide in tabular form the annual relevant contract tax revenue collected and tax refunded between 2000 and 2007. [5019/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the annual tax revenue collected from and tax refunds relating to RCT between 2000 and 2007 is as set out in the following table.

Year	RCT Gross	RCT Repayments/ Offsets	RCT Net
	€m	€m	€m
2000	339.3	287.1	52.2
2001	422.2	365.2	57.0

Year	RCT Gross	RCT Repayments/ Offsets	RCT Net
2002	394.3	365.2	29.1
2003	477.0	423.7	53.3
2004	613.0	532.3	80.7
2005	759.8	660.9	98.9
2006	949.8	856.1	93.8
2007	1,033.4	983.5	49.9

Public Sector Reform Implementation

287. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the establishment of the accountability board of the Civil Service will be set up as per the committee for review of public service report 2014; the way the representatives of this board will be appointed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4451/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Establishing an Accountability Board for the Civil Service for the first time is one of the priority actions in the Civil Service Renewal Plan and work is at an advanced stage to progress this priority, set out the criteria for membership and establish the Board. The Board will be chaired by the Taoiseach and balanced with ministerial, civil service and external membership. The nomination process for external members will issue shortly, using the procedures set out for State Boards.

Departmental Expenditure

288. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide, in tabular form, for the years 2007 to 2010, inclusive, the total photography costs in his Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4498/15]

289. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide, in tabular form, for the years 1997 to 2007, inclusive, the total photography costs in his Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4514/15]

290. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide, in tabular form, a list of all external public relations firms hired by his Department and associated costs incurred from 2007 to 2010, inclusive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4548/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 288 to 290, inclusive, together.

As the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform only came into being in March 2011 there were no expenditure costs incurred before this time.

Freedom of Information Remit

291. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if any semi-State companies have made a business case to his Department seeking an extension of time before that company will be subject to freedom of information legislation; if so, the names of these companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4555/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Section 1(3)(b) of the FOI Act 2014 provides that in respect of a body that was not subject to FOI under the 1997 Act but is subject to FOI under the new Act, the Act will come into operation 6 months following enactment or on such later date, not later than 12 months from enactment, as the Minister may by order appoint. The FOI Bill was enacted on 14 October 2014.

The decision to apply FOI in respect of the functions of ESB Networks, Gas Networks Ireland and EirGrid was made during the progress of the Bill through the Oireachtas. I concluded, having consulted with my Government colleagues, that the rationale for excluding commercial state bodies generally from FOI, on account of the potential adverse impact on their commercial position in a competitive market, did not apply to the network utilities to the same extent as they operate on a monopoly.

Subsequently, these companies sought an extension in relation to this lead-in period on the basis that they had received significantly less advance notice that they were to be made subject to FOI than other bodies who were being made subject to FOI for the first time under the new Act. Having considered the business cases submitted carefully, I have agreed that the maximum lead-in time provided for under the Act for the application of FOI could be allowed in respect of these companies in order to allow them sufficient time to make the necessary administrative arrangements required.

I also decided that Irish Rail should have the same lead-in period as the energy network companies. I made that decision on the same basis as the decision in respect of the energy network companies and also to bring about a level of consistency in terms of the application of FOI to network utilities.

My decisions as set out above will require a Ministerial Order before they come into effect. I intend, therefore, to make the Order shortly to provide that FOI will apply to Irish Rail, EirGrid, ESB Networks and Gas Networks Ireland with effect from 14 October 2015.

Flood Relief Schemes Funding

292. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if an application for funding has been received from Limerick City and County Council in respect of flood alleviation measures in Askeaton and Ballysteen, County Limerick; if the council has estimated a total cost for the works involved; if an assessment on site has taken place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4586/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Simon Harris): Limerick City and County Council (LCCC) submitted applications for funding for projects at Askeaton and Ballysteen under the Office of Public Works' (OPW) Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme.

The application for Askeaton sought funding to enable LCCC to engage consultants to survey the existing flood defences and to prepare a detailed design of proposed improvements to include costings and a Cost Benefit Analysis. LCCC indicated that, based on initial assessment, the overall cost of the project could be in excess of €250,000. The OPW recently requested additional information from the Council in relation to this application. When this information

is received the application will be fully assessed under the eligibility criteria of the Scheme. I would point out also that Askeaton is an Area for Further Assessment (AFA) under the Shannon Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Study that is being carried out by the OPW to identify specific flood mitigation measures for the area. The OPW's assessment of the application for funding under the Minor Works scheme will also have regard to that fact.

In relation to Ballysteen, LCCC sought funding for works estimated to cost €20,000. This application does not meet the minimum benefit to cost ratio of 1.5:1 required under the criteria of the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme and consequently has been refused.

Public Procurement Contracts Social Clauses

293. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the progress of evaluating the use of social employment clauses in public sector procurement under the devolved schools programme; and if such an approach will be rolled out across public sector procurement. [4950/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As the Deputy is aware, a pilot social clause has been included in the three devolved schools bundles which are being administered by the N DFA on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills.

In summary the pilot clause requires that:

At least 10% of those working on the sites being drawn from the live register and having been unemployed for more than 12 months; and

At least 2.5% of workers on the sites will be engaged in an approved registered apprenticeship, training or educational work placement scheme.

In total the three contracts cover fourteen sites with the works comprising both stand-alone, new build and extensions/refurbishment works. Construction work started on all three of the contracts during Spring 2014. The aggregate capital value of the contracts is c. €70m.

I understand that overall compliance in relation to the pilot clause has been good. The Department of Social Protection and its local Intreo offices are working closely with the appointed contractors to support the pilot initiative and there has been strong positive engagement from the contractors involved in each of the projects.

The most recent monthly progress reports (Dec 14) provided by each of the main contractors involved indicate that they are on target to achieve the cumulative percentages set out in the pilot clause. At present, across the three contracts the contractors' reports indicate that there are 50 employees who had been unemployed for more than 12 months and 17 further employees who are either apprentices or trainees.

The Department of Social Protection, through its local Intreo offices is continuing to liaise with the contractors on all three contracts to identify and fill further positions from the live register.

Once initial evaluations on the performance of the clause have been undertaken any necessary amendments will be tabled at GCCC before they are incorporated into the €1.5bn, PPP element of the €2.25bn Stimulus Programme that I announced in July 2012.

Departmental Funding

294. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the way and the reason the decision to revive Irish Nonprofits Knowledge Exchange was made; if alternative approaches were considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4957/15]

295. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the budget or funding that has been allocated for Irish Nonprofits Knowledge Exchange; if there was a tendering process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4958/15]

296. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the objectives that have been set for Irish Nonprofits Knowledge Exchange; the timeframe; the way its performance will be measured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4959/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 294 to 296, inclusive, together.

There are in excess of 12,000 non-profit entities, which receive more than €4.4 billion annually in government funding. In line with the Public Sector Reform Plan 2014–2016 my Department is progressing solutions to design and deliver complete data on the funding received by the not-for-profit sector. The establishment of such an evidence base will assist Government in evaluating and delivering a higher quality impact assessment of public spending.

The Irish Nonprofits Project Limited (formerly INKEx) previously worked on the development of a single repository of financial, governance and other relevant data on the not-for-profit sector. This project was designed to significantly enhance the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of Government support and interaction with the non-profit sector. It was part-funded through significant State investment. However funding was withdrawn due to economic constraints and the project was put into abeyance.

The Irish Nonprofits Project Limited (formerly INKEx) have secured philanthropic funding toward the re-establishment of this project and I have committed to providing match funding. My Department are engaged in discussions with the Irish Nonprofits and philanthropic organisations on the practicalities and structures involved in re-establishing this project. Any investment will build on the earlier investment and seek to realise the value of the State's previous funding of this project. This is in keeping with the Government's aim to develop alternative models of delivery and to provide for greater public accountability and transparency in Government grant-making and its support of the non-profit sector.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

297. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding job vacancies in the Civil Service (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4991/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Public Appointments Service (PAS) is the centralised recruiter for the Civil and Public Service. Recruitment competitions conducted by the PAS cover a broad range of areas including, professional/ technical; clerical/ administrative; senior management/ executive, etc.

Recruitment competitions conducted by the PAS are advertised on www.publicjobs.ie. By logging on to this website, individuals can also register to be notified by e-mail or text message

of vacancies as they arise.

In Budget 2015, it was announced that there would be a targeted programme of recruitment into the Civil Service to address service needs and a shortfall in key skills which commenced in late 2014 and is ongoing in 2015.

General Service recruitment competitions currently underway include the following:

Clerical Officer

A recruitment competition to fill clerical vacancies was advertised in mid-2014. Over 28,000 applications were received and, to date, just over 300 individuals have been assigned to vacancies. Approximately 130 have been assigned in 2015 and clerical vacancies notified to PAS over the next year to 18 months will be filled from this competition.

Administrative Officer (Graduate Recruitment) Competitions

The graduate Administrative Officer competition was advertised in October 2014 and it is likely that at least 20 will be assigned from that competition. The Administrative Officer competition to fill Graduate Economist posts in the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) is ongoing and interviews will take place shortly.

Executive Officer

A competition for Executive Officer was recently advertised attracting approximately 13,500 applicants. The selection process is currently underway.

Executive Officer (ICT)

The selection process is also currently in train to fill vacancies for the position of Executive Officer (ICT)

Principal Officer and Assistant Principal Officer Competitions

An open competition for Principal Officer will take place in the first quarter of 2015. It is also expected that competitions for Assistant Principal - both open and interdepartmental - will take place in 2015.

Following a selection process PAS creates panels of qualified individuals from which vacancies are filled. It is not possible to determine in advance the total number of vacancies to be filled from such panels as this is determined from time to time having regard to demand from Departments and Offices.

The above recruitment programme supports Action 8 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan, to “open up recruitment and promotion processes at all levels”. Under the Renewal Plan the established policy of open competition for all senior management positions (Assistant Principal and higher) will be extended. Further consideration will be given throughout 2015 to resourcing and staffing needs for the Civil Service.

Semi-State Bodies Remuneration

298. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide a list of all bonus payment to chief executives of commercial semi-State agencies under the remit of his Department paid in each year from 2011 to 2014; if bonuses were withheld by commercial semi-States during the period; the reasons for withholding of bonuses; the

current policy regarding the payment of bonuses in the commercial semi-State sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4994/15]

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

With regard to commercial semi State agencies under my remit no bonus payments were made to, nor sought by, the Chief Executive of the National Lottery since 2011.

Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

299. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the position on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and the way the partnership is being structured; the position on the investor-state dispute settlement element of the proposed partnership; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5002/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Together the EU and the US account for almost half of world GDP and 30% of world trade. The purpose of the negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is to reduce barriers to trade and investment in order to generate jobs and growth in the EU and the US. According to assessments made by the European Commission and other European bodies, a comprehensive TTIP could over time boost the EU's GDP by 0.5% per annum, resulting in 400,000 additional jobs across the EU.

Ireland has particularly strong economic links with the US, with over 118,000 people employed in 585 US companies here. The total level of trade (imports and exports) between Ireland and the US in 2012 was €55 billion. The US is Ireland's biggest merchandise export market. The most recent data from the CSO shows that Ireland's services exports to the US increased by 40% in 2012. Notwithstanding the present high level of trade, significant benefits could be derived from a comprehensive and ambitious TTIP.

My Department commissioned a study on the potential impact of the TTIP for Ireland. This study is intended to assist in guiding the Irish position in the negotiations. The study is expected to be finalised shortly and published in early 2015.

The initial findings of the study show that the benefit to Ireland would be more than double the EU average, with 1.1% added to GDP. Other preliminary findings include increased exports (2.7%), increases in real wages (1.4%) and investment (1.6%). Opportunities are expected mainly in manufacturing – pharmaceutical and chemical industry, electrical machinery and other advanced machinery; in certain services and in processed foods.

The scope of the EU Commission's mandate to negotiate with the US on TTIP is comprehensive. It is therefore very much in the interests of Ireland that the partnership will be structured according to the mandate, which is publicly available and can be found on the EU Council's website at

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/145014.pdf.

The important question of investment protection in the TTIP was the subject of a public consultation by the EU Commission, the results of which were published on 13 January, 2015. [[http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=1234.](http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=1234)] The EU Commission has stated that it will be discussing the report with Member States and the European Parliament, and with different stakeholders, and that following these consultations, it will develop specific proposals for the TTIP negotiations. I very much welcome this approach, and I believe that it is important to take time to have open and constructive discussion following the Commission's report that will inform the next steps.

The following information was provided under Standing Order 40A

The investment protection part of the EU Commission's mandate to negotiate with the United States on a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership includes investor state dispute settlement (ISDS).

Investment protection, including ISDS, in the TTIP was the subject of a public consultation by the EU Commission, the results of which were published on 13 January, 2015. [[http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=1234.](http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=1234)]

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I very much welcome this approach, and I believe that it is important to take time to have open and constructive discussion following the Commission's report that will inform the next steps.

At this stage, there are no negotiations taking place with the United States on this aspect of the proposed agreement. Ultimately this element, as indeed other elements of the mandate, will only be included if the overall outcome is satisfactory to the EU.

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I very much welcome this approach, and I believe that it is important to take time to have open and constructive discussion following the Commission's report that will inform the next steps.

At this stage, there are no negotiations taking place with the United States on this aspect of the proposed agreement. Ultimately this element, as indeed other elements of the mandate, will only be included if the overall outcome is satisfactory to the EU.

300. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation his plans to review the credit guarantee scheme to assist customers of banks whose bank has left the Irish market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4317/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that a review of the SME Credit Guarantee Scheme was undertaken last year and laid before the Oireachtas in July 2014. As a result of the review of the CGS and on foot of immediate concerns raised by the Credit Review Office, Business Representative Organisations and the banks, I have decided to take urgent action to assist SMEs whose banks have left or are leaving the Irish SME lending market.

This will see a new CGS 2015 made in accordance with the terms of the Credit Guarantee Act 2012 which will allow guarantees for refinancing loans where an SME's bank has exited or is exiting the Irish SME market. This new Scheme will also increase the maximum length of guarantees under the CGS from 3 years to 7 years.

To bring this Scheme into operation there are a number of steps to conclude with the participating banks including certification, approval and legal agreements. Work is currently being finalised on the Statutory Instrument to give effect to these changes which requires the consent of the Minister for Finance and Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, and on the certification, approval and legal agreements with the banks. It is hoped that the new Scheme will be operational in the very near future.

Industrial Development

301. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the date of each visit by an Industrial Development Agency or Enterprise Ireland prospective client to the former NEC factory in Ballivor, County Meath. [4387/15]

302. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the date of each visit by an Industrial Development Agency prospective client to each town in County Meath for each of the past five years. [4388/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 301 and 302 together.

I am informed by IDA Ireland that in the 5-year period from 2010 to 2014, inclusive, there were a total of five IDA Ireland-sponsored site visits by potential investors to County Meath. IDA sponsored itinerary visits by potential investors include visits to multiple locations where there are greenfield or current turn-key property solutions for them to consider. The majority of these solutions, with the exception of Dublin and to a lesser extent Cork, are usually situated on the outskirts of towns and cities.

For reasons of client confidentiality and commercial sensitivity, such as the potential impact on any future property transactions that may arise from a possible investment, it is prudent to provide details of such visits on a county by county basis only.

IDA Ireland, who also provide property solutions to certain Enterprise Ireland client companies, have informed me that although it has been actively promoting the former NEC site at Ballivor as a potential property solution to prospective clients, as yet this promotion has not translated into a site visit.

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. In County Meath alone, IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland client companies employ 7,900 people in full and part time employment.

Additionally, two US companies opened their offices in Kells in November 2014, as a result of the Succeed in Ireland Initiative, which is implemented by Connect Ireland on behalf of IDA Ireland. The inclusion of Kells in the national Regional Aid Map will further enhance the prospects of attracting new investment and the expansion of existing enterprises, both foreign and indigenous, in County Meath .

As the Deputy is aware, the Action Plan for Jobs 2015 was launched on Thursday last, 29 January. This is the fourth annual plan in a multi-year process, which started in 2012. When the First Action Plan for Jobs was launched, unemployment stood at 15.1%. Today it stands at 10.6% and we are on track to exceed our target of 100,000 additional jobs by 2016. We are now setting a goal to bring employment to 2.1 million by 2018 – 2 years ahead of our original target.

We are determined that every region will benefit from the recovery and we will be announcing over the coming weeks and month a series of actions to help drive the achievement of this goal.

Industrial Development

303. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of companies located at the business and technology park in Roscommon town; the profile of those companies; the efforts the Industrial Development Agency has made in the past three years to attract investors to the park, including current active leads; if he will provide details of current active leads; the plans the IDA has to attract investors to the park in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4422/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am informed by IDA Ireland that the following three indigenous companies are located at the Business and Technology Park in Roscommon Town. System Label, an Enterprise Ireland client company, specialises in the manufacture of Technical Labels, Safety and Instruction Labels, for the Medical Technologies, Electronics and Automotive sectors. Cubis Industries, another Enterprise Ireland client company is a subsidiary of CRH, and manufactures preformed access chamber systems for utility markets e.g. power and water companies, rail and road developers and telecommunications. Tubbercurry Engineering provides mechanical engineering services to industrial projects including the Commercial, Retail, Industrial and Pharmaceutical sectors and companies.

In the past three years, 2012 to 2014 inclusive, there have been a total of 4 IDA Ireland sponsored site visits by potential investors to County Roscommon, all of which took place in 2013. IDA sponsored itinerary visits by potential investors include visits to multiple locations where there are greenfield or current turn-key property solutions for them to consider. The majority of these solutions, with the exception of Dublin and to a lesser extent Cork, are usually situated on the outskirts of towns and cities.

For reasons of client confidentiality and commercial sensitivity, such as the potential impact on any future property transactions that may arise from a possible investment, it is prudent to provide details of such visits on a county by county basis only. IDA Ireland has assured me that

the Business and Technology Park in Roscommon has been marketed by IDA Ireland over the past number of years for appropriate mobile investment and I am assured that will continue in the future, as appropriate.

While for similar reasons, IDA Ireland does not comment on upcoming site visits or on current or upcoming pipeline, the Agency has informed me that it is confident that it will be in a position to make an announcement relating to an investment in Roscommon before mid-year. I am sure that the Deputy will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

As the Deputy is aware, the Action Plan for Jobs 2015 was launched on Thursday last, 29 January. This is the fourth annual plan in a multi-year process, which started in 2012. When the First Action Plan for Jobs was launched, unemployment stood at 15.1%. Today it stands at 10.6% and we are on track to exceed our target of 100,000 additional jobs by 2016. We are now setting a goal to bring employment to 2.1 million by 2018 – 2 years ahead of our original target.

We are determined that every region will benefit from the recovery and we will be announcing over the coming weeks and month a series of actions to help drive the achievement of this goal.

IDA Portfolio

304. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide a list of the sites owned by the Industrial Development Agency in County Cork and which have potential use for inward investment purposes in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4443/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): IDA Ireland owns a total of 312.63 hectares of land in Cork, City and County which have the potential for use for inward investment purposes. The location of these sites are set out in the tabular statement. In addition, there are a number of units in IDA owned Business Parks in the Cork Region which are also available for use. These units which are a mix of IDA owned and private finance are located as follows.

In Kilbarry, there is approximately 4,200 square metre Industrial Unit (Private Finance) and 4 Cluster units approx. 298 square metres each (Private Finance). In Cork Business and Technology Park there is approximately 1,164 square metre IDA owned (3 storey). While in Youghal there are two units (privately owned), one 2,298 square metres and one 10,313 square metres.

The availability of an adequate supply of marketable, serviced land and office and industrial/technology buildings in advance of demand is a key element in IDA Ireland's ability to compete for mobile FDI.

The availability of property solutions eliminates the lead times normally associated with acquiring property, enables clients to plan their property needs with a greater degree of certainty and allows for the commencement of projects at an earlier date by eliminating much of the difficulties associated with land acquisition, planning and construction.

At the end of 2014, there were 146 IDA Ireland client companies in Cork, City and County employing 28,545 people in full and part time employment. IDA Ireland has strong relationships with all these companies and works closely with them to ensure their long term sustainability and to encourage their growth, development and continuing re-investment in their sites.

IDA Ireland positions Cork as being a strong cluster in Pharmaceuticals and Medical Technologies (Pfizer, Novartis, GSK, Janssen, Abbvie, Eli Lilly, Gilead, Pepsico, GE, Stryker, Gilead, Astellas among others). The success of Cork for attracting life sciences has seen the growth in associated support services such as experienced building firms and project managers, clean room providers, specialist recruitment agencies, tailored educational courses etc.

The region also has a significant cluster of ICT companies such as Apple, Dell, McAfee, Trend Micro, EMC, VMware, among others. The cluster of companies has led to the growth in suitably qualified individuals, experienced in working with multi-national corporations.

IDA Ireland has also informed me that a new cluster is emerging in the region based around the marine and renewable technologies. The development of the Irish Maritime and Energy Resource Cluster (IMERC) will be a strong magnet of attraction for the South West. IMERC will harness and integrate diverse research and industry expertise through the development of the innovative cluster which incorporates the Beaufort Research Laboratory, The Irish National Maritime College and The Naval Service of Ireland.

Table shows sites owned by IDA Ireland in Cork, City and County, which have potential for use for inward investment purposes.

Property Name	Town	County	Property Type	Net Hectares
Mallow B & T	Mallow	Cork	Land	1.30
Charleville	Charleville	Cork	Land	1.65
Kanturk	Kanturk	Cork	Land	2.47
Kilbarry B&T Park	Cork City	Cork	Land	57.53
Carrigtohill B&T Park	Carrigtohill	Cork	Land	24.30
Ringaskiddy	Cork City	Cork	Land	155.56
Fermoy B & T	Fermoy	Cork	Land	6.05
Cork Carrigtohill East	Carrigtohill East	Cork	Land	53.16
Youghal Springfield Estate	Youghal	Cork	Land	1.87
Youghal Foxhole	Youghal	Cork	Land	1.23
Fermoy Rathealy	Fermoy	Cork	Land	1.00
Skibbereen	Skibbereen	Cork	Land	3.86
Bandon Laragh Estate	Bandon	Cork	Land	1.83
Cork B&T Park	Cork City	Cork	Land	0.83
-	-	-	Total circa.	312.63

305. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if local enterprise offices have targets imposed by his Department; if he will provide a breakdown on a county basis as to the targets and budget for each office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4450/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are the first-stop-shops providing advice and supports to entrepreneurs and new businesses in the micro and small business sector. They operate within the functional areas of the Local Authorities rather than at a County level, per se. Their performance is monitored in accordance with the ambitious performance indicators and metrics set out in the Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for the LEOs agreed between Enterprise Ireland (EI) – which

has operational responsibility for the LEOs – and the Local Authorities as part of the Local Enterprise Development Plan (LEDP) for their areas. The LEDPs for 2015 are currently being finalised and will be available through the local enterprise website at www.localenterprise.ie in due course.

The targets for the LEOs, which are aimed at supporting entrepreneurship, enterprise growth and job creation, cover amongst other things, performance in terms of projects assisted, jobs created and sustained, progression to EI, training delivered and mentoring provided.

Details of the performance of each LEO in 2014 against its targets are being collated by the Centre of Excellence in EI and will be available later this month.

Enterprise Ireland is responsible for allocating budgets to individual LEOs for both current administration and capital requirements. The Board of EI is meeting later this month to agree these allocations. The SLA provides for a review of the methodology used in making allocations and this matter will be progressed in the context of the 2016 Estimates process in Quarter 2 2015.

Departmental Expenditure

306. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide, in tabular form, for the years 2007 to 2010 the total photography costs in his Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4496/15]

307. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide, in tabular form, for the years 1997 to 2007 the total photography costs in his Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4512/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 306 and 307 together.

The photographers booked by my Department over the period 2004 to 2010 and the associated costs incurred on each occasion are detailed in the following table. My Department does not have access to records relating to photography costs incurred during the period 1997 to 2003.

2004

Occasion for which Photographer booked	Name of Photographer	Breakdown of costs associated with each event
Not Available (N/A)	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€34
N/A	Frank Fennell	€29
1 Photo Tanáiste 1 Photo Minister Fahey	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€38
N/A	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€204

Occasion for which Photographer booked	Name of Photographer	Breakdown of costs associated with each event
N/A	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€161
N/A	Maxwell Photography	€62
Photos ASEM Meeting	Maxwell Photography	€469
N/A	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€381
Roger Digan	Prints of StudioShoot Portrait	€314
Photography – Action Plan for European Res.	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€181
Photography – Annual Report to Minister Fahy.	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€181
Action Plan for Europe	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€159
Syndication of Images to National Press	Jason Clarke	€178
Action Plan for Europe	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€92
Email ISDN Image to Media	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€31
N/A	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€254
Photography – Secretary General’s retirement	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€815
Photography Minister Martin & US Under Secretary	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€238
N/A	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€226
N/A	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€102
N/A	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€596
N/A	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€61
Total	-	€4,806

2005

Occasion for which Photographer booked	Name of Photographer	Breakdown of costs associated with each event
Enterprise Ireland SME Workshop - 2 Multi Use Licences	Frank Fennell	€58
Photography Government Report	Frank Fennell	€29
Minister Ahern	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€41

Questions - Written Answers

Occasion for which Photographer booked	Name of Photographer	Breakdown of costs associated with each event
Secretary General's Photos - Retirement	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€71
Redundancy Computer Launch	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€517
Redundancy Computer Launch	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€26
Photos Management Board	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€224
Photos French Judiciaries	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€224
Employment Bill Launch	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€480
National Statement of Trade Policy	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€443
Photo of Management Board for Annual Report	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€61
Photography Safety Health & Welfare at Work Bill	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€610
Small Business Forum	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€608
Photography Safety Health & Welfare at Work Bill	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€61
Publication of Bullying Report	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€403
Photo request of Minister and Mr Roddy Molloy, CEO, FAS.	Frank Fennell	€116
Photography IDA Investment	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€182
National Competitiveness	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€429
Multi use Licence National Competitive Council	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€61
Photography Studio Setting	Denis Hyland Photography	€563
Groceries Order Press Briefing	Lensmen and Associates	€269
Scanned Image Photo from Groceries Order Briefing	Lensmen and Associates	€47
Multi Use Licence Secretary General	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€182
Photography for Secretary General	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€218
Photography for SME Section	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€628
Secretary General's Retirement	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€246

Occasion for which Photographer booked	Name of Photographer	Breakdown of costs associated with each event
Patents Office Presentation	Frank Fennell	€24
Total	-	€6,822

2006

Occasion for which Photographer booked	Name of Photographer	Breakdown of costs associated with each event
Photography Colour Passport Minister Ahern	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€99
Photography Annual Report	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€170
2 Email Images NSAI Launch	Maxwell Photography	€57
Electronic image of Department	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€61
Photography – Minister Martin & Croatian Labour Minister	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€244
Photography for Strategy for Science Technology and Innovation	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€631
Photography Minister Noel Treacy	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€61
1 Single use image Mr Paul Farrell	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€61
Photography – Wyeth Launch	Maxwell Photography	€656
Publication of Consumer Legislation	Lensmen Limited	€319
Publication of Consumer Legislation	Lensmen Limited	€181
Passport Photos for Minister Killeen and Minister Ahern.	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€162
Launch of Booklet on Health & Safety for T.Ds and Senators	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€68
Launch of Booklet on Health & Safety for T.Ds and Senators	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€183
Total	-	€2,953

2007

Questions - Written Answers

Occasion for which Photographer booked	Name of Photographer	Breakdown of costs associated with each event
Photography – Photo of Minister Martin & Mr Ger Deering in Department	Maxwell Photography	€547
Digital Images	Lensmen Limited	€47
Photography – Launch of Employment Permits Act Green card	Fennell Photography	€695
Photography – Employment Rights Agenda Government Press Centre	Maxwell Photography	€642
Photography – Launch of Forfás Influenza Planning Report	Maxwell Photography	€547
Photography – Photo of Management Board	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€61
Photography – CSRI Bullying Report. Government Press Centre	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€408
Photography – Launch of Consumer Protection Bill	Fennell Photography	€58
Photography - Launch of Consumer Protection Bill	Fennell Photography	€749
Photography – Launch of ICT Audit Programme	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€661
Photography – Annual Report 1999 – 2 High Resolution single use photos	Mac Innes Photography	€99
Photography – CLRG Event	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€578
N/A	Mac Innes Photography Limited	€183
Photography Carlow New Office on 30 July 2007.	Karl Mc Donagh Photography	€170
Photography Carlow New Office on 30 July 2007.	Karl Mc Donagh Photography	€545
Photography – New CEO of IDA	Maxwell Photography	€677
Launch of Code of Practice for Domestic Workers	Eaon Ward Photography	€272
Total	-	€6,939

2008

Occasion for which Photographer booked	Name of Photographer	Breakdown of costs associated with each event
Photography – Employment Law Compliance Bill 2008	Mac Innes Photography	€374
Photography – Launch of Forfás Study on Impact of Single Market in Ireland	Mac Innes Photography	€440
Launch of Report	Mac Innes Photography	€584

Occasion for which Photographer booked	Name of Photographer	Breakdown of costs associated with each event
Photography – Minister Kelleher meeting students re. Job Shadow Week Cork	Provision	€415
Photography – Tánaiste Meeting with CEO of FAS, Mr Roddy Molloy	Mac Innes Photography	€419
N/A	Maxwell Photography	€174
N/A	Fennell Photography	€281
N/A	Fennell Photography	€58
N/A	Fennell Photography	€289
N/A	Maxwell Photography	€154
N/A	Maxwell Photography	€698
N/A	Maxwell Photography	€218
N/A	Mac Innes Photography	€61
N/A	Nick Bradshaw	€574
Tánaiste Meeting with Enterprise	Mac Innes Photography	€144
Tánaiste Launch of Innovation Policy State IFSC	Fennell Photography	€629
N/A	SKP & Associates Limited T/A Lensmen & Associates	€94
N/A	Fennell Photography	€29
Annual Report Management Board Photo	Mac Innes Photography	€255
N/A	Provisions	€393
Photo call in Advance of LRC Annual Report	Provisions	€415
Total	-	€6,698

2009

Occasion for which Photographer booked	Name of Photographer	Breakdown of costs associated with each event
Advertisement	Mac Innes Photography	€118
Advertisement – Minister O’Keeffe meeting Chinese Ambassador H.E. Mr Liu Biwei	Mac Innes Photography	€194
Advertisement	Mac Innes Photography	€379
Advertisement – 1st Report on the Strategy for Science, Technology & Innovation	Mac Innes Photography	€43
N/A	Clive Wasson Photography	€242
Photography – Tánaiste Meeting Vice President of EU	Fennell Photography	€660

Questions - Written Answers

Occasion for which Photographer booked	Name of Photographer	Breakdown of costs associated with each event
N/A	Fennell Photography	€519
N/A	Fennell Photography	€62
N/A	Fennell Photography	€272
N/A	Fennell Photography	€31
Photography – Signing of Agreement – Minister Conor Lenihan and Dr Thirumalachari Ramasami, Indian Secretary of the Department of Science & Technology	Mac Innes Photography	€409
Photography – Tánaiste & Minister Ryan & Mr Joe Halford, Green Enterprise Group.	Mac Innes Photography	€352
Photography – In studio head shots of Minister Callery	Mac Innes Photography	€159
Photography – Government Buildings Tánaiste & Minister Hanafin re. Workplace Graduate Scheme & Short Term Working Programme	Fennell Photography	€866
Photocall Merrion Square 21/05/09	Dublin City Council	€100
Photography – Minister Callery	Mac Innes Photography	€135
N/A	Fennell Photography	€226
Photography	Fennell Photography	€592
Tánaiste meeting with Russian Deputy Prime Minister	Fennell Photography	€450
N/A	Jason Clarke Photography	€175
Advertisement – Launch of Green Enterprise Report	Jason Clarke Photography	€486
Photography – Launch Guide on Procurement - Tánaiste	Mac Innes Photography	€583
Photography Tánaiste meeting Commissioner Kroes.	Mac Innes Photography	€259
Minister Lenihan meeting DG for Research, Mr José Manuel Salva Rodriguez	Mac Innes Photography	€387
Advertisement	Mac Innes Photography	€387
Minister Lenihan Launch of STI Report	Jason Clarke Photography	€601
N/A	Jason Clarke Photography	€49

Occasion for which Photographer booked	Name of Photographer	Breakdown of costs associated with each event
Photography – Min Calleary meeting with Ms Breege O’Donoghue	Fennell Photography	€612
Photocall with Minister Lenihan/ Mr Dominic McVey at launch of Green Enterprise Report	Jason Clarke Photography	€486
N/A	Jason Clarke Photography	€486
Photography – Minister Kelleher, China Economic Trade Forum Signing	Mac Innes Photography	€526
N/A	Mac Innes Photography	€526
Total	-	€11,372

2010

Occasion for which Photographer booked	Name of Photographer	Breakdown of costs associated with each event
Photography – Announcement of FÁS Board	Jason Clarke Photography	€484
Advertisement	Mac Innes Photography	€582
N/A	Mac Innes Photography	€433
Advertisement	Jason Clarke Photography	€486
N/A	Mac Innes Photography	€164
Minister O’Keeffe Meeting Chinese Ambassador H.E. Mr Liu Biwei	Mac Innes Photography	€194
N/A	Mac Innes Photography	€294
N/A	Mac Innes Photography	€53
N/A	Jason Clarke Photography	€560
Photographs of Minister O’Keeffe at Official opening.	Catherine Ketch	€70
Photography 15/07/10 of Minister O’Keeffe	Mac Innes Photography	€510
N/A	Queenan Photography	€30
Art & Photography	Creative Ad Ltd	€2,263
Total	-	€6,123

My Department uses external photographers sparingly and, with a view to keeping costs to a minimum, regularly uses its own facilities and staff to take photographs in-house. My Department also avails of the panel of photography firms, selected following a procurement process undertaken by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which is available for use by all Departments.

Departmental Contracts Data

308. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide, in tabular form, a list of all external public relations firms hired by his Department and associated costs incurred from 2007 to 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4546/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The providers of public relations services used by my Department and the Offices of my Department, the details of the services supplied by each provider and the expenditure incurred on such services by my Department for the period 2007 to 2010 were as follows:

2007

Name of PR Company/PR Consultant:	Purpose of Expenditure:	PR Cost (€):
Leo Burnett	Advertising increase in National Minimum Wage	€50,163
Q 4	Interim NCA PR Services	€18,150
Form Creative Limited	Advertising Campaign for Work-Life Balance Day 2007 (Main design concept for the Campaign)	€7,714
The Media Group	To devise, implement and manage a national promotion and advertising campaign across a range of media for the ICT Audits Programme for Small Business in Ireland.	€16,033
Carr Communications	Corporate Communications on matters including annual return dates, the availability of the "pre-filed" annual return and company law compliance.	€45,372
DHR Communications	Dissemination of EQUAL Programme	€28,305
Keating and Associates	Communications Strategy for the ODCE	€32,670
Millward Brown IMS	Market Research for the ODCE	€44,790
Keating and Associates	To provide NERA with PR Services in the development of a new Communications Strategy.	€46,734
Design Tactics	NERA – Advertising Media	€6,285
OVERALL TOTAL 2007	-	€296,216

2008

Name of PR Company/PR Consultant:	Purpose of Expenditure:	PR Cost (€):
DHR Communications	Dissemination of EQUAL Programme	€9,547
Keating and Associates	NERA PR	€63,189
Ellard Browne Ltd	NERA Advertising	€605
Cawley Nea Ltd	NERA Advertising	€27,410
Carr Communications	Communications for CRO	€25,593

Name of PR Company/PR Consultant:	Purpose of Expenditure:	PR Cost (€):
Millward Brown/IMS	Market Research for the ODCE	€15,898
Form Creative Ltd	Design work for Media Campaign for Worklife Balance Day 2009 (PR element)	
OVERALL TOTAL 2008	-	€147,900

2009

Name of Consultants	Purpose	Cost (€)
Keating & Associates	To provide NERA with PR Consultancy Services.	€20,303
OVERALL TOTAL 2009	-	€20,303

2010

Name of Consultants	Purpose	Cost (€)
Keating & Associates	To provide NERA with PR Consultancy Services	€29,011
OVERALL TOTAL 2010	-	€29,011

My Department uses external public relations providers having regard to its business needs. In engaging such providers, the Department is mindful of the need to secure value for money and, accordingly strives to keep costs to the minimum.

National Flag

309. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he approved the lowering of the national flag over his Department's building on Kildare Street, Dublin 2, on 23 January 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4568/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Decisions regarding the raising and lowering of the national flag are taken by the Protocol and General Division of the Department of the Taoiseach and not directly by my Department. Accordingly, the national flag was lowered to half-mast on Friday 23 January 2015, on the occasion of the funeral of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, as is established protocol upon the death of a head of state in office, as a mark of respect to their country.

Job Creation

310. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the progress that has been made in creating job opportunities in Dublin North East and Dublin North Central; his plans to further encourage job opportunities in these areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4731/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Action

Plan for Jobs since 2012 has set a comprehensive set of measures agreed by Government to promote jobs opportunities and employment growth in all parts of the country. The 2015 Action Plan for Jobs was launched on January 29 in ICON Plc. The Action Plan process is working. Almost 80,000 more people are at work since the launch of the first Action Plan for Jobs in 2012. Indigenous exports and foreign direct investment are at all-time record levels. Our competitiveness ranking internationally has climbed to 15th. The rate of unemployment has declined from a peak of 15.1 per cent at the start of 2012 to below 10.6 per cent at end 2014. The achievement of 100,000 additional jobs by 2016 will be an important milestone. Beyond this, we want to replace all of the jobs lost during the economic crisis and bring employment to 2.1 million in 2018.

The Action Plan for Jobs 2015 will be a further step along the way in meeting this medium-term goal for Ireland. The themes in this year's Action Plan for Jobs build on the reforms of previous years in the areas of competitiveness, innovation and entrepreneurship and in fostering new sources of growth for the economy,

The 2015 Action Plan contains a suite of 380 actions to ensure we deliver not just the promised 100,000 additional jobs by 2016, but an additional 40,000 jobs this year alone. Specifically, in 2015, Enterprise Ireland will target the creation of 13,000 gross new full-time jobs in indigenous firms. IDA Ireland will target the creation of 14,000 gross new jobs in multinationals. It is estimated that every direct job created in agency assisted firms indirectly supports another job in the wider economy thereby making a strong contribution to the overall target of getting to full employment in 2018.

Key among the initiatives in the 2015 Action Plan for Jobs are six new Disruptive Reforms: significant projects that require cross Government collaboration that can make a real difference to enterprise and jobs in a short space of time.

Entrepreneurship is one of our Disruptive Reforms for 2015, supporting new job opportunities at local level. Through driving implementation of the actions in the new National Entrepreneurship Policy Statement we will double the jobs impact of start-ups in Ireland over the next five years, from 93,000 currently. We will increase the number of start-ups, the survival rate, and the capacity of startups to grow to scale, all by 25 per cent.

A major reform of support for creating job opportunities in 2014 was the launch of the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs), to make the operating environment for businesses and the system for delivery of support to micro and small enterprises more coherent, responsive and conducive to entrepreneurship at local level. The LEOs are now the first-stop-shop for those beginning a new business as well as those wishing to expand their existing one. The LEOs provide financial and non-financial supports to help micro and small businesses to expand their growth potential and the LEO staff can advise clients directly or direct them to the most appropriate source of support for their project.

Each LEO is developing a Local Enterprise Development Plan for 2015 which will aim at further boosting enterprise growth within the area within their remit by building on the achievements to date and setting targets for job creation and enterprise growth in their area. Key targets in the Plans will include new business start-ups, business expansions and jobs created or sustained as well as wider economic impacts such as exports, mentoring, training and enterprise promotion. It is expected that this reform will continue the momentum for sustained growth in job creation in each County across the country.

In addition, we will launch an Entrepreneur Partnering Programme, linking start-ups with established businesses. The new Startup Refunds for Entrepreneurs Scheme (SURE) will provide additional finance for entrepreneurs. We will support 130 new entrepreneurs via the New

Frontiers Programme, support 185 Competitive and High Potential Startups.

The other Disruptive Reforms include the National Talent Drive in 2015, which will ensure we have the skills supply to underpin the new economy, including through the provision of 1,250 extra ICT places for students in 2015 and developing new apprenticeships in key sectors of the economy. We will also establish the Low Pay Commission, to undertake analysis and make a recommendation on the appropriate level of the national minimum wage. We will shortly launch competitive funding initiatives of up to €25 million to support entrepreneurship and innovation in the regions.

These Disruptive Reforms sit alongside the long menu of actions to support sales and exports, get credit flowing, drive innovation, cut red tape, and stimulate the domestic sectors (agri-food/marine, retail, tourism, construction).

The APJ2015 reforms and initiatives are focused on making it easier to do business and to create jobs in every part of the country and we are determined through these actions to create the conditions to achieve the target of 100,000 extra people at work by 2016 and contribute to our longer-term goal of restoring the country to have 2.1 million at work in 2018.

IDA Site Visits

311. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of Industrial Development Agency site visits undertaken in Dublin North East and Dublin North Central in 2013 and 2014; his plans to encourage more visits in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4732/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am informed by IDA Ireland that information in relation to site sponsored visits by potential investors is provided on a county by county basis only and during 2013 and 2014 there were a total of 385 such visits to Dublin, city and county. For reasons of commercial sensitivity and client confidentiality IDA Ireland does not release details of individual locations visited or comment on upcoming visits arranged. The number of site visits by potential investors to Dublin city and county in each of the years 2013 and 2014 are set out in the attached tabular statement. It must also be remembered that decisions as to where to visit and where to locate is ultimately a matter for the investor.

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 the Deputy is aware, the Action Plan for Jobs 2015 was launched on Thursday last, 29th January. This is the fourth annual plan in a multi-year process, which started in 2012. When the First Action Plan for Jobs was launched, unemployment stood at 15.1%. Today it stands at 10.6% and we are on track to exceed our target of 100,000 additional jobs by 2016. We are now setting a goal to bring employment to 2.1 million by 2018 - 2 years ahead of our original target.

We are determined that every region will benefit from the recovery and we will be announcing over the coming weeks and month a series of actions to help drive the achievement of this goal.

The Table shows the number of IDA Ireland sponsored site visits by potential investors

to Dublin, city and county during 2013 and 2014.

-	2013	2014
Dublin, city & county	180	205

Enterprise Ireland Expenditure

312. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide the payments in 2014 by Enterprise Ireland by company, county and payment type; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4875/15]

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 with the ultimate objective of job creation. Enterprise Ireland clients are a vital source of employment in every county in Ireland. In view of the complexity of the information sought, I will forward the draft 2014 payments made by Enterprise Ireland by Company, County and Payment type, in hard copy directly to the Deputy. Please note that this information is in draft form pending the completion of the C&AG audit of Enterprise Ireland's 2014 accounts and the completion of their Annual Report in June 2015.

Community Enterprise Centres

313. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation when the BDM programme for community enterprise centres, CEC, will be in place; if he recognises the achievements of CECs; if there are changes to this programme envisaged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4964/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I understand from Enterprise Ireland that since the launch of the first Community Enterprise Centre scheme in 1989, Enterprise Ireland has approved €64 million for the development of Community Enterprise Centres in towns and villages across the country. There are currently 117 such centres across the country. There are currently no specific proposals to extend the Community Enterprise Centre Scheme to fund Business Development Management in 2015. The last scheme rolled out was in 2012 and 2013 when Enterprise Ireland provided funding of €2 million to support the recruitment of a total of 46 Business Development Managers.

On the wider issue of the Centres, the success levels, occupancy levels and sustainability of jobs at the Centres varies and therefore I asked Enterprise Ireland to review the operations of the Community Enterprise Centres in the context of regional enterprise development and how the Community Enterprise Centres and the Local Enterprise Offices might work more closely in support of business start-ups before giving further consideration to the matter.

Under the 2014 Action Plan for Jobs, my Department developed a framework for the preparation of Regional Enterprise Strategies. This framework provides a model for co-ordinated action across public bodies and other stakeholders to maximise the potential of each region to support enterprise development and jobs growth, based on the strengths and assets of the region.

The application of the template was tested in the Midlands region towards the end of 2014 and will lead to the publication and implementation of a Regional Enterprise Strategy for the Midlands in early 2015. Similar strategies for the other regions will be commenced over the course of the year, on a phased basis, and will include specific actions on the part of Enterprise

Ireland, IDA Ireland, the LEOs, Údarás na Gaeltachta and other public bodies active in each region to promote enterprise growth and job creation. In this context, my Department and Enterprise Ireland will also work to explore how the Community Enterprise Centre network can best be enhanced to support regional job creation.

As part of the Action Plan for Jobs 2015, a number of Government agencies will be shortly outlining their regional enterprise plans to map out what they will do to help create new jobs across Ireland.

These Regional Enterprise Strategies seek to maximise the job potential of each region. It will provide new funding for enterprise support in the regions and seek to leverage and orient existing funds to target initiatives that enable regions to achieve their full employment potential. A significant regional fund of up to €25 million in competitive funding will be announced to support regional initiatives.

Farm Assist Scheme Applications

314. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide farm scheme regulations in CD form to assist applicants with literary difficulties such as dyslexia and so on as the Revenue Commissioners provide such service and co-operation to this sector of the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4319/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department aims to ensure that the needs of all of its customers, including people with disabilities, are met and the right to equal treatment is upheld in all dealings with the Department. The Department's business spans a wide range of activities involving direct interaction with many customers. Every effort is made to ensure that we provide the highest level of service to all our customers. As regards people with disabilities my Department has two Access officers appointed in accordance with Section 26(2) of the Disability Act. These officers are available to persons with disabilities to provide assistance as required. When a customer with dyslexia makes contact with one of these officers, arrangements are made whereby the relevant Division makes contact with the individual directly either by phone or in person to go through the paperwork involved and assist/advise as appropriate. My Department has in the past, made available an audio version of certain schemes on CD for this purpose. Material is also provided in a large print format when required. Contact details for the Access Officers are on my Department's Website.

Departmental Funding

315. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department will provide funding to a voluntary organisation (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4375/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The application for *ex gratia* funding submitted by Kerry Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has been approved and an amount of €7,200 was awarded to the organisation in December last. The organisation was informed of the allocation on 18 December 2014.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

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

when a 2013 AEOS payment will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4393/15]

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. 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 2013 Scheme year and 75% payment will issue shortly. The balancing 25% payment will issue thereafter.

Common Agricultural Policy Reform

317. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will review the criteria blocking young farmers who are under 40 years of age but who have been farming for more than five years from accessing measures under the new CAP programme for young farmers including applying for the national reserve and also for top up entitlements; the reason they are currently excluded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4394/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In accordance with the EU Regulations governing the Young Farmer Scheme and National Reserve, eligibility for payment is limited to farmers under 40 years of age who commenced their farming activity no more than five years prior to submitting the Basic Payment Scheme application. These schemes are intended to provide financial assistance to young farmers during the period immediately following the setting up of their farming enterprise. My Department has no discretion regarding these eligibility criteria and as such it is not possible to extend the Young Farmers Scheme or Young Farmers category of the National Reserve to include the group of farmers as proposed by the Deputy.

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.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Appeals

318. **Deputy Áine Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Cork will receive a decision on their disadvantaged area scheme payment 2012 appeal. [4403/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named is one of a number, their derogation applications having been unsuccessful, who appealed my Department’s decision to the independently chaired, DAS Appeals Committee. Immediately that Committee has adjudicated on the appeal, the person named will be advised of the Committee’s decision, in writing.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

319. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a disadvantaged area scheme payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4409/15]

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 16 April 2014. Processing of this application has recently been completed following receipt of the equine passports on 12 January 2015. 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

320. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a 2014 disadvantaged area payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4415/15]

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 14 May 2014. Payment has not yet issued to the person named as, at this stage, the holding concerned has not yet satisfied the Scheme minimum stocking density requirements. Immediately the holding concerned is confirmed as having met these requirements, the case will be further processed with a view to payment issuing to the person named at the earliest possible date thereafter, provided all other Scheme requirements have been satisfied.

Special Areas of Conservation Designation

321. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 92 of 22 January 2015, the exact areas of Dunbulcan Bay, County Galway, that were surveyed as part of the appropriate assessment; the methodology used; the dates the survey took place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4417/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Appropriate Assessment in respect of the area referred to by the Deputy has assessed the potential ecological impacts of aquaculture and fisheries activities within the Galway Bay Complex Special Area of Conservation (SAC) on the Conservation Objectives of the site. The Appropriate Assessment has also assessed the potential impacts of these activities on the Special Conservation Interests in the inner Galway Bay Special Protection Area (SPA). The Appropriate Assessments are carried out by the Marine Institute on behalf of my Department.

The Appropriate Assessment in respect of Galway Bay is available for viewing by any member of the public on my Department's website at www.agriculture.gov.ie.

Departmental Expenditure

322. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide, in tabular form, for the years 2007 to 2010 the total photography costs in his Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and

breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4486/15]

323. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide, in tabular form, for the years 1997 to 2007 the total photography costs in his Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4502/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to Questions Nos. 322 and 323 together.

In my Department photographers are booked for the purpose of recording significant events such as the launch of schemes/programmes, new initiatives and visits by delegations from abroad. Where possible the Press Office uses in house photography and the number of occasions where photographers are booked has reduced substantially since 2011.

In 2012, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade established a Framework Agreement comprising five firms for the provision of photography services. This Framework Agreement is available for use by all Government Departments and Offices for events in the Dublin region. If an event is outside Dublin, the practice is to get three written quotations.

A detailed breakdown of expenditure from 2004 to 2010 is provided in the following table.

A detailed breakdown of expenditure from 1997 to 2003 is not available in the timeframe requested. **2004**

DATE	COMPANY	AMOUNT
06 January 2004	Fennell Photography	€359.55
06 January 2004	Fennell Photography	€588.21
14 January 2004	Fennell Photography	€585.42
12 February 2004	Fennell Photography	€399.85
13 February 2004	Fennell Photography	€115.77
05 March 2004	Deasy Photography	€147.56
08 March 2004	Fennell Photography	€444.11
08 March 2004	Fennell Photography	€492.35
09 March 2004	Fennell Photography	€646.95
15 April 2004	Fennell Photography	€347.88
16 April 2004	Fennell Photography	€326.88
16 April 2004	Fennell Photography	€225.87
16 April 2004	Fennell Photography	€173.66
27 April 2004	Fennell Photography	€897.22
27 April 2004	Fennell Photography	€295.67
27 April 2004	Fennell Photography	€438.11
27 April 2004	J Campbell	€390.00
28 April 2004	Edmund Ross Studio	€232.68
06 May 2004	Fennell Photography	€57.89
06 May 2004	Fennell Photography	€467.95
04 June 2004	Fennell Photography	€231.54
04 June 2004	Fennell Photography	€286.35

DATE	COMPANY	AMOUNT
09 June 2004	MacInnes Photography	€34.05
21 June 2004	Walter Coleman Photography	€78.00
24 June 2004	Fennell Photography	€430.49
24 June 2004	Fennell Photography	€46.86
30 June 2004	Fennell Photography	€550.23
06 July 2004	Fennell Photography	€292.02
08 July 2004	Provision Photographers	€366.60
14 July 2004	James Yorke Photography	€115.00
06 August 2004	John Sheehan Photography	€22.70
16 August 2004	John Sheehan Photography	€340.50
26 August 2004	Fennell Photography	€546.26
01 September 2004	SWS Group	€682.44
01 September 2004	MacMonagle Photography	€31.38
01 October 2004	Andrew Downes	€366.83
04 October 2004	Lensmen/SKP	€436.51
07 October 2004	Fennell Photography	€28.94
07 October 2004	Fennell Photography	€578.61
07 October 2004	Fennell Photography	€654.28
07 October 2004	Fennell Photography	€498.59
07 October 2004	Fennell Photography	€26.43
20 October 2004	Fennell Photography	€28.94
04 November 2004	Fennell Photography	€26.43
09 November 2004	Fennell Photography	€575.72
15 November 2004	Harrison Photography	€529.11
24 November 2004	Fennell Photography	€771.90
30 November 2004	Provision Photographers	€116.91
01 December 2004	Brian McDaid Photographer	€340.00
02 December 2004	Edmund Ross Studio	€964.75
07 December 2004	Fennell Photography	€1,154.34
08 December 2004	Tom Conachy Photographer	€658.30
09 December 2004	Fennell Photography	€497.39
09 December 2004	Fennell Photography	€662.24
14 December 2004	Picell8 Ltd	€255.29

2005

DATE	COMPANY	AMOUNT
04 January 2005	Fennell Photography	€516.74
04 January 2005	Fennell Photography	€71.60
04 January 2005	Fennell Photography	€115.77
04 January 2005	Fennell Photography	€115.77
04 January 2005	Fennell Photography	€384.24
04 January 2005	Fennell Photography	€28.94
04 January 2005	Fennell Photography	€28.94

Questions - Written Answers

DATE	COMPANY	AMOUNT
04 January 2005	Fennell Photography	€635.29
04 January 2005	Fennell Photography	€57.89
04 January 2005	Fennell Photography	€115.77
04 January 2005	Fennell Photography	€428.40
04 January 2005	Fennell Photography	€210.80
06 January 2005	Fennell Photography	€869.51
06 January 2005	Fennell Photography	€28.94
06 January 2005	Fennell Photography	€28.94
06 January 2005	Fennell Photography	€57.89
06 January 2005	Fennell Photography	€57.89
07 January 2005	Fennell Photography	€28.94
10 January 2005	Tom Conachy Photography	€34.05
24 January 2005	Edmund Ross Photography	€681.00
24 January 2005	Edmund Ross Photography	€346.18
24 January 2005	Edmund Ross Photography	€306.45
28 January 2005	Fennell Photography	€52.87
28 January 2005	Fennell Photography	€748.79
28 January 2005	Fennell Photography	€57.89
03 February 2005	Fennell Photography	€743.12
22 February 2005	Fennell Photography	€759.01
22 February 2005	Fennell Photography	€57.89
22 February 2005	Fennell Photography	€139.30
02 March 2005	Fennell Photography	€348.14
03 March 2005	MacInnes Photography	€30.65
09 March 2005	Maxwell Photography	€132.98
09 March 2005	Edmund Ross Photography	€851.25
09 March 2005	Fennell Photography	€132.95
09 March 2005	Fennell Photography	€1,231.19
15 March 2005	Edmund Ross Photography	€62.43
23 March 2005	Fennell Photography	€115.77
23 March 2005	Fennell Photography	€57.89
23 March 2005	Fennell Photography	€256.77
31 March 2005	Jim Campbell Photography	€190.00
01 April 2005	Fennell Photography	€210.30
06 April 2005	Fennell Photography	€57.89
06 April 2005	Fennell Photography	€115.77
06 April 2005	Fennell Photography	€1,104.70
11 April 2005	Maxwell Photography	€102.15
19 April 2005	Picsell8 Ltd	€50.00
19 April 2005	Gerard Hore Photography	€402.93
20 April 2005	Lensmen	€53.24
26 April 2005	Maxwell Photography	€100.44
26 April 2005	Maxwell Photography	€100.44
26 April 2005	Maxwell Photography	€100.44

DATE	COMPANY	AMOUNT
27 April 2005	Edmund Ross Photography	€397.00
27 April 2005	Edmund Ross Photography	€56.75
27 April 2005	Edmund Ross Photography	€397.00
29 April 2005	Fennell Photography	€86.83
29 April 2005	Fennell Photography	€353.24
29 April 2005	Fennell Photography	€28.94
29 April 2005	Fennell Photography	€476.39
29 April 2005	Fennell Photography	€88.22
09 May 2005	Maxwell Photography	€8.51
09 May 2005	Maxwell Photography	€8.51
09 May 2005	Maxwell Photography	€8.51
09 June 2005	Fennell Photography	€190.37
09 June 2005	Fennell Photography	€173.66
21 June 2005	MacInnes Photography	€61.29
27 June 2005	Maxwell Photography	€40.00
30 June 2005	Maxwell Photography	€40.00
01 July 2005	Fennell Photography	€28.94
01 July 2005	Fennell Photography	€686.93
01 July 2005	Fennell Photography	€535.98
01 July 2005	Fennell Photography	€527.47
05 July 2005	Fennell Photography	€28.94
05 July 2005	Fennell Photography	€28.94
22 July 2005	Fennell Photography	€28.94
02 August 2005	Fennell Photography	€235.77
02 August 2005	Fennell Photography	€115.77
11 August 2005	Fennell Photography	€711.90
11 August 2005	Fennell Photography	€26.93
11 August 2005	Fennell Photography	€26.93
11 August 2005	Fennell Photography	€26.93
11 August 2005	Fennell Photography	€26.93
18 August 2005	Fennell Photography	€26.93
18 August 2005	Fennell Photography	€57.89
07 September 2005	Fennell Photography	€566.06
07 September 2005	Fennell Photography	€86.83
07 September 2005	Fennell Photography	€816.32
07 September 2005	Fennell Photography	€86.83
07 September 2005	Fennell Photography	€219.31
08 September 2005	Maxwell Photography	€25.54
03 October 2005	Jim Campbell Photography	€350.00
07 October 2005	Fennell Photography	€375.60
13 October 2005	Fennell Photography	€240.00
27 October 2005	Fennell Photography	€459.93
02 November 2005	Fennell Photography	€144.71
07 November 2005	Fennell Photography	€408.86

Questions - Written Answers

DATE	COMPANY	AMOUNT
12 November 2005	Fennell Photography	€110.00
15 November 2005	Brian McDaid	€150.00
23 November 2005	Fennell Photography	€604.65

2006

DATE	COMPANY	AMOUNT
10 January 2006	Fennell Photography	€228.96
23 February 2006	Fennell Photography	€527.47
02 March 2006	Lensmen	€396.99
09 March 2006	Fennell Photography	€28.94
09 March 2006	Fennell Photography	€28.94
13 March 2006	Maxwell Photography	€380.23
21 March 2006	Fennell Photography	1,151.89
29 March 2006	Fennell Photography	€260.48
03 April 2006	Fennell Photography	€659.69
04 April 2006	Fennell Photography	€831.16
10 April 2006	Fennell Photography	€387.49
24 April 2006	Farrelly's Photographic	€674.25
24 April 2006	Farrelly's Photographic	€510.75
09 May 2006	Fennell Photography	€28.94
19 May 2006	Fennell Photography	€757.30
24 May 2006	Fennell Photography	€170.25
24 May 2006	Farrelly's Photographic	€510.75
24 May 2006	Farrelly's Photographic	170.25
25 May 2006	Fennell Photography	€297.94
09 June 2006	LK Photos	€381.99
19 June 2006	Fennell Photography	€637.56
23 June 2006	Fennell Photography	€218.58
26 June 2006	Maxwell Photography	€28.38
28 June 2006	Fennell Photography	€560.38
28 June 2006	Fennell Photography	€136.20
28 June 2006	Fennell Photography	€202.86
12 July 2006	Maxwell Photography	€45.40
18 July 2006	Fennell Photography	€1,305.51
19 July 2006	Clive Wasson Photography	€268.31
26 July 2006	Fennell Photography	€584.78
02 August 2006	Fennell Photography	€584.22
02 August 2006	Fennell Photography	€86.83
09 August 2006	Farrelly's Photographic	€454.00
16 August 2006	Brian Duignan Photography	€350.00
23 August 2006	Fennell Photography	€623.02
23 August 2006	Fennell Photography	€28.94
23 August 2006	Fennell Photography	€173.66

DATE	COMPANY	AMOUNT
24 August 2006	Harrison Photography	€22.37
01 September 2006	Jason McGarrigle	€200.00
07 September 2006	Fennell Photography	€28.94
11 September 2006	Fennell Photography	€735.74
11 September 2006	Fennell Photography	€86.83
20 September 2006	Farrelly's Photographic	€510.75
21 September 2006	Fennell Photography	€192.64
21 September 2006	Fennell Photography	€57.89
06 October 2006	Jim Campbell Photography	€220.00
09 October 2006	Fennell Photography	€57.89
09 October 2006	Fennell Photography	€28.94
09 October 2006	Fennell Photography	€231.54
09 October 2006	Clive Wasson Photography	€1,143.52
09 October 2006	Fennell Photography	€36.48
10 October 2006	Fennell Photography	€663.51
22 October 2006	Glynn's Photography	€300.00
26 October 2006	Fennell Photography	€192.64
26 October 2006	Fennell Photography	€192.64
01 November 2006	Fennell Photography	€115.77
01 November 2006	Fennell Photography	€28.94
01 November 2006	Fennell Photography	€115.77
21 November 2006	Farrelly's Photographic	€681.00
24 November 2006	Fennell Photography	€173.66
24 November 2006	Fennell Photography	€192.64
27 November 2006	Fennell Photography	€58.14
27 November 2006	Fennell Photography	€58.14
01 December 2006	Edmund Ross Photography	€391.58
08 December 2006	Fennell Photography	€786.81
09 December 2006	Fennell Photography	€848.22
15 December 2006	Edmund Ross Photography	€959.08
19 December 2006	Jason McGarrigle	€80.00
19 December 2006	Fennell Photography	€639.26
19 December 2006	Fennell Photography	€653.16
25 December 2006	Fennell Photography	€23.93

2007**2008**

DATE	COMPANY	AMOUNT
21 January 2008	Fennell Photography	€28.94
21 January 2008	Fennell Photography	€602.94
28 January 2008	Fennell Photography	€347.00
30 January 2008	Fennell Photography	€727.39

Questions - Written Answers

DATE	COMPANY	AMOUNT
30 January 2008	Fennell Photography	€202.60
09 February 2008	Fennell Photography	€626.28
11 February 2008	Fennell Photography	€57.89
12 February 2008	Maxwell Photography	€603.54
17 February 2008	Fennell Photography	€692.68
18 February 2008	Seamus Farrelly	€340.50
21 February 2008	GMC Photography	€1,157.70
21 February 2008	GMC Photography	€283.75
24 February 2008	Fennell Photography	€486.04
24 February 2008	Fennell Photography	€661.96
28 February 2008	Fennell Photography	€28.94
29 February 2008	Fennell Photography	€28.94
29 February 2008	Paris Photographer	€300.00
01 March 2008	Fennell Photography	€173.66
01 March 2008	Fennell Photography	€889.53
01 March 2008	Fennell Photography	€203.99
01 March 2008	Fennell Photography	€28.94
11 March 2008	Maxwell Photography	€90.80
24 April 2008	Fennell Photography	€68.10
28 April 2008	Fennell Photography	€340.50
30 April 2008	Fennell Photography	€770.36
15 May 2008	Fennell Photography	€1,047.25
18 May 2008	Fennell Photography	€144.71
18 May 2008	Fennell Photography	€104.11
18 May 2008	Fennell Photography	€68.10
21 May 2008	Fennell Photography	€28.94
21 May 2008	Fennell Photography	€797.03
10 June 2008	Jim Campbell Photography	€130.00
11 June 2008	Gerard McHugh Photogra- phy	€121.00
13 June 2008	Fennell Photography	€340.50
20 June 2008	Fennell Photography	€28.94
27 June 2008	Fennell Photography	€68.10
11 July 2008	Maxwell Photography	€109.96
11 July 2008	Maxwell Photography	€109.96
17 July 2008	Jim Campbell Photography	€480.00
22 July 2008	Fennell Photography	€517.25
16 September 2008	Fennell Photography	€28.94
24 September 2008	Fennell Photography	€565.49
11 December 2008	Fennell Photography	€86.83
16 December 2008	Fennell Photography	€659.52
17 December 2008	DC Photo	€300.00
31 December 2008	Fennell Photography	€702.99

2009

DATE	COMPANY	AMOUNT
30 January 2009	Fennell Photography	€594.43
23 February 2009	Fennell Photography	€616.11
28 February 2009	Fennell Photography	€202.60
31 March 2009	Fennell Photography	€571.29
31 March 2009	Fennell Photography	€961.65
23 April 2009	Dermot Sullivan	€556.15
30 April 2009	Sean T. Byrne Photography	€90.80
28 May 2009	Fennell Photography	€572.44
30 May 2009	Maxwell Photography	€334.12
18 June 2009	Fennell Photography	€609.89
23 June 2009	Edmund Ross Photography	€510.75
10 July 2009	Creedon Communications	€102.15
15 September 2009	Maxwell Photography	€380.75
30 September 2009	Fennell Photography	€671.83
30 September 2009	Fennell Photography	€946.69
27 November 2009	Fennell Photography	€342.44
07 December 2009	Alf Harvey	€351.85
23 December 2009	Fennell Photography	€691.48

2010

DATE	COMPANY	AMOUNT
06 February 2010	Farrelly's Photographic	€227.00
23 February 2010	Fennell Photography	€601.10
28 February 2010	Fennell Photography	€452.20
28 February 2010	Fennell Photography	€750.02
28 February 2010	Fennell Photography	€328.78
23 March 2010	Fennell Photography	€452.20
31 March 2010	Fennell Photography	€545.99
07 April 2010	Harvey Rogers Photography	€369.37
30 April 2010	Fennell Photography	€555.29
11 May 2010	Jason McGrath Photography	€375.00
31 May 2010	John Power Photography	€136.20
11 June 2010	Dermot Sullivan	€550.00
14 June 2010	Adrian Donohoe Photography	€321.38
02 July 2010	Tony Keane Photographer	€70.00
03 July 2010	Farrelly's Photographic	€227.00
16 July 2010	Fennell Photography	€297.94
27 July 2010	Fennell Photography	€842.17
30 September 2010	Fennell Photography	€1,134.51
21 October 2010	Fennell Photography	€236.22
26 October 2010	Fennell Photography	€147.91
23 November 2010	Patrick J. Browne & Co	€143.50

DATE	COMPANY	AMOUNT
30 November 2010	Fennell Photography	€429.11

Fisheries Protection

324. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the scientific information underlining SI 591 of 2014 in relation to lobster stocks; the basis on which he is concerned about lobster stock levels off the west coast, that is, when a stock survey was last completed; if his attention has been drawn to an offer to fund a survey that will show the success of the existing v-notching programme; if he will revoke the introduction of SI 591 of 2014 pending completion of that study; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4521/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Lobster fishing is an important economic activity in coastal fishing communities all around Ireland. Stock advice is available online in the Shellfish Stocks and Fisheries Review, prepared by the Marine Institute (MI) and an Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM). According to the 2012 Review, some 1,700 boats, approximately three quarters of the Irish fleet, participated in the fishery between April and October 2012 on all Irish coasts. Any changes to the management of this fishery are therefore given careful consideration prior to enactment. The Lobster (Conservation of Stocks) Regulations 2014 (S.I. 591 of 2014), which I signed into law in December 2014, concluded the roll-out of changes to lobster conservation measures which I had announced in May 2014. The regulations replace and revoke previous regulations with the objective of supporting the reproductive potential of the stock. In that regard, I am conscious of my responsibilities under the Common Fisheries Policy to strive for sustainable inshore fisheries in the long term.

The package of enhanced conservation measures I announced in May 2014 were approved following the consideration of over 250 submissions received during an extensive public consultation on the lobster fisheries. These submissions were reviewed in light of scientific advice and information on the status of the fisheries. The changes to the lobster management measures are aimed at ensuring the long-term viability of this stock by protecting its reproductive potential. The most recent stock advice from the Shellfish Stocks and Fisheries Review 2012 noted that the egg production level for the stock is estimated to be below generally accepted limit reference points. The measures which now apply to the lobster fishery include:

- Continued legal protection in the aforementioned regulations for lobsters v-notched under an incentivised National Lobster V-Notching Programme which provides financial support for fishermen engaged in conservation practice of v-notching live lobsters and returning them to sea to contribute to the reproductive capacity of the stock;

- The introduction of a new maximum landing size for lobster of 127mm, which took effect from 1 January 2015 through the aforementioned regulations;

- An increase in grant aid to fishermen for the voluntary v-notching of lobsters from the existing rate of 55% to a new maximum of 75% of the market price;

- Transitional arrangements that provide fishermen with grant aid of up to 75% of the market price for v-notching oversize lobsters and returning them alive to sea during the first two years of the maximum landing size measure;

- EU regulations prohibiting the landing of lobsters of less than 87mm in carapace length.

The new maximum landing size measure is expected to be less economically penalising

than other possible alternative measures and particularly when provided with financial support under the v-notching programme during the transitional arrangements. Data from the catch and effort indicators from data collection initiatives conducted by MI and BIM indicates that in the period 2009-2012, the proportion of commercial sized non-v-notched lobsters over 127 mm varied from 0.9 to 2.3%. I am advised by the Marine Institute that a number of factors point to the conservation value of protecting large lobsters including the far higher number of eggs produced; spawning frequency may be higher in large lobsters as growth and moulting slows down and low natural mortality with lobsters living for more than 30 years and producing more eggs as they get larger.

I established the National Inshore Fisheries Forum (NIFF) specifically to give inshore fishermen a voice in policy making and decisions on inshore fisheries management and to work with the Department and the marine agencies in developing robust, scientifically sound measures to support sustainable fisheries into the future. The first meeting of the NIFF took place on 15 January and the delegates shared fisheries experiences in their different regions and identified a number of common challenges which hampered the development of long-term sustainable lobster fisheries.

At the meeting I was pleased to have the opportunity to brief the delegates on the upsurge in v-notching of lobsters since my announcement to increase financial support up to a maximum of 75% in May 2014 and I committed to monitoring the impact of the new maximum landing size through the v-notching programme. The national figures for 2014 record an increase of 19,000 lobsters presented for v-notching, over twice the number conserved in 2013, and over €230,000 was provided to fishermen in financial support. I advised delegates of scientific advice from the Marine Institute on the reproductive value of large lobsters to contribute to sustainable stocks. I believe that the figures for 2015 programme will provide a useful dataset from which the impact of the new measures can begin to be assessed. I have invited the delegates to bring forward proposals from their respective Regional Inshore Fisheries Forums on how some of the specific challenges faced by this fishery could be addressed, including projects which could be funded under the forthcoming EMFF operational programme, for discussion at the next NIFF meeting.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

325. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 237 of 30 September 2014 and 78 of 10 December 2014, if all payments have issued under the agri-environment option scheme and disadvantaged area scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4523/15]

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 November 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 and the balancing 25% payment issued on 30 January 2015. An application under the 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 15 April 2014, processing of which was completed following the submission by the person named of additional documentation to my department. Payment under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme issued directly to the nominated bank account of the person named on 8 October 2014.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Appeals

326. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 300 of 16 December 2014, if he will provide an update on an appeal for 2014 single payment disadvantaged area schemes application. [4524/15]

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 30 September 2014. A late penalty of 100% was initially applied to this application. An appeal under Force Majeure circumstances was received, which following review was accepted. However, as the person named does not hold any entitlements under the Single Payment Scheme, no payment is due under this scheme.

Payment under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme will shortly issue to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

327. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will receive their agri-environment options scheme payment; the reason for the delay in payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4529/15]

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 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. During these checks in respect of the 2014 Scheme year, issues arose in respect of the Natura element of the plan. My officials are currently working towards resolving these issues and it is expected that payment in respect of 2014 will issue shortly.

Control of Horses

328. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to tackle the problem of loose, feral horses or neglected horses in urban areas of Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4535/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Control of Horses Act, 1996 designates to local authorities responsibility for issues relating to stray and neglected horses in urban areas. My Department provides funding to the local authorities to assist their work in applying the provisions of the Act. In 2014 an amount of €467,143 was paid to the local authorities in the Dublin area to assist them in dealing with straying horses in the Dublin city and county areas. As a further step in protecting the welfare of neglected horses in urban areas of Dublin, my Department provides funding to the DSPCA (an amount of €210,000 was paid in December last) to assist their work in horse care. In addition to funding provisions, a service agreement has been agreed between my Department and the DSPCA under the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 empowering its Inspectors to intervene in situations of horse neglect and cruelty in urban areas. My Department has also allocated €1 million in funding in 2014 to support Urban Horse Projects. This funding will be directed towards supporting educa-

tional initiatives in urban areas to engender in horse owners a respect for horses. Funding will also be made available for development of shelters and facilities for the urban horse population.

Public Relations Contracts Data

329. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide in tabular form a list of all external public relations firms hired by his Department and associated costs incurred from 2007 to 2010. [4536/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department does not employ external public relations firms. Public relations advice is provided by my Department's Press Office.

Special Protection Areas Designation

330. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to compensate farmers whose land has been designated as special protection areas for the hen harrier; if his plans to include such farmers in the GLÁS scheme are not adequate to compensate for the enormous impact this derogation has on the value of the lands in question; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4567/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The designation of land is a matter in the first instance for the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The detailed consideration of Ireland's Draft Rural Development Programme (RDP) by the EU Commission is now at an advanced stage and the new Green Low-Carbon Agri- Environment Scheme (GLAS) is a key component of our RDP. I hope to be in a position to open GLAS as soon as agreement is reached with the EU Commission in the near future. GLAS will be the main source of support under my Department for farmers with Hen Harrier habitat on their holding. The proposed payment under GLAS for farmers who undertake the Hen Harrier action is €370 per hectare subject to a maximum payment of €7,000, if they qualify for GLAS Plus. This rate is based on the additional costs involved in protecting and enhancing the habitat, and the income foregone as a direct result of that. The regulations governing GLAS do not allow land-value to be taken into account in establishing payment rates under the scheme.

GLAS Establishment

331. **Deputy Tom Barry** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the GLAS scheme will be fully operational. [4579/15]

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 notified us of their detailed observations on the draft Programme at the end of October last year, to which my Department provided immediate and detailed replies. Since then, bilateral discussions have been ongoing with the Commission with the objective of securing approval for the Irish Programme at the earliest possible date. Once approval is granted, my Department will move to open the Scheme as soon as possible.

GLAS Establishment

332. **Deputy Tom Barry** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a one-year derogation on entry to GLAS will be applied in view of the spring barley growing tillage farmers who have a derogation of the three-crop rule provided that they are in the new GLAS and in view of the fact that the application date for the single farm payment may come before GLAS acceptance. [4581/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): As part of the Reform of the CAP, the Single Payment Scheme was replaced by the Basic Payment Scheme and the Greening Payment with effect from 1 January 2015. The three requirements covered under the greening measures are as follows;

- Protection of permanent grassland, which is applied at national level
- Crop Diversification
- Ecological Focus Area

Farmers with less than 10 hectares of arable land are exempt from the Crop Diversification requirements. Farmers with 10 to 30 hectares of arable land must grow at least two crops and farmers with over 30 hectares of arable land must grow at least three crops. The area of the main crop cannot exceed 75% of the arable land while the area of the two main crops cannot exceed 95% of the arable land.

In order to assist arable farmers to meet the Crop Diversification requirements I decided to apply equivalence under the new Agri-Environment measure – GLAS. Farmers, who sow catch crops on all of their arable land under that Scheme, will be exempt from the Crop Diversification requirements provided that they apply for equivalence under GLAS and are accepted under that Scheme. The requirements governing the Greening Payment are applicable since 1 January 2015. In order that a farmer with over 30 hectares of arable land, for example, is eligible for the full payment under the Greening Payment, he or she must either grow three arable crops in 2015 or apply for equivalence under GLAS and sow the required area of catch crops under the provisions of that Scheme. It is not possible, under the provisions of the EU Regulations, to exempt farmers from the greening requirements in 2015.

Rural Development Programme Funding

333. **Deputy Tom Barry** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the funding of tillage groups will become operational. [4582/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Draft Rural Development Programme (RDP), submitted by Ireland in July 2014, proposes a Knowledge Transfer Programme which involves the setting up of farmer Knowledge Transfer groups led by trained facilitators across six sectors, including tillage. Subject to E.U. Commission approval of the RDP, the groups in the Dairy, Beef and Equine sectors will commence in 2015 with the groups in the Sheep, Poultry and Tillage sectors expected to commence in 2016.

Special Areas of Conservation Designation

334. **Deputy Tom Barry** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will

confirm that adequate compensation will be paid for farmers who have had their land designed special areas of conservation with regards to the hen harrier, and in view of the severe restrictions on available farming options that this brings about; and if the designation will be removed. [4583/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The detailed consideration of Ireland's Draft Rural Development Programme (RDP) by the EU Commission is now at an advanced stage and the new Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) is a key component of our RDP. I hope to be in a position to open GLAS as soon as agreement is reached with the EU Commission in the near future. The GLAS will be the main source of support under my Department for farmers with Hen Harrier habitat on their holding. The proposed payment under GLAS for farmers who undertake the Hen Harrier action is €370 per hectare subject to a maximum payment of €7,000, if they qualify for GLAS Plus. This rate is based on the additional costs involved in protecting and enhancing the habitat, and the income foregone as a direct result of that. The actual designation of the land, however, is a matter in the first instance for the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

335. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payments of agri-environment options scheme moneys and hardship grant regarding TB restrictions will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4613/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application was received from the herd owner concerned under the TB Hardship Grant Scheme (which applies in the period 1 November to 30 April) following the restriction of his holding on 13 November 2014. This grant is payable in monthly tranches in arrears where the period of restriction exceeds two months (i.e. the initial two-month period of the restriction is not eligible). Accordingly, in this case, the initial reckonable period for the Hardship Grant is 13 January to 12 February 2015. An assessment of the applicant's eligibility, in terms of income and compliance with the restriction in the relevant period, will take place at that stage and, if eligible, payment will be made as soon as possible thereafter.

In relation to AEOS, 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 and the balancing 25% payment issued on the 30 January 2015.

Departmental Staff Data

336. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide, in tabular form, the details of agency staff costs incurred by his Department or its aegis in 2012, 2013 and 2014, including the breakdown of the staff roles involved and the area within his Department's aegis where they are contracted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4745/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department does not engage agency staff. It does however, from time to time, engage external services providers when such proves to be more cost effective and Department staff are not available. Such expenditure is based on competitive tendering with extensive use of Central Government and Department specific frameworks which continue to drive costs down.

Agriculture Scheme Eligibility

337. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to implement the Scottish derogation so that young farmers who farmed actively pre-2010 will qualify for the national reserve scheme and young farmers' scheme. [4779/15]

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.

The Scottish Derogation would allow for the allocation of entitlements to persons who never held entitlements, either owned or leased, but who actively farmed in 2013. My Department is currently engaged with the EU Commission in examining how this provision may be applied in Ireland.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

338. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a 2014 AEOS 3 payment will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4808/15]

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. The application of the person named was also selected for an on-farm inspection which took place on 30 October 2014. During this inspection issues arose in respect of the Commonage and Natura land parcels declared which required digitisation. This is being dealt with by my Department at present and once all issues have been resolved, the application will be processed in respect of 2014 at the earliest opportunity.

339. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara cén uair a dhéanfar íocaíocht faoi Scéim na Limistéar faoi Mhíbhuntáiste don bhliain 2014 le feirmeoir i gContae na Gaillimhe (sonraí leis seo); cén fáth go bhfuil moill ar an íocaíocht seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [4845/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Fuarthas iarratas faoi Scéim na Limistéar faoi Mhíbhuntáiste don bhliain 2014 ón duine ainmnithe ar an 15 Aibreán 2014. Tar éis an t-iarratas sin a phróiseáil, sainaitníodh saincheisteanna maidir le fíorú i leith chomhlíonadh an dlúis íosta stocála.

Rinne an duine ainmnithe pasanna eachaí i leith dhá asal a rugadh sa bhliain 2010 a thíolacadh. Faoi Rialachán AE 505/2008, ceanglaítear, de bhreis ar phas eachaí a fháil, micrishlis a ionphlandú i ngach eachaí a rugadh tar éis an 1 Meitheamh 2009 agus sin a dhéanamh laistigh de shé mhí ón dáta breithe nó faoi dheireadh bhliain na breithe, cibé acu is déanaí. Níor chuir an duine ainmnithe faoi deara micrishlis a ionphlandú sa dá asal lena mbaineann go dtí an 11 Bealtaine 2014, agus, dá bhrí sin, mainníodh cloí le Rialachán AE 504/2008. Dá bhrí sin, níl na hainmnithe sin cáilithe lena gcur san áireamh sa ríomhaireacht don dlús stocála.

Sheep Technology Adoption Programme Payments

340. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a sheep technology adoption programme payment will issue in of persons (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4848/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Initial payments under the 2014 Sheep Technology Adoption Programme issued in late December. Validations have been ongoing and a further payment run is planned for later this week which will include the person named.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

341. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue under the 2014 disadvantaged areas based scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in issuing this payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4863/15]

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 12 May 2014. Payment has not yet issued to the person named as, at this stage, the holding concerned has not yet satisfied the scheme minimum stocking density requirements. Immediately the holding concerned is confirmed as having met these requirements, the case will be further processed with a view to payment issuing to the person named at the earliest possible date thereafter, provided all other Scheme requirements have been satisfied.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

342. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue under the 2014 disadvantaged areas scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in issuing this payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4864/15]

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 12 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.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

343. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue under the AEOS1 scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in issuing this payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4865/15]

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. The application of the person named was also selected for an on-farm inspection which took place on 19 August 2014. During this inspection non-compliances with the Terms and Conditions of the Scheme were noted in relation to the Traditional Stone Wall Maintenance action which resulted in a penalty being incurred. The application will now be processed on the basis of the inspection findings and payment in respect of the 2014 Scheme year, less penalty, will issue at the earliest opportunity.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

344. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will receive their AEOS payments; the reason for the delay in payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4866/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named is an applicant under the Agri-Environment Options Scheme 2010. A Department review of the non-productive capital investment claims submitted by applicants was undertaken in 2014. This review shows irregularities with documentation submitted for reimbursement in some of these claims.

A full Department investigation is now underway into this matter and further payments to any AEOS participants included in this review are being held for the time being. A decision on any future payment cannot be determined until the findings of the investigation are to hand. My Department has written to each of the people concerned on 28 January to explain the situation.

Question No. 345 withdrawn.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Payments

346. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Cork will be receiving their REPS payment. [4944/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in August 2009 and received payments for the first five years of their contract. REPS 4 is a measure under the current 2007-13 Rural Development Programme and is subject to EU regulations which require detailed administrative checks on all applications to be completed before any payments can issue. Following an on-farm inspection in August 2011 penalties were applied for non-compliance with the terms and conditions governing the REP scheme. A review of this case has now been finalised by my Department and following receipt of further documentation, the original penalties have been reduced by 50%. All outstanding REPS payments are now being processed and will issue at the earliest opportunity.

Beef Data Programme

347. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the beef data genomics scheme will be issued in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4955/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named registered 51 animals under the 2014 Beef Genomics Scheme. The terms and conditions of this scheme require applicants to take BVD (Bovine Viral Diarrhoea) samples for each calf and have them sent to the laboratory within 27 days of birth. BVD samples have only been received for 15 of the applicant's 51 registered animals.

As the person named has not complied with the scheme terms and conditions no payment is due.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

348. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding an AEOS payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo. [4998/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named is an applicant under the Agri-Environment Options Scheme 2010. A Department review of the non-productive capital investment claims submitted by applicants was undertaken in 2014. This review shows irregularities with documentation submitted for reimbursement in some of these claims. A full Department investigation is now underway into this matter and further payments to any AEOS participants included in this review are being held for the time being. A decision on any future payment cannot be determined until the findings of the investigation are to hand. My Department has written to each of the people concerned on 28 January to explain the situation.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

349. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a disadvantaged area payment for 2014 will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry who met their stocking requirement on 24 December 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5001/15]

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 14

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.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

350. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide a list of all bonus payments to chief executives of commercial semi-State agencies paid in each year from 2011 to 2014 under the remit of his Department; if bonuses were withheld by commercial semi-States during the period; the reasons for withholding of bonuses; the current policy regarding the payment of bonuses in the commercial semi-State sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5199/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are currently 12 State bodies under the remit of my Department. Of these, eight are non-commercial entities and four are commercial entities.

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

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

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

In relation to Coillte, while performance related pay awards were not made to the Chief Executive for the years in question on the basis of the Government pay policy outlined above, the High Court decided last week that bonuses in respect of the period 2008 to 2013 inclusive are payable to the former Chief Executive Officer of the company.

Defence Forces Records

351. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Defence the options available in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork to rejoin the Army; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [4480/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): I have been advised by the military authorities that the individual concerned can make an application to join the Defence Forces in any competition in which he is eligible to apply for. If he meets the eligibility criteria, he will then enter the selection process and compete with all other eligible applicants for recruitment into the Defence Forces. The selection process consists of psychometric tests, fitness test, interview, medical and security clearance. From the information provided, it appears that the individual's age, he is currently 26 years old, would be a limiting factor. He is not eligible to join the Army as a General Service Recruit as he will not be under the age of 25 years of age on the closing date for applications in any future competition. However, he may be eligible on age grounds for other Defence Forces recruitment streams.

Plans for recruitment competitions in 2015 have not yet been finalised. Therefore a definitive answer regarding his age *vis-à-vis* the closing date for applications, the key date in determining eligibility on age grounds, cannot be provided at this stage.

However, he may be eligible on age grounds to apply for a cadetship in 2015, as he will be under 28 years of age on the likely closing date for applications, and he would be eligible to apply to become a Recruit in the Naval Service, as he is likely to be under 27 years of age on the likely closing date for applications. However, as he will turn 27 years of age in October 2015, if the closing date for Naval Service Recruits is after this date, he would be ineligible to apply.

Departmental Expenditure

352. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide, in tabular form, for the years 2007 to 2010 the total photography costs in his Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4490/15]

353. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide, in tabular form, for the years 1997 to 2007 the total photography costs in his Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4506/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 352 and 353 together.

The total costs for photography paid by the Department for the years 2006 to 2010 are set out in the following table. The information with regards to the cost of photography to the Department prior to 2006 is not readily available.

Date	Company	Cost (Including VAT)
10/02/06	Frank Gavin Photography	€510.75
02/03/06	Frank Gavin Photography	€192.95
07/03/06	Maxwell Photography	€526.07
05/04/06	Maxwell Photography	€3178.00
10/04/06	Maxwell Photography	€206.29
20/04/06	Maxwell Photography	€511.64

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07/06/06	Maxwell Photography	€554.45
28/06/06	Maxwell Photography	€800.11
28/06/06	Buzzword Photography	€405.98
11/08/06	Maxwell Photography	€3925.16
22/08/06	Maxwell Photography	€719.02
23/08/06	Maxwell Photography	€649.22
30/08/06	Maxwell Photography	€320.80
03/10/06	Maxwell Photography	€789.11
12/10/06	Maxwell Photography	€490.04
18/12/06	Maxwell Photography	€809.82
2006	Totals	€14,589.41

Date	Company	Cost (Including VAT)
22/01/07	Frank Gavin Photography	€794.50
22/03/07	Buzzword Photography	€437.00
12/04/07	Maxwell Photography	€3929.27
24/05/07	Maxwell Photography	€896.65
21/06/07	Maxwell Photography	€866.57
11/07/07	Maxwell Photography	€376.54
22/08/07	Maxwell Photography	€1305.25
07/09/07	Maxwell Photography	€526.07
08/11/07	Maxwell Photography €3929.27	€626.52
15/11/07	Maxwell Photography €3929.27	€3915.75
07/12/07	Maxwell Photography €3929.27	€980.07
2007	Totals	€14,654.19

Date	Company	Cost (Including VAT)
10/01/08	Maxwell Photography	€590.48
17/01/08	Frank Gavin Photography	€726.40
24/01/08	Frank Gavin Photography	€374.55
09/04/08	Maxwell Photography	€582.82
09/04/08	Maxwell Photography	€1305.25
12/05/08	Maxwell Photography	€4109.11
09/06/08	Maxwell Photography	€819.17
13/06/08	Maxwell Photography	€728.42
17/06/08	Aidan Crawley Photography	€623.15
18/08/08	Maxwell Photography	€968.00
20/08/08	Maxwell Photography	€4546.74
08/09/08	Maxwell Photography	€621.34
03/11/08	Maxwell Photography	€470.09
11/11/08	Maxwell Photography	€582.82
2008	Totals	€17,048.34

Date	Company	Cost (Including VAT)
07/01/09	Maxwell Photography	€988.87
04/02/09	Buzzword Photography	€561.83
04/02/09	Maxwell Photography	€810.70
03/06/09	Maxwell photography	€698.63
2009	Totals	€3060.03

Date	Company	Cost (Including VAT)
09/03/10	Tom Conachy	€283.75
25/05/10	Maxwell Photography	€250.17
24/06/10	Maxwell Photography	€30.25
18/08/10	Maxwell Photography	€48.40
18/08/10	Maxwell Photography	€453.75
2010	Totals	€1066.32

Public Relations Contracts Data

354. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide in tabular form a list of all external public relations firms hired by his Department and associated costs incurred from 2007 to 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4540/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The table outlines the information in relation to the cost of hiring external public relations companies in the period 2007 to 2010.

Year	Expenditure - €
2007	253,300
2008	1,848,000
2009	Nil
2010	Nil

The above expenditure relates to a Public Information and Awareness Campaign on Emergency Planning. The main focus of the campaign was the publication and distribution of a handbook – ‘Preparing for Major Emergencies’. The handbook was distributed to every household in the country.

International Agreements

355. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Defence the specific details of the defence agreement that he has signed with the British Defence Secretary; if he will attend before the Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality to explain and debate the agreement; and if it will come before Dáil Éireann for ratification. [4818/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) provides a framework for developing and furthering bilateral co-operation and relations between the Department of Defence and the UK Ministry of Defence. The MOU takes into account matters such as military forces training; exercises and military education; exchange of views on EU Common Security and Defence Policy; potential for joint contributions to UN

Crisis Management Operations; joint procurement initiatives; pooling and sharing resources; general sharing of reform in defence services; potential for staff exchanges; sharing of information, and joint contribution to Security Sector Reform and capacity building in crisis locations. It envisages cooperation and exchanges involving both civil and military personnel. The signing of the MoU places already existing co-operation arrangements in the Defence area between Ireland and the UK on a more formal and transparent footing, while fully respecting the differing policy positions and security arrangements of both States.

To date, I have not been requested to appear before the Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality to discuss the Agreement. However, I would welcome the opportunity to brief the Committee should the opportunity arise.

Dáil approval was not required for the Memorandum of Understanding. However, in the interests of transparency and good administrative practices, the Document has been laid before Dáil Éireann by lodging it to the Dáil Library on 21 January 2015.

Stardust Fire

356. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she has reviewed the information and meeting request sent to her by representatives of a committee (details supplied); and if she will meet this committee. [4678/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I wish to inform the Deputy that I met with the Stardust Relatives' and Victims Committee in July of last year where they outlined their concerns in relation to the Inquiries into this matter that have been undertaken previously and some related financial issues that have arisen. I indicated to the Committee that, while I am prepared to examine matters they wish to bring to my attention, I am anxious that no unrealistic expectations about what can be achieved are raised.

Following that meeting in July the Stardust Relatives' and Victims Committee submitted two reports (compiled by a researcher associated with the Committee) to my Department. The researcher subsequently sought the return of these reports prior to them being examined and my Department complied with this request. My Department has, through the Stardust Relatives' and Victims Committee, requested that the decision to withdraw these reports be reconsidered.

The Deputy will be aware that Mr. Paul Coffey SC was appointed in 2008 by the then Government, with the agreement of the Victims Committee, to review the case made by the Committee for a new inquiry into the fire. His report was published in January 2009. He concluded that the original Tribunal finding of arson was a hypothetical one only and that no-one present on the night can be held responsible. He further concluded that in the absence of any identified evidence as to the cause of the fire, the most another inquiry could achieve would be another set of hypothetical findings, which would not be in the public interest. The then Government accepted Mr. Coffey's findings and motions were passed in both Houses of the Oireachtas endorsing his conclusions and expressing sympathy with the families.

I wish also to inform the Deputy that allegations raised by the Stardust Relatives' and Victims Committee and their representatives in relation to certain matters are the subject of an ongoing investigation by An Garda Síochána. I am informed by the Garda Commissioner, that this is a complex investigation and, as the Deputy will understand, I cannot do anything that might cut across this investigation.

UN Conventions Ratification

357. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the likely ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by the Irish State; when this ratification is likely to happen; if there is a reason it has not been ratified already; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4683/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin): The Government intends to proceed to ratification of the Convention as quickly as possible, taking into account the need to ensure all necessary legislative and administrative requirements under the Convention are met. As the Deputy is aware, Ireland has a dualist legal system and therefore does not become party to treaties until it is first in a position to comply with the obligations imposed by them, including the amendment of domestic law as necessary.

A team has been charged with examining all outstanding obstacles to ratification, and has nearly completed the first phase of its work, which includes identifying all areas which will need attention to make ratification possible. An Interdepartmental Committee is in place, and met recently to review issues and the action and timeframe required to tackle them. Many of these issues involve amending unsuitable and outmoded language and in some cases, archaic legal provisions, in existing legislation. Another key task which is underway involves examining how the important issue of Reasonable Accommodation can be achieved in a meaningful way within our Constitutional framework as interpreted by the Supreme Court.

Progress towards ratification therefore continues to be made. One of the core elements of the remaining work to be completed is the enactment of capacity legislation. The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Bill will comprehensively reform existing legislation governing capacity and will provide a series of options to support people with decision-making capacity difficulties to make decisions and exercise their basic rights in line with the principles of the Convention. The Bill is currently awaiting Committee Stage in the Dáil.

Insolvency Service of Ireland

358. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of personal insolvency practitioners who have applied for payment in respect of insolvency proposals which were vetoed by creditors; the total number of insolvency proposals which have been vetoed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4321/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): In October 2014 the Insolvency Service of Ireland (ISI) announced an initiative whereby a Personal Insolvency Practitioner (PIP) can seek a supporting payment towards their costs in certain circumstances when an arrangement has not been passed by creditors.

Subject to satisfying certain conditions - most fundamentally, creditors voting against an arrangement that would have produced a return greater than would be the case in bankruptcy - every qualifying case will receive a payment of €750.

The purpose of this initiative is to promote and support greater engagement between PIPs and debtors, with the objective of enhancing the accessibility of debtors to Debt Settlement Arrangements and Personal Insolvency Arrangements under the Personal Insolvency Act 2012.

This initiative is expected to be available until 31 December 2015, but will be reviewed during 2015 to assess its effectiveness and to ensure that it has brought about significant improve-

ment in the case outcome for debtors. The initiative is open to all PIPs authorised by the ISI.

I can confirm that no payments have yet been made by the ISI as PIPs had until 31 January 2015 to submit a claim for Quarter 4 of 2014, therefore the exact figures will not be available until all claims have been received and verified.

The ISI has confirmed that it will publish details of payments made under the initiative in its Quarterly Statistical Report. An analysis of creditors who voted no will also be made available.

Construction Sector Strategy

359. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the system of e-conveyancing will be rolled out; if it will be available to all bank customers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4324/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The introduction of eConveyancing, or electronic conveyancing, would represent a change in conveyancing practice to a paperless, electronic, end to end, conveyancing process. Construction 2020, the Government's Strategy for a Renewed Construction Sector contains a specific Action in relation to eConveyancing. The Action provides that my Department in cooperation with the Property Registration Authority and other relevant Departments and stakeholders will conduct a review and report to Government on the steps necessary to deliver a system of eConveyancing in Ireland, including the resource implications and the timescales for delivery.

My Department has had some initial discussions with key stakeholders on this matter and expects to be in a position to commence the formal review process in the near future.

Peace Commissioners Appointments

360. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure regarding a person (details supplied) in Dublin 3 becoming a peace commissioner; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4377/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Peace Commissioners are appointed by me under section 88 of the Courts of Justice Act, 1924 for which there is no remuneration or compensation by way of fees or expenses for services. An application for appointment may be submitted by a person who is interested in obtaining an appointment, or a third party may submit a nomination in respect of a person considered suitable for appointment. Nominations are generally received from public representatives. A local Garda Superintendent can also request an appointment in a particular area in the public interest.

There is no qualifying examination involved but appointees are required to be of good character and they are usually well established in the local community. Persons who are members of professions or employed in occupations which engage in legal work or related activities and members of the clergy are, as a matter of practice, not appointed because of their occupation. Civil servants are usually only appointed where the performance of their official duties requires an appointment (i.e. *ex-officio*). Persons convicted of serious offences are considered unsuitable for appointment.

Should he wish to do so, the person referred to can submit an application for appointment which will then be considered having regard to the particular needs of the Dublin 3 area.

Good Friday Agreement

361. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the Irish Government at any stage entered into an agreement with the British Government as part of the Northern Ireland peace process in relation to providing special arrangements for on the runs that resulted in those persons not being arrested; if her attention has been drawn to some of these so-called on the runs being resident in this jurisdiction; if she has received correspondence from the British authorities as part of the settlement requesting that certain persons not be arrested; if she will provide details of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4389/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will be aware that Good Friday Agreement of 1998, while dealing with early release arrangements for convicted persons, did not address the issue of persons who might in the future face prosecution or conviction. The term 'on-the-run' was used to refer to these cases although it was not entirely accurate in the sense that, in practice, it also covered people living openly in the community - the key issue was whether they would face prosecution. Over subsequent years it was recognised publicly by the Irish and British Governments that dealing with these cases was a logical follow on from the Good Friday Agreement's provisions relating to the release of prisoners.

The scheme to which the Deputy refers was an administrative scheme operated by the Northern Ireland Office in respect of the UK. The Government was not party to the issuing of letters by the British Government or to any specific arrangements under that scheme.

As part of a protracted process both Governments had announced in late 2005 proposals for addressing the on-the-runs issue. The UK Government had formulated legislative proposals. The Government here had undertaken to operate in tandem with the UK in dealing with this issue and had announced a scheme whereby the President's power under the Constitution relating to pardons would be operated in relevant cases. As the UK Government's legislation was not proceeded with the Government here did not proceed with a scheme in this jurisdiction. Subsequently, the NIO proceeded with the administrative scheme referred to above.

Criminal Law

362. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding a harassment case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4399/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am aware of the case referred to by the Deputy and I have sought a report on the matter from the Garda Commissioner. However, the Deputy will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the detail of the particular case. However, on receipt of the Garda report I will contact the Deputy directly with any further information which it may be possible to give.

More generally, there are a range of legislative provisions, including provisions for a range of court orders, which may be applicable in the sorts of cases referred to by the Deputy.

These include provisions under the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997 which provides for offences of assault, harassment, coercion or threatening behaviour. Section 10(1) of the Act provides for the offence of harassment, including by means of the telephone, by persistently following, watching, pestering, besetting or communicating with another person. Where a person is convicted of such an offence the court may issue a restraining order requir-

ing that the person shall not communicate by any means with the victim or shall not approach within a specific distance of the victim's home or place of work. It is also an offence to breach such a restraining order.

Even where a person is acquitted of harassment a court can issue a restraining order if, having regard to the evidence, the court is satisfied that it is in the interests of justice to do so.

In addition, there is a related provision in section 101 of the Criminal Justice Act 2006 which allows a Court to make a restriction or movement order in respect of a person convicted of certain scheduled offences, including harassment.

There are also the incremental procedures provided under the Criminal Justice Act 2006. These provide for Garda warnings, good behaviour contracts and behaviour orders in relation to children. With regard to adults they provide for warnings and the making of a civil order by the court.

The Domestic Violence Acts 1996 and 2002 (as amended) provide protections for a spouse, a civil partner (within the meaning of the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010) and a person living with another person in an intimate and committed relationship, as well as protections for a parent in relation to a non-dependent adult child who is living with them and a parent with a child in common with the other parent, regardless of whether the parents live with each other. In addition there is provision for protections in relation to an adult person living with another person.

In conclusion, I can advise the Deputy that work is currently being undertaken to draft proposals to reform and consolidate the Domestic Violence Acts with a view to enactment later this year.

Naturalisation Applications

363. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the grounds on which an application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 14 was refused; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4429/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Section 15 of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, provides that the Minister may, in her absolute discretion, grant an application for a certificate of naturalisation provided certain statutory conditions are fulfilled. The conditions are that the applicant must: be of full age; be of good character; have had a period of one year's continuous residency in the State immediately before the date of application and, during the eight years immediately preceding that period, have had a total residence in the State amounting to four years; intend in good faith to continue to reside in the State after naturalisation; have, before a judge of the District Court in open court, in a citizenship ceremony or in such manner as the Minister, for special reasons, allows— (i) made a declaration, in the prescribed manner, of fidelity to the nation and loyalty to the State, and (ii) undertaken to faithfully observe the laws of the State and to respect its democratic values.

A foreign national who is married to, or is the civil partner of, an Irish citizen for at least three years may apply for naturalisation under section 15A of the Irish Naturalisation and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, where the applicant has: been continuously resident in the island of Ireland for the year immediately prior to the date of his or her application; and has in addition been resident in the island of Ireland for two out of the four years prior to that year.

The marriage or civil partnership must be subsisting and recognised under Irish law. Sec-

tion 15A provides that the Minister may waive certain conditions for naturalisation if satisfied that the applicant would suffer serious consequences in respect of his or her bodily integrity or liberty if not granted Irish citizenship.

An application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy was received in the Citizenship Division of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) on 19 November, 2014. On examination of the application submitted it was determined that the person in question did not meet the statutory residency requirements as set out in the Act and referred to above. The person concerned was informed of this by letter on 20 January, 2015.

It is open to the individual referred to by the Deputy to lodge a further application for citizenship if and when he is in a position to meet the prescribed statutory requirements. The on-line Naturalisation Residency Calculator available on the INIS web-site at www.inis.gov.ie can be used as a guide to whether an individual satisfies the naturalisation residency conditions and, if not, give an indication of how long they should wait before making an application.

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

Garda Misconduct Allegations

364. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the action she has taken to address the concerns raised in section 20.4 of the Guerin report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4484/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The person referred to by the Deputy has initiated legal proceedings connected with the making by him of allegations of Garda misconduct. In view of these ongoing legal proceedings, the Deputy will appreciate that I cannot comment further on the matter at this time.

Departmental Expenditure

365. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide, in tabular form, for the years 2007 to 2010 the total photography costs in her Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4497/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The photography costs incurred by my Department for the years 2007 to 2010 are as follows:

Year	Photographer	Cost
2007	John Quirke	€337.10
2007	Maxwell Photography	€18,837.36
2007	News Digital	€497.27

2007	William Farrell Photography	€483.51
2008	Flynn's Photo Service	€354
2008	Frank Fennell Photography	€963.87
2008	Maxwell Photography	€11,951.40
2008	Sean Curtin Photographer	€418.82
2009	Maxwell Photography	€1,932.45
2009	O'Driscoll Photography	€426
2009	Tom Conachy	€283.75
2010	Maxwell Photography	€5,144.94
2010	Tom Conachy	€510.75
	Total	€42,141.22

Departmental Expenditure

366. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide, in tabular form, for the years 1997 to 2007 the total photography costs in her Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4513/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I wish to advise the Deputy that the information relating to photography costs for the years 1997 to 2007 is archived and not readily available in the time permitted.

Naturalisation Applications

367. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for leave to remain in accordance with section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 as amended in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Waterford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4525/15]

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 was granted permission to remain in the State for an initial one year period, valid to 23rd January, 2016. This permission may be extended by a further two years, to 23rd January, 2018, by the local Immigration Registration Office on production by the person concerned of a valid passport to attest to their identity and nationality. This decision was communicated to the person concerned by letter dated 23rd January, 2015.

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

Visa Applications

368. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedures or the process by which a person from the Ukraine can come and stay here either by way of work permit or to come here and seek a visa to remain here on an ongoing basis or on a short-term holiday basis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4534/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): It is open to a visa-required national to make a visa application for any purpose, the onus resting with the applicant to satisfy the Visa Officer as to why the visa should be granted. All information that the applicant wishes to have taken into consideration should be included with his or her application.

The type of visa that will be required to travel to Ireland will depend on how long an applicant wishes to spend in Ireland and the reason for their travel.

Guidelines on the visa application process, including details of the required supporting documentation for all visa categories can be found on the website of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department at www.inis.gov.ie. It should be borne in mind, however, that the information contained on the website is intended to act as guidance only; it does not limit the discretion of the Visa Officer in dealing with individual applications.

A visa-required national can apply for a visa for the purpose of employment after they have obtained an Employment Permit from the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (DJEI). Information on how to obtain an Employment Permit is available on the website of that Department at www.djei.ie.

All applications for Irish visas are made online at www.inis.gov.ie. Supporting documentation, including passports, for Ukrainian nationals living in Ukraine are lodged at the Honorary Consulate of Ireland in Kiev and processed by the dedicated Irish Visa Office in Moscow, which is a sub-office of INIS. This Office handles all aspects of visa applications, locally.

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

Public Relations Contracts Data

369. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide, in tabular form, a list of all external public relations firms hired by her Department and associated costs incurred from 2007 to 2010; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4547/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department did not incur any costs in relation to the provision of public relations services during the years in question. It is my Department's policy to use in house resources as much as possible and to restrict the use of external groups to a minimum.

Magdalen Laundries

370. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when she will ensure that all survivors of the Magdalen laundries will receive HAA cards, as proposed in the

recommendations of Mr. Justice Quirke's report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4589/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Government is committed to full implementation of Judge Quirke's recommendations on the provision of medical services. The legislative vehicle to achieve this is the Redress for Women Resident in Certain Institutions Bill 2014 which has passed Second Stage in the Dáil. When this is enacted, the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive will introduce a scheme and I understand that as part of that scheme an enhanced medical card will be provided to the women concerned.

Court Accommodation Provision

371. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration will be given to the establishment of a designated family law court in Cootehill, County Cavan, to serve Cavan and Monaghan, taking into account that Cootehill is centrally situated for both counties and has a substantial courthouse building; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4591/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy is aware, the Programme for Government commits the Government to significant reform of the courts, including the establishment of a separate family law court structure that is streamlined, more efficient, and less costly. Following consultations, my Department is preparing draft legislation in the matter and I intend to bring the relevant proposals to Government for its approval as soon as possible. The proposals will then be referred to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality for pre-legislative scrutiny.

Under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts, including the provision of accommodation for court sittings, is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions. The Courts Service has informed me that decisions relating to venues for the family court will not be decided until a later stage taking account, *inter alia*, of the suitability of available facilities for family law proceedings.

Garda Equipment

372. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the Garda will consider the use of technology (details supplied) in rural policing; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4592/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have requested the information sought by the Deputy from the Garda authorities and I will be in contact with the Deputy again when the information is to hand.

Garda Deployment

373. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda community officers by Garda division and Garda station throughout the State. [4619/15]

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. I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that, as of the 31 December 2014, the latest date for which figures are readily available, there were 852 dedicated Community Gardaí across the State and I have arranged to send a detailed table of these directly to the Deputy.

Domestic Violence Policy

374. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the protection available to a person (details supplied) who has been subjected to harassment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4648/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am aware of the case referred to by the Deputy and I have sought a report on the matter from the Garda Commissioner. However, the Deputy will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the detail of the particular case. However, on receipt of the Garda report I will contact the Deputy directly with any further information which it may be possible to give.

More generally, there are a range of legislative provisions, including provisions for a range of court orders, which may be applicable in the sorts of cases referred to by the Deputy.

These include provisions under the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997 which provides for offences of assault, harassment, coercion or threatening behaviour. Section 10(1) of the Act provides for the offence of harassment, including by means of the telephone, by persistently following, watching, pestering, besetting or communicating with another person. Where a person is convicted of such an offence the court may issue a restraining order requiring that the person shall not communicate by any means with the victim or shall not approach within a specific distance of the victim's home or place of work. It is also an offence to breach such a restraining order.

Even where a person is acquitted of harassment a court can issue a restraining order if, having regard to the evidence, the court is satisfied that it is in the interests of justice to do so.

In addition, there is a related provision in section 101 of the Criminal Justice Act 2006 which allows a Court to make a restriction or movement order in respect of a person convicted of certain scheduled offences, including harassment.

There are also the incremental procedures provided under the Criminal Justice Act 2006. These provide for Garda warnings, good behaviour contracts and behaviour order in relations to children. With regard to adults they provide for warnings and the making of a civil order by the court.

The Domestic Violence Acts 1996 and 2002 (as amended) provide protections for a spouse, a civil partner (within the meaning of the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010) and a person living with another person in an intimate and committed relationship, as well as protections for a parent in relation to a non-dependent adult child who is living with them and a parent with a child in common with the other parent, regardless of whether the parents live with each other. In addition there is provision for protections in relation to an adult person living with another person.

In conclusion, I can advise the Deputy that work is currently being undertaken to draft proposals to reform and consolidate the Domestic Violence Acts with a view to enactment later this year.

Magdalen Laundries

375. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will support the women who spent time in the Magdalen laundries as a matter of priority, in particular in providing the full Health (Amendment) Act, HAA, card, and with regard to representation to those women who lack the capacity and do not have the support of independent advocates; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4750/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Judge Quirke recommended that the women receive medical services equivalent to those provided by the holder of a HAA card and he also advised that “not all of the services described in the Guide may be directly relevant to the Magdalen women and any comparable Guide for the Magdalen women would require suitable adaptation.

Judge Quirke also recommended that legislation was required to give effect to this recommendation. The legislative vehicle to achieve this is the Redress for Women Resident in Certain Institutions Bill 2014 which has passed Second Stage in the Dáil. The Bill provides for a broad range of medical services without charge to women who were resident in these institutions. These health services are as follows:

- (a) General Practitioner and surgical services
- (b) Drugs, medicines and surgical appliances
- (c) Nursing services
- (d) Home help services
- (e) Dental, ophthalmic and aural services
- (f) Counselling services
- (g) Chiropody services
- (h) Physiotherapy services

There is no means assessment in regard to any of the above services which will be provided to these women and, in addition, they will be exempt from charges for acute in-patient services.

With regard to the provision for care representatives, I can advise the Deputy that women who were in the Magdalen laundries are already covered under section 21 of the Nursing Home Support Scheme Act 2009 which makes provision for persons to act as care representatives in respect of any person applying for support under that Act.

In addition, the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Bill 2014 is awaiting committee stage in the Dáil. This provides for a range of options including decision making assistants, co-decision makers, decision making representatives and the public guardian, which are well suited to look after the best interests of the women who were in Magdalen laundries and have capacity issues.

As the Deputy will be aware this Bill is just one part of a wider package of supports for

these women. Under the Scheme the women are eligible for a payment of between €11,500 and €100,000 depending on the length of stay in a relevant institution. To date, my Department has made decisions on 87% of the cases and a total of over €18m has been paid out so far. The women are also entitled to top up pension type payments of up to €100 under the age of 66 and up to €230.30 aged 66 and over. These payments are being paid by the Department of Social Protection.

The Government is committed to full implementation of the Quirke report.

Garda Recruitment

376. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality in view of the recent Garda recruitment campaign, the current position of bands 1, 2 and 3, which were formed in the recruitment process; in view of the fact that candidates who have been chosen for recruitment have come from band 1, when it is envisaged that candidates in band 2 will be informed they will progress to band 1; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4765/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will be aware that 100 new recruits entered training at the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014, the first intake of Garda recruits since 2009. This was followed by an intake of a further 100 new recruits in December and another 100 this week. This will bring to 300 the number of recruits in the Garda College since last September.

It is not possible to say when a candidate in Band 2 or Band 3 might be called to progress to the next stages of the competition. The number of trainees to be recruited will take into account the rate of departures from the force over the coming years and the number of personnel required.

It is the intention that there will be ongoing recruitment and I am discussing the details of this with my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

Charities Regulation

377. **Deputy Eamonn Maloney** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will instruct the Charities Regulatory Authority to allow voluntary members to opt out of supplying their PPS numbers when updating their charity entry on the register of charities (details supplied). [4766/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As part of its work in further developing the public Register of Charities that was published by the Charities Regulatory Authority on 16 October 2014, the Authority is currently inviting registered charities to supply it with additional information, some of which is for inclusion on the public Register of Charities, in accordance with the terms of the 2009 Charities Act.

Certain of the information fields requested are optional, including the PPS numbers of charity trustees. Where PPS numbers are supplied, these will not appear on the public Register of Charities.

Citizenship Applications

378. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide an update on a citizenship application in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4781/15]

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.

Processing of the application is well advanced and the case will be submitted to me for decision in due course.

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

Human Rights Issues

379. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will report on the November launch of the 16 Days of Action campaign to raise awareness about gender-based violence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2149/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The 16 Days Campaign is an international campaign that started in 1991. The Campaign runs from 25th November, UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to 10th December, Human Rights Day. On the first day of the campaign last year the Taoiseach and I issued a joint statement to underline the seriousness with which this issue is taken by Government. After condemning all forms of domestic and sexual violence, the Taoiseach said it was necessary to change societal attitudes. In particular the Taoiseach called on men to support women victims of such violence, if they reported such violence to them.

I said that all forms of such violence persist as a stain on our humanity. I welcomed the '16 Days of Action' as a timely opportunity to raise awareness of the evils of gender-based violence. I advocated the need for everyone to work to ensure that no barrier, no hesitation, no doubt ever comes in the way of reporting suspicions or concerns regarding the occurrence or risk of sexual, domestic or gender based abuse.

I was also pleased to participate in the debate condemning domestic violence which took place in the Dáil on 18 December.

I am pleased to say that my Department, through Cosc, the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence, funded voluntary sector organisations to co-ordinate and run local awareness raising activities across the country over the 16 days. Cosc also funded a national MANUP campaign leading up to the 16 days. This campaign aimed to engage men to stand up against domestic and sexual violence. Funding was also provided to the White Ribbon campaign for activities during the 16 days. That campaign was also focussed on engaging men as advocates against such violence.

Anti-Social Behaviour

380. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the options open to residents in County Louth living with anti-social behaviour; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4868/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will appreciate that the first step that anyone should take in relation to concerns about anti-social behaviour is to contact their local Garda. In this regard, An Garda Síochána continue to implement a range of strategies based on existing legislation and enhancing partnerships with local communities in County Louth and elsewhere.

A range of strong legislative provisions are available to an An Garda Síochána to combat anti-social behaviour, including provisions under the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Acts, the Criminal Damage Act and the Intoxicating Liquor Acts. There are also the incremental provisions contained in the Criminal Justice Act 2006 which provide for warnings and civil proceedings in relation to anti-social behaviour by adults and Part 13 of the Act which provide for warnings, good behaviour contracts and civil proceedings in relation to anti-social behaviour by children.

The National Model of Community Policing is directed and supported each year by the Garda Síochána Annual Policing Plan which underlines the importance of community based policing. An Garda Síochána continue to tackle public disorder and anti-social behaviour by working with communities and business groups, including the hospitality industry, to reduce this type of behaviour and enhance community safety. This approach includes a strong focus on quality of life issues and collaboration with local authorities to help address the causes of anti-social behaviour.

In addition, new Garda Community Crime Prevention Guidelines, which build on the work of existing partnership programmes such as Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert, were published in January 2013. The guidelines give information and advice to help establish new community “watch” groups and also to revitalise existing groups where necessary. My Department continues to provide funding for the Community Alert programme, administered by Muintir na Tíre in partnership with the Gardaí, which supports the operation of over 1,300 local groups. An Garda Síochána also supports the operation of approximately 2,500 Neighbourhood Watch groups countrywide.

Furthermore, the Garda Text Alert Scheme, which was developed with the support of Muintir na Tíre, Neighbourhood Watch and the Irish Farmers Association, was introduced in September 2013 and has developed very successfully with in excess of 500 local groups involving over 100,000 subscribers. The scheme provides an additional and effective means for Gardaí to distribute crime prevention information and advice and there are in the region of 200,000 text messages sent under the scheme each month.

In August last year, I published new guidelines for the operation of Joint Policing Committees (JPCs) which have an important role in supporting local community policing partnerships. The new JPC guidelines emphasise the need to enhance communication between JPCs, which have a strategic co-ordinating role, and the full range of local and community based fora which can contribute to improving community safety and supporting effective policing responses.

Magdalen Laundries

381. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the Magdalen laundries redress programme (details supplied); and if she will make a

statement on the matter. [4883/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Judge Quirke recommended that the women receive medical services equivalent to those provided by the holder of a HAA card and he also advised that “not all of the services described in the Guide may be directly relevant to the Magdalen women and any comparable Guide for the Magdalen women would require suitable adaptation.

Judge Quirke also recommended that legislation was required to give effect to this recommendation. The legislative vehicle to achieve this is the Redress for Women Resident in Certain Institutions Bill 2014 which has passed Second Stage in the Dáil. The Bill provides for a broad range of medical services without charge to women who were resident in these institutions. These health services are as follows:

- (a) General Practitioner and surgical services
- (b) Drugs, medicines and surgical appliances
- (c) Nursing services
- (d) Home help services
- (e) Dental, ophthalmic and aural services
- (f) Counselling services
- (g) Chiropody services
- (h) Physiotherapy services

There is no means assessment in regard to any of the above services which will be provided to these women and, in addition, they will be exempt from charges for acute in-patient services.

With regard to the provision for care representatives, I can advise the Deputy that women who were in the Magdalen laundries are already covered under section 21 of the Nursing Home Support Scheme Act 2009 which makes provision for persons to act as care representatives in respect of any person applying for support under that Act.

In addition, the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Bill 2014 is awaiting committee stage in the Dáil. This provides for a range of options including decision making assistants, co-decision makers, decision making representatives and the public guardian, which are well suited to look after the best interests of the women who were in Magdalen laundries and have capacity issues.

As the Deputy will be aware this Bill is just one part of a wider package of supports for these women. Under the Scheme the women are eligible for a payment of between €11,500 and €100,000 depending on the length of stay in a relevant institution. To date, my Department has made decisions on 87% of the cases and a total of over €18m has been paid out so far. The women are also entitled to top up pension type payments of up to €100 under the age of 66 and up to €230.30 aged 66 and over. These payments are being paid by the Department of Social Protection.

With regard to the pension type payments, Judge Quirke recommended 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.

This recommendation is being fully implemented by the Department of Social Protection. 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."

The Government is committed to full implementation of the Quirke report.

Domestic Violence Policy

382. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the safety orders available to persons who are being harassed, threatened or intimidated by persons known to them, for example a sibling suffering from mental health disorders or serious behavioural issues; and in view of recent tragic cases (details supplied) in County Cork; the measures being put in place to protect family members and loved ones who suffer in these dangerous situations. [4885/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am of course aware of the tragic cases referred to by the Deputy. While the circumstances of particular cases will vary there are a range of legislative provisions, including provisions for a range of court orders, which may be applicable in the sorts of cases referred to by the Deputy.

These include provisions under the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997 which provides for offences of assault, harassment, coercion or threatening behaviour. Section 10(1) of the Act provides for the offence of harassment, including by means of the telephone, by persistently following, watching, pestering, besetting or communicating with another person. Where a person is convicted of such an offence the court may issue a restraining order requiring that the person shall not communicate by any means with the victim or shall not approach within a specific distance of the victim's home or place of work. It is also an offence to breach such a restraining order.

Even where a person is acquitted of harassment a court can issue a restraining order if, having regard to the evidence, the court is satisfied that it is in the interests of justice to do so.

In addition, there is a related provision in section 101 of the Criminal Justice Act 2006 which allows a Court to make a restriction or movement order in respect of a person convicted of certain scheduled offences, including harassment.

There are also the incremental procedures provided under the Criminal Justice Act 2006. These provide for Garda warnings, good behaviour contracts and behaviour order in relations to children. With regard to adults they provide for warnings and the making of a civil order by the court.

The Domestic Violence Acts 1996 and 2002 (as amended) provide protections for a spouse, a civil partner (within the meaning of the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010) and a person living with another person in an intimate and committed

relationship, as well as protections for a parent in relation to a non-dependent adult child who is living with them and a parent with a child in common with the other parent, regardless of whether the parents live with each other. In addition there is provision for protections in relation to an adult person living with another person.

In conclusion, I can advise the Deputy that work is currently being undertaken to draft proposals to reform and consolidate the Domestic Violence Acts with a view to enactment later this year.

Liquor Licence Applications

383. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a waiver will be considered in the case of a small retailer (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4922/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The position is that while I have overall responsibility for the licensing laws in my capacity as Minister for Justice and Equality, it would not be appropriate for me to intervene in, or comment on, a particular licensing case.

The general position is that section 6 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2008 introduced a statutory requirement which prevents the Revenue Commissioners from issuing a new wine retailer's off-licence until the applicant has obtained a certificate from the District Court. The District Court may refuse to issue such a certificate in any particular case on grounds of the character, misconduct or unfitness of the applicant, the unfitness or inconvenience of the premises, the unsuitability of the premises for the needs of persons residing in the neighbourhood, or the adequacy of the existing number of licensed premises of the same character in the neighbourhood. Moreover, the Court may impose a condition on granting such a certificate in relation to the installation, use and operation of a CCTV system in respect of the premises. Matters relating to the rate of excise duty payable in respect of licences are the responsibility of the Minister for Finance and the Revenue Commissioners.

Fuel Quality

384. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of complaints regarding petrol and diesel quality received by the Garda during the past 12 months in County Louth and that portion of east Meath in the Louth constituency; the numbers being investigated; the number of prosecutions which have been taken or initiated and their outcome; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4934/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Garda authorities that no reports of complaints regarding the quality of petrol and diesel have been received by An Garda Síochána in the past twelve months in County Louth and that portion of East Meath that is in the Louth constituency.

Detention Centres Data

385. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide details of the Oberstown campus, including the number of cases of self harm and suicide attempted by clients; if there has been any increase in this compared to the past

three years; if there has been an increase in the number of staff being assaulted; if there is a plan to house ten clients per unit despite the fact that a review of services on campus carried out a number of years ago concluded that the safe number of clients per unit was six; when the McIl-factrick report will be released; if current facilities are suitable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4644/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The table provides information from 2011 to 2013 regarding the number of cases of assault, self harm and suicide attempted by young persons on the Oberstown campus. This information is based on incidents reported by staff and management under the Oberstown “Notifiable Incidents Policy”, which is available on the website of the Irish Youth Justice Service. I have arranged for a copy of this policy to be sent to the Deputy.

Notifiable Incidents - Oberstown Campus - 2011 to 2013

-	2011	2012	2013
No. of Assaults on Staff	26	20	16
No. of Self Harm Attempts	3	0	0
No. of Suicide Attempts	0	1	1

The comparable figures reported under the policy for 2014 will be available in the near future and will be forwarded to the Deputy. I am advised that unfortunately, there was a period in late 2014 when there was a small number of attempts at self harm or suicide involving a number of young people on the campus. In the case of 1 young person, there was a total of 5 attempts at self harm or suicide and in 3 other cases, 1 attempt each at self harm or suicide. All such incidents are thoroughly reviewed by management and staff and the Campus Manager has put procedures in place since these incidents to enhance monitoring and security of all children on the campus.

I understand that a number of reviews have taken place over the years in relation to residential units for both children’s detention and special care. These considered issues such as unit size, layout, facilities, the mix of young people and staff numbers. The new units to be commissioned shortly on the Oberstown campus comprise of 10 bedrooms each, all of which have in-room sanitation and shower facilities. The units also include multipurpose rooms, recreational areas, kitchen, dining area and laundry facilities. The units offer greater space, flexibility of use and security than the present units on the campus. The design of the units allows for more than one type of activity to take place at any given time and in separate parts of the unit. It is envisaged that the new units will be initially used a rate of 8 children per unit and the maximum number per unit will be kept under ongoing review based on the criteria outlined above.

The report referred to by the Deputy is the subject of an ongoing human resources process on the Oberstown campus. This process is ongoing and I am advised that no steps can be taken at this time which could be interpreted as prejudicial to this process.

Legislative Measures

386. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when he will publish the new child care regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4318/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The revised Child Care

Regulations which are required under the new amendments to Part VII of the Child Care Act 1991 are currently being developed in association with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel. These new Regulations will provide for a number of reforms being introduced by my Department under the Early Years Quality Agenda.

As pointed out previously, the drafting of the new regulations required a root and branch re-examination of the existing regulations, including a restructuring of regulations and guidance content in line with the latest drafting practices. It is expected that the new Regulations will be finalised shortly.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

387. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will include the Westbank Home, Greystones, County Wicklow, on the list of institutions to be investigated by the Ryan commission; his views on correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4400/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Since the decision to establish this investigation was announced, there have been calls for the inclusion of a wide range of institutions in the list of Mother and Baby Homes. In responding to these calls it is important to be clear on what we want this investigation to examine and that we are clear and realistic as to our approach and expectations here. My sole objective is to establish a focused Commission, which can effectively utilise all the necessary powers, to establish relevant facts in a reasonable time frame. On the basis of the available information it would not be appropriate to consider places which were children's homes, infants' homes or functioned as orphanages, as being Mother and Baby Homes. These institutions did not provide the specific range of services, in particular supervised ante and post-natal facilities to single mothers and their children which are the central focus of this investigation, in the manner of the homes listed in the terms of reference.

As I have previously stated, it would not be accurate to suggest children's homes and orphanages are excluded from this Investigation as the relationships of Mother and Baby Homes with such institutions will be explored by the Commission as required by Article 1(VII) of the investigation and in the academic social history module. The Commission will investigate evidence of patterns of referral, relationships and co-operation with other entities and intermediary organisations. This will allow for examination of the practices and procedures pertaining in such institutions including intermediary bodies involved in the placement of children.

While I do appreciate that there are many additional matters which some might like to be included, and I have responded to the specific issue raised on a number of occasions, it is important to be clear that this is not an investigation into all and every type of institution. It is also the case that other inquiries examined issues relating to a wide range of care settings including children's homes. As we know a major investigation into historical child abuse has already been conducted by the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse. Its remit was to inquire into the abuse of children in institutions in the period 1940 to 1999 and the broad definition of institutions covered included settings such as the Westbank Orphanage.

I am satisfied that the independent Commission has sufficient scope to examine a broad range of concerns, and to make a determination on their relevance to the central issues in question, and where appropriate to make any recommendations to me which the Commission deems necessary. In this regard, I hope that this will reassure those who feel that the process to date may not have fully uncovered information relevant to their specific circumstances.

Departmental Expenditure

388. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide in tabular form for the years 2007 to 2010 the total photography costs to his Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4488/15]

389. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide in tabular form for the years 1997 to 2007 the total photography costs to his Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4504/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 388 and 389 together.

My Department was established in June 2011 and therefore I cannot provide the information requested by the Deputy.

Public Relations Contracts Data

390. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide in tabular form a list of all external public relations firms hired by his Department and associated costs incurred from 2007 to 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4538/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): My Department was established in June 2011, therefore the information requested by the Deputy cannot be provided.

Early Childhood Care Education

391. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will respond to correspondence (details supplied) regarding child care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4616/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme is implemented by my Department and provides one free pre-school year for children in the age category 3 years 2 months to 4 years 7 months.

The objective of the ECCE programme is to improve children's readiness for entry to primary school. It is considered that the 38 week model of delivery in one school year is the optimal model in terms of ensuring a high-quality early years experience for pre-school children. The Síolta and Aistear frameworks which are central to quality pre-school provision, were developed to support this objective. The current model of delivery also helps to ensure that children and parents become accustomed to the weekly discipline of school attendance with the number of days and hours on which the programme is delivered being approximate to the primary school requirement of 5 days over 38.6 weeks.

Parents of special needs children, who consider that their child may not be able to meet the demands of 5 days attendance each week, can apply to have the pre-school year split over two

years on a pro-rata basis, attending for 2 days a week in the first year and for 3 days a week in the second year. Parents of special needs children can also apply for an exemption from the upper age limit for qualification under the programme where a child would benefit from starting primary school at a later age. These exemptions apply to special needs children only and there are no plans to make these exemptions available to children generally.

Departmental Funding

392. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide a breakdown of the funding that was awarded by his Department to youth services in Dublin North East and Dublin North Central since his Department was established in June 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4733/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. Targeted supports for disadvantaged, marginalised and at risk young people are provided through the Special Projects for Youth Scheme, the Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund, Rounds 1 and 2, Local Drugs Task Force Projects and certain other programmes including the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme and Youth Information Centres. In 2015, an allocation of €49.9m has been provided to my Department to support the provision of youth services.

Details of the funding provided to youth services and projects by my Department are not readily available in the format requested by the Deputy. The funding for the provision of youth services is administered on behalf of my Department by a number of funding administrative bodies. In the main, these are the Education and Training Boards. Details of the funding in respect of youth services administered by City of Dublin Youth Service Board and Dublin City Council on behalf of my Department are being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy shortly.

Child Care Costs

393. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his plans to provide assistance towards child care costs for working parents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4734/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I am aware of the relatively high cost of childcare in this country and to help address the issue my Department supports a number of childcare programmes that assist parents in accessing quality and affordable childcare. These programmes are, of course, in addition to the support provided to all parents in the form of the Children's Allowance, which is a key Government support to help families with ongoing costs.

These programmes include the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) programme which provides funding to community childcare services to enable them to provide quality childcare at reduced rates to disadvantaged and low income working parents. In the case of full day care, parents qualifying for the higher rate of subvention under the CCS programme can have up to €95 per week deducted from the overall charge for childcare in the participating childcare facility. Pro-rata reductions are made in respect of the other services provided.

The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme is a universal programme

that provides for one free pre-school year for all eligible children in the year before commencing primary school. The programme represents an annual investment of approximately €175 million and parents availing of the provision have their annual childcare costs reduced by €2,375 for each eligible child.

A number of initiatives have been introduced under the Training and Employment Childcare (TEC) programmes to support parents who are endeavouring to enter or return to the workforce and who are participating in training or educational courses for this purpose. These include the Childcare Education and Training Support (CETS) programme which provides childcare places to qualifying Solas or Education and Training Boards trainees or students for the duration of their courses. This programme provides €145 per week towards the cost of a full day childcare with pro rata rates for parents who receive a reduced level of service.

The After-School Child Care (ASCC) programme was introduced under the TEC initiative and provides after-school care for primary school children for certain categories of working parents for a once-off period of 52 weeks. This programme provides €40 per week for after-school care, (or €80 per week where a pick up service is provided) and €105 per week for full day childcare during the holiday period. Pro-rata rate applies for parents who require support over a shorter weekly period. The Community Employment Childcare (CEC) programme was also introduced and provides up to €80 a week to support qualifying parents who are participating in Community Employment schemes.

The above programmes represents an annual investment of approximately €260 million and despite the difficult budgetary situation in recent years this funding has been maintained. This Department will continue to fund these programme, with an emphasis on improving the quality of the service, and as funding becomes available I would hope that the capitation rates for all programmes could be increased to provide further support.

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 outcomes for children, reducing poverty and increasing parents' participation in the labour market. To ensure that all the benefits of childcare investments are fully realised, future public investment in childcare must be evidence-based and strategically coordinated. I am establishing a cross-Departmental group to look at the provision right across the 0 to 6 age group as well as to consider the after-school needs of older school-going children. It is crucial that we develop a coherent whole-of-Government approach to investment in childcare services.

This new group 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.

Adoption Data

394. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of couples that have been granted declarations of eligibility and suitability to adopt under the relevant sections of the Adoption Act, but that have yet to adopt a child; the number of single persons who have been granted such declarations, but have yet to adopt; if he will provide a gender breakdown of these single persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4793/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Adoption Authority of Ireland has provided the following table of Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability granted over the past ten years. The Authority advises that it is not possible to say how many of these led to an adoption as some prospective adopters will have withdrawn from the process for a variety of reasons. I would point out that a Declaration remains valid for 3 years, therefore the numbers below may include applicants who reapplied, following expiration of an earlier Declaration that was granted.

APPLICATIONS FOR A DECLARATION OF ELIGIBILITY & SUITABILITY

Year	Couples	F/Applicants only	M/Applicants only	Total
2004	478	23	0	501
2005	378	22	0	400
2006	442	25	0	467
2007	473	21	0	494
2008	462	47	0	509
2009	368	38	1	407
2010	335	46	0	381
2011	223	9	0	232
2012	203	0	1	204
2013	236	1	0	237

Adoption Data

395. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of non-family adoption orders granted for each of the past ten years; if he will provide a breakdown of the non-family adoption orders granted to couples and to single persons for each year; if he will provide a gender breakdown of these single persons for each year over the period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4794/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Adoption Authority of Ireland has provided a table which shows the number of domestic adoption orders made from 2005 through 2014 in respect of non-family adoptions. The Authority advises that it does not maintain statistics on the numbers of sole applicants adopting a non-related child. However, it can be taken that the number of sole applicants adopting non-related children is extremely low and would occur only in exceptional circumstances, e.g. where a foster family intended to adopt a foster child and one of the couple died and the other proceeded with the adoption. The reasons for the exceptional nature of these adoptions are that birth mothers giving their children for adoption typically choose a couple and also that sole applicants are not automatically eligible to adopt but must satisfy the Authority that in the particular circumstances the adoption is desirable and in the best interests of the child.

Year	Number of non-family adoption orders made
2005	62
2006	69
2007	43
2008	67
2009	42
2010	35

Year	Number of non-family adoption orders made
2011	39
2012	13
2013	29
2014	30

Health Services

396. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet a person (details supplied) to discuss the person's concerns regarding Prader-Willi syndrome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4285/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): In September 2014, I received a request to meet the individual in the details supplied but as it is a service issue, it is a matter for the Health Service Executive (HSE).

It is suggested that she contact Ms Carol Doolan, HSE Disability Manager, Dublin North Central @ telephone 8467127 or e-mail carol.doolan@hse.ie to arrange an appointment to discuss her concerns.

Suicide Incidence

397. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who died by suicide in 2014; the numbers under 30 years of age; if he will provide a breakdown of males and females; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4455/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): National mortality data, including that relating to suicide, is published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) on a quarterly and annual basis. Information on the number of persons who died by suicide in 2014 has not yet been published. The most recent CSO data available is for 2013 and this indicates that 475 people died by suicide, 396 (83%) male and 79 (17%) female. This data is provisional and is subject to change, when the data by year of occurrence is published. Final data is available for 2012 and this shows a total of 541 deaths by suicide, 445 (82%) male and 96 (18%) female.

The breakdown of deaths by gender and age group of those persons under 30 years who died by suicide in 2012 and 2013 is shown in a table.

2012	0 - 4 yrs	5 - 9 yrs	10 - 14 yrs	15 - 19 yrs	20 - 24 yrs	25 - 29 yrs	Total
Male	0	0	3	20	39	38	100
Female	0	0	1	7	9	14	31
Total (2012)	0	0	4	27	48	52	131
2013*	0 - 4 yrs	5 - 9 yrs	10 - 14 yrs	15 - 19 yrs	20 - 24 yrs	25 - 29 yrs	Total
Male	0	0	2	16	31	36	85
Female	0	0	0	4	6	7	17

Total (2013)	0	0	2	20	37	43	102
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**This data is provisional and is subject to change, when the data by year of occurrence is published.*

International Bodies Membership

398. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the proposals put forward regarding the urgent need to reform the World Health Organization in view of the concerns expressed by many member countries of the WHO about the inadequate and slow a response to the recent Ebola outbreak; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4593/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The World Health Organisation is undergoing a process of reform to better equip itself to address the increasingly complex challenges of health in the 21st century. From persisting problems to new and emerging public health threats, WHO has stated that it needs the capability and flexibility to respond to an evolving environment.

The reform process has three objectives: programmatic reform to improve people's health; governance reform to increase coherence in global health and managerial reform in pursuit of organisational excellence.

The first cases of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) in West Africa were diagnosed in March 2014. However, the virus had been spreading in the region since December 2013. On 8 August 2014, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the Ebola outbreak to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). The current epidemic has killed more than all other known Ebola outbreaks combined. As of 28 January 2015, the cumulative number of cases attributed to Ebola was 22,092, including 8,810 deaths. There is recognition that the international community must take stock of the lessons learned from the Ebola response to direct WHO reform.

A Special Session on the Ebola emergency took place on Sunday 25 January 2015, ahead of the regular WHO Executive Board which runs from 26 January to 3 February. The objectives of the session were to review the current state of the Ebola response; make recommendations on further steps to stop the epidemic; and discuss how to strengthen WHO's capacity to prepare for and respond to future large-scale and sustained outbreaks and emergencies. Discussions focused on the need for stronger systems at national and international level, and within the WHO, to respond to future health crises.

I am advised by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade that Ireland delivered a national statement at the Special Session supporting the statement on behalf of the EU and its Member States. Ireland noted that experience on the ground shows that health systems need to focus on surveillance, logistics and political leadership as vital components in the fight against future epidemics. In particular, human resources and community health systems need far greater attention and investment. Ireland called on WHO to continue providing strong and close technical support to the current processes being led by the governments of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea for the formulation of national health systems strengthening plans.

Ireland also called on the WHO to ensure that the strongest possible country level leadership is put in place to support the three national governments in meeting the enormous post-Ebola recovery and systems strengthening challenges in the medium term and noted that the key skills required by the WHO Representatives in the coming period will not be Ebola response skills,

but systems strengthening and health service delivery skills and experience.

Ireland underlined the pressing need for action now for a global network of skilled health care workers with adequate support systems in place that can be drawn upon with more speed and efficiency.

Finally, Ireland stressed the need for vigilance in moving from the current crisis to longer term recovery and the need to remain alert and ensure that adequate precautions are taken to avoid a reversal of trends or the overstretching of health systems that have become heavily reliant on external support.

The session saw the adoption of a resolution which, inter alia, requests the commissioning of an external assessment on all aspects of the WHO's response to the outbreak, calls for reforms to WHO human resource structures and appointments systems, and requests the setting up of adequate surge capacity to tackle future health crises. A copy of the Resolution will be published on the WHO website <http://www.who.int/en/>.

A Report by Dr Margaret Chan the Director-General of the World Health Organisation, to the Special Session of the Executive Board on Ebola is available at <http://www.who.int/dg/speeches/2015/executive-board-ebola/en/>.

Hospital Beds Data

399. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health the number of children and adolescents admitted to adult beds in 2014. [4313/15]

405. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for children and adolescents for consultation with the child and adolescent mental health services. [4376/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 399 and 405 together.

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.

Medical Card Applications

400. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is a continuing delay in processing the application for a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; if same will be expedited due to the time taken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4314/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

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

Medical Card Applications

401. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is a continuing delay in processing the application for a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; if same will be expedited due to the time taken. [4315/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

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

Medical Card Applications

402. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is a continuing delay in reviewing the application for a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; if the application will be expedited in view of the time taken and the condition of the person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4316/15]

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.

HSE Agency Staff Data

403. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the current number of agency staff employed by the Health Service Executive; the cost of agency staff in 2013 and 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4323/15]

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.

Proposed Legislation

404. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Health when the public health (alcohol) Bill will come through the Houses of the Oireachtas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4329/15]

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. The General Scheme of a Public Health (Alcohol) Bill is due to be published shortly.

Question No. 405 answered with Question No. 399.

Services for People with Disabilities

406. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding children with muscular dystrophy who are being refused funding for wheelchairs; the reason this vulnerable group of children is being discriminated against; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4379/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The role of the Health Service Executive (HSE) is to provide health and personal supports to people with disability, including those with Muscular Dystrophy. Services are provided either directly by the HSE or through a range of voluntary service providers. The services include the provision of medical/surgical aids and appliances on the basis of assessments carried out by a range of multi-disciplinary staff and based on an assessed need for the service, rather than a specific diagnosis such as muscular dystrophy. Prioritisation is based on the results of the assessment and a prioritisation process approves items which are essential to ensure safety, dignity and independence. If the Deputy's question relates to particular individuals, the HSE will investigate the position in each case.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

407. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for the fair deal scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; if it will be expedited due to extenuating circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4382/15]

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.

Residential Institutions

408. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the differences there are between the HAA card and the medical support in the Redress for Women Resident in Certain Institutions Bill 2014. [4386/15]

428. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Health in view of the fact that Mr. Justice Quirke’s first recommendation on the Magdalen women was that they should receive a card entitling them to the free range of services currently received by holders of the Health (Amendment) Act 1996 card, the reason the Government is refusing this card to those women; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4520/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 408 and 428 together.

As the Deputies will be aware, the Redress for Women Resident in Certain Institutions Bill 2014, which was published by the Minister for Justice, completed Second Stage in the Dáil last week. The Committee Stage of the debate is scheduled to commence on 4 February 2015.

It is anticipated that the Bill, which provides, inter alia, for health services to be made available without charge to participants in the redress scheme, will continue its passage through both Houses over the coming weeks. The final provisions of the Bill will be determined in the course of the Oireachtas debate.

Data Protection

409. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Health the steps that have been taken by his Department since his rise to the position of Minister to ensure that data protection issues are eradicated from the PCRS; his views on serious flaws within the medical card system which need to be immediately addressed; how an official review form forwarded to a medical card holder, which was apparently automatically generated from details held on file, could contain the personal details of a complete stranger as a spouse and three completely unrelated dependent children (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4396/15]

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.

Home Help Service Provision

410. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will be provided home help hours; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4404/15]

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

411. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his plans in making funding available for the construction of a much-needed day centre in Youghal, County Cork, which currently has full valid planning permission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4412/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): 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 Reviews

412. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a reassessment of a medical card application in respect of persons (details supplied) in Dublin 10; and when a decision on their case will issue. [4419/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Medical Card Applications

413. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical card application in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 10; and when a decision on their case will issue. [4420/15]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

414. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he or his Department has received representations from members of the Prader-Willi Syndrome Association; the actions that have been taken as a result; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4425/15]

416. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he has received requests to meet the Prader-Willi Syndrome Association; if she will agree to its request for a meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4427/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 414 and 416 together.

The Minister for Health receives representations and requests for meetings on or behalf of people with a disability on a regular basis.

I received a request to meet a parent of a child with Prader-Willi Syndrome which is under consideration, but as it appears to be a service issue, it is more appropriate to be dealt with by the Health Service Executive (HSE).

It is suggested that the lady contact the local HSE Disability Manager, to arrange an appointment to discuss her concerns.

Under the Health Act 2004, the HSE is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal services, including disability services.

HSE Funding

415. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if there is a specific financial allocation by the Health Service Executive to patients who suffer from Prader-Willi syndrome or if it is part of the mental health care budget in general; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4426/15]

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.

Question No. 416 answered with Question No. 414.

HSE Funding

417. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he or his Department is currently examining alternatives models of health care funding to that proposed in the White Paper on Universal Health Insurance published in April 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4428/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I have established a three-year Research Programme in Healthcare Reform with the ESRI. The research programme uses economic analysis to explore issues in relation to health services and health spending as well as population health.

The immediate priority of the ESRI research programme is to examine the cost implications of a change to a multi-payer, universal health insurance model, as proposed in the White Paper on Universal Health Insurance. This analysis will include, among other things, a review of evidence of the effects on healthcare spending of alternative systems of financing and of changes in financing methods and entitlements.

This work is a key component of the major UHI costing exercise which is currently under way in my Department in conjunction with the ESRI, the Health Insurance Authority and others. I expect to have the initial results in April. These results will assist the Government in developing a road map on the next steps to UHI.

HSE Funding

418. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if his Department will provide funding to a cardiac first-responder group (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4433/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I would encourage the Deputy, if he has not already done so, to direct the particular Group to the National First Responder Network *www.nfr.ie* who may be able to assist with relevant information regarding equipment.

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.

Medical Card Reviews

419. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be reached on a medical card review in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo in view of the fact that this review has been ongoing since July 2014. [4447/15]

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.

Rare Diseases Strategy Implementation

420. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the National Rare Disease Plan for Ire-

land 2014-2018; and the number of times the oversight implementation group has met since the plan's publication in July 2014. [4454/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): One of the principal recommendations in the National Rare Disease Plan was the establishment of a National Clinical Programme for Rare Diseases. This programme will be responsible for, among others:

Mapping, developing and implementing care pathways for rare diseases;

Facilitating timely access to centres of expertise - nationally and internationally;

Developing treatment guidelines for many rare disorders; and

Developing care pathways with European Reference Centres for those ultra-rare disorders where there may not be sufficient expertise in Ireland.

In line with this recommendation, a National Clinical Programme for Rare Diseases has been established in the HSE. A Clinical Lead for this programme has also been appointed. This clinical programme will ultimately be a channel for advancing and implementing other recommendations in the plan, such as those on National Centres of Expertise for rare diseases.

The establishment of a National Rare Disease Office featured prominently in the recommendations of the Rare Disease plan. The HSE is in the process of establishing such a national office. It will, among other functions, provide up-to-date information regarding new treatment and management options, including clinical trials.

Meanwhile, the HSE and the EU Commission plan to fund jointly a rare disease post of Information Scientist in the HSE with a number of recommendations in mind. These refer to rare disease registries and the utility of data currently captured in health information systems.

The Health Identifiers Bill - the publication of which was recommended in the plan - has now been enacted. A similar recommendation on the Health Information Bill is being advanced.

My officials have convened a number of informal meetings with some members of the National Steering Group on Rare Diseases. I expect that a formal Oversight Implementation Group will be established in the near future.

Medical Card Applications

421. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if a full medical card will be approved as a matter of urgency in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Kilkenny based on the medical evidence provided by them. [4456/15]

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.

Health Services Provision

422. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be provided to deliver the appropriate health care plan in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow as a matter of urgency; if he will seek a report on the meetings between the Health Service Executive and the family; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4459/15]

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.

Hospital Procedures

423. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Health the number of elective surgeries that were performed at University Hospital Waterford in January 2015; the number of those scheduled surgeries that were cancelled; the reason for the cancellations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4467/15]

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.

Cancer Screening Programmes

424. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce free cancer screening programmes for men; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4482/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): International evidence recommends population based screening programmes for bowel, breast and cervical cancer.

The HSE provides cancer screening programmes for these three cancers. BowelScreen, the National Bowel Screening Programme, commenced offering free bowel screening nationwide to men and women aged 60 to 69 years in late 2012. In 2014 BowelScreen issued 266,000 invitations. The preliminary participation rate for 2014 is between 42-45% up from 42% in 2013. It is hoped to achieve the 50% uptake target by the end of the initial screening round in 2015.

There is currently insufficient evidence to recommend the introduction of a prostate screening programme. However, the Department of Health and the National Screening Service are keeping emerging international evidence under review.

Any man who may have concerns about prostate cancer should seek the advice of their GP who will, if appropriate, refer them to a rapid access clinic for prostate cancer in a designated cancer centre.

Hospital Staff Data

425. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of full-time and part-time MRI radiographers who are employed at the Cork University Hospital; the hours worked by these radiographers; his plans to employ additional radiographers; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [4485/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on the matter. If he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Departmental Expenditure

426. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form for the years 2007 to 2010 the total photography costs in his Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4495/15]

427. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form for the years 1997 to 2007 the total photography costs in his Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4511/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 426 and 427 together.

The information requested by the Deputy is not available for the years in question but if the Deputy has a specific query regarding a particular company, he should contact me and I will follow it up.

Question No. 428 answered with Question No. 408.

Care Services

429. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the availability of supports to family carers in County Louth; if the Health Service Executive currently funds in-home respite care in the county; the agencies that provide such support; if there are any other supports specifically designed to provide the family carer a break; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4527/15]

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

Hospital Consultants Contract

430. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the official policy in relation to the circumstances in which category C consultant posts should be approved both for new entrants and for doctors wishing to change over from another form of contract. [4531/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Section 22 e) of the Consultant Contract 2008 states that a Consultant seeking to change from Type A, B or B* contract to a Type C

contract should apply to the Consultant Applications Advisory Committee. In the event that the Type C Committee does not agree to the application, it is referred to the Director General of the Health Service for a final decision.

Applications for a change of Contract Type to Contract Type B* or C are considered on condition that the total number of Consultants holding B*, Type C and Category 2 Contracts is subject to an upper limit of such posts within the system. The upper limit – as set out at Appendix VII of the Contract – is stated as ‘approximately 700’.

Hospital Consultants Contract

431. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of doctors appointed for the first time in the public hospital system voluntary hospitals as well as Health Service Executive-run hospitals under category C consultant contracts since 1 January 2014. [4532/15]

432. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of senior doctors currently employed on a contract other than a category C contract who have applied to the Health Service Executive to change to a category C contract since 1 January 2014; and the number of such changes which have been approved by the HSE over the same time period. [4533/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 431 and 432 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.

Departmental Expenditure

433. **Deputy Patrick O’Donovan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide, in tabular form, a list of all external public relations firms hired by his Department and associated costs incurred from 2007 to 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4545/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Department has availed of the services of public relations firms for some health promotion campaigns in areas like smoking cessation, alcohol awareness, men’s health, obesity and breastfeeding. Work carried out by these companies included public awareness and communications campaigns, as well as advertising and consumer research. Details are set out as follows:

Year	Company	Expenditure
2008	Carr Communications	€07,100
2008	IPA	€04,550
2008	Public Affairs Ireland	€03,265
2008	High Performance Training	€00,599
2008	Public Relations Institute of Ireland	€00,520
2007	Carr Communications	€48,400

Health Services

434. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in assessing a person (details supplied) in Dublin 20 for dyslexia; and when they will receive a date for their assessment [4553/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the issue raised by the Deputy relates to an individual case, this is a service matter for the Health Service Executive. I have asked the HSE to look into the particular matter raised and to reply directly 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.

Maternity Services

435. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the way the extra €2 million allocation in the 2015 Health Service Executive service plan will be spent with regard to current pressures within the maternity services here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4556/15]

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.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

436. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the way he proposes to reduce waiting times for breast prostheses for women who have had mastectomies; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that in the Dublin north local health area, women have been waiting since September for breast prostheses and surgical bras, and that this compares very unfavourably to other parts of the country; the reason there is no nationwide uniformity of provision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4587/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): A national group has been established in the HSE to review practices in the area of aids and appliances. This review will include policy and procedures applying to the provision of breast prostheses and bras for women who have had mastectomies. The Group will complete its work this year and it is expected that the implementation of its recommendations will lead to standardised procedures nationwide.

Abortion Legislation

437. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health the number of women who have availed of terminations under the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013; the number of women who have been refused; his views on the follow-up care for women who have been refused; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4590/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act provides that I, as the Minister for Health, must publish a report covering the operation of the Act in the preceding year by 30th June each year and lay it before the Houses of the Oireachtas. As the Act was commenced on 1st January 2014, the first annual report covering its operation will be published in June 2015.

Hospital Appointment Status

438. **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. [4596/15]

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.

Health Services Provision

439. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the proposed day care centre for a town in County Cork (details supplied) that was originally allowed to proceed by the Health Service Executive in December 2008; if planning permission was granted in December 2011 in view of a letter issuing in 2012 from the HSE area manager stating that the project had been halted due to lack of funds in the capital development plan; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that planning permission is only granted for a period of five years, and that time is running out on this project and funding urgently needs to be provided for this extremely important development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4602/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As with all infrastructure projects this particular 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. The HSE is concentrating on applying the limited funding available for capital works in the most effective way possible to meet needs now and in the future.

Health Services Staff

440. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure that the minimum number of agency staff are being employed by the Health Service Executive in County Meath in order that full-time staff are employed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4604/15]

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 Facilities

441. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will utilise the beds in St. Brigid's Hospital, Shaen, Portlaoise, to alleviate the crisis of bed shortage in the Midland

Regional Hospital, Portlaoise, County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4605/15]

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

Hospital Staff Recruitment

442. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to instruct the Health Service Executive to commence the recruitment of at least ten permanent staff nurses at the Midland Regional Hospital, Mullingar, County Westmeath, which have been sought and committed to since October 2014; if the interviews will be conducted forthwith in respect of the said necessary posts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4625/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform announced in budget 2014 that he intends to delegate greater autonomy to Departments and Agencies to manage their own staffing levels. The change from the application of a rigid employment control framework, with its particular focus on a moratorium on recruitment and compliance with employment ceilings and targets, to one operating strictly within allocated pay frameworks will allow for recruitment where it is determined that this can achieve more economical service delivery. 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 to meet current needs.

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.

I have asked the HSE to reply directly to you in relation to the post at the Midlands Regional Hospital.

Orthodontic Service Waiting Lists

443. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Health his proposals to expedite orthodontic treatment waiting periods in County Longford; if his attention has been drawn to a specific case (details supplied) in County Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4627/15]

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 the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

National Positive Ageing Strategy Implementation

444. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the role his Department plays in the implementation of the objectives of the national positive ageing strategy; and if he will provide in tabular form the progress made in regard to each individual area for action that is the responsibility of his Department or agency under the remit of his Department. [4637/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The 2011-2016 Programme for Government committed to completing and implementing the National Positive Ageing Strategy (NPAS) so that older people are recognised, supported and enabled to live independent full lives. In our statement of Health priorities for 2015, the Minister for Health and I have reiterated our commitment to implementing the Strategy.

The National Positive Ageing Strategy published in 2013 provides a vision for an age-friendly society and includes four National Goals and underpinning Objectives to provide direction on the issues that need to be addressed to promote positive ageing. The Cabinet Committee on Social Policy, chaired by the Taoiseach, will oversee the implementation of the Strategy. As Minister of State with responsibility for older people, I will drive implementation at political level. As the Strategy is a cross-Departmental one, my Department has an overall coordinating and collating role and a more direct role for the health-related objectives.

The Objectives included in the Strategy are quite high level and must be followed by the identification of concrete actions which can then be implemented and measured. My Department has had on-going contacts with all relevant Government Departments and agencies in this context, and while it has been possible to identify actions and activities which are very positive for older people, it has been harder to identify new actions which have been introduced in direct response to the Strategy. This is perhaps understandable given the resource limitations and competing priorities that apply across all Departments and Agencies, but my Department is committed to bringing renewed impetus to implementation if at all possible. We are considering how this might be achieved and I will keep the Deputy informed as this process develops.

It is important to point out the many initiatives are already in train which contribute to the Strategy's goals. For example, in the health sector, in the area of older people's services and supports, the Review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme will be completed shortly. The Single Assessment Tool, which will allow for a systematic assessment of need and allocation of services to older people, is being developed by the HSE, measures are being taken to ensure integrated care for older patients, and palliative care services are being improved. The Deputy will also be aware of the recent initiative which saw an additional €25 million provided to address the issue of delayed discharges in acute hospitals. The majority of these patients are older people, and these funds are being applied across both long term and short term residential services and at community level. As a result the waiting time for funding of approved patients under the Nursing Home Support scheme has fallen to eleven weeks now from fifteen weeks a short time ago.

A Healthy and Positive Ageing Outcomes Initiative (HPAOI) has also been established to implement the research objective of the National Positive Ageing Strategy. It is a joint initiative between the Department of Health, the HSE's Health and Wellbeing Programme and the Atlantic Philanthropies and will run from October 2014 to December 2017, with a commitment to Department of Health funding for a further two years. The Initiative will monitor changes in older people's health and well-being linked to the Goals and Objectives of the Positive Ageing Strategy. This will be done primarily through the development of positive ageing indicators to be published every two years. The HSE will also develop a physical activity communications campaign under the Initiative.

National Lottery Funding Applications

445. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if his Department will make a fund available for community groups to apply for grant aid to purchase and install community defibrillators; if he will pilot such a scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4659/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The applications for the Department's National Lottery Funding 2015 will be opening soon. I would encourage all organisations to complete a formal application form which along with detailed procedures will be available on the Department of Health's website at www.health.gov.ie.

As the Deputy's question about a pilot scheme relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Open Disclosures Policy

446. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health his disposition towards a legal duty of candour for health professionals as introduced in the neighbouring island in November 2014; his plans to introduce facilitating legislation to provide for a similar requirement here; if so, the stage his preparations have reached; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4689/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Measures are now in place and more are planned to foster and support a culture of open disclosure within the health service.

A National Policy on Open Disclosure was developed jointly by the HSE and the State Claims Agency and launched by my predecessor in November 2013. The Policy is designed to ensure an open, consistent approach to communicating with patients and their families when things go wrong in the provision of their healthcare. It is important that the patients and their families are kept informed and that feedback is forthcoming on investigations. It is vital that we establish the steps that need to be taken to prevent a recurrence of adverse events. The HSE has now begun implementing the Policy across all health and social services.

In addition, I intend to bring legislation forward to give effect to recommendations made by the Commission on Patient Safety and Quality Assurance to facilitate open disclosure of adverse events to patients. The Commission recommended that legislation be enacted to provide legal protection for open disclosure and said that such legislation should ensure that open disclosure, which is undertaken in good faith in compliance with national standards, cannot be used in litigation against the person making the disclosure. These provisions will be in the Health Information Bill. Because of changes to the Bill since the general scheme was approved by Government, I will be bringing a revised general scheme to Government in the coming months, with a view to publishing the Bill this year.

Motorised Transport Grant Data

447. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update regarding the new mobility allowance scheme that was promised for persons with disabilities; when it will commence; the amount it will be; the criteria for the scheme; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [4721/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Conscious of the reports of the Ombudsman regarding the legal status of the Motorised Transport Grant and Mobility Allowance Scheme, in the context of the Equal Status Acts, the Government decided to close both schemes. The Government decided that the preparatory work required for a new travel subsidy scheme and associated statutory provisions should be progressed by the Minister for Health. The Department is seeking a solution which would best meet the aim of supporting people with severe disabilities who require additional income to contribute towards the costs of their mobility needs, while remaining within the available budget and satisfying all legal and equality concerns. In the meantime, monthly payments have continued to be made by the Health Service Executive to 4,700 people who were in receipt of the Monthly Allowance at the time that the scheme closed.

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.

Maternity Services

448. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding indemnity insurance in respect of a person (details supplied); his views on this person's insurance which has been taken away; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4722/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I wish to thank the Deputy for the issue raised.

The HSE have advised me that there were 12 mothers contracted for home births with the self employed community midwife prior to her suspension. All but one mother has delivered their baby.

The HSE have also advised that self employed community midwives are facilitated to practice after signing a memorandum of understanding and a contract of agreement. The particular case and issue referred to by the Deputy is an operational matter and it is appropriate that it should be dealt with by the HSE. Therefore, I have referred the Deputy's question to the HSE for attention and direct reply.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my private office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Medical Card Data

449. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the number of taxpayers who had a medical card in 2013 and 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4723/15]

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 Data

450. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the number of stages in the medical card application process; the time each stage takes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4724/15]

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.

HSE Staffing

451. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the amount by which staffing will increase in the accident and emergency department of Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9, following the recent negotiations between accident and emergency nurses and management regarding understaffing in the department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4725/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Labour Court issued a recommendation on the 13th January 2015 in respect of issues of over-crowding within the Accident and Emergency Department of Beaumont Hospital. In this context management at Beaumont Hospital will increase the number of nurses on day duty to 12 and the number of nurses on night duty to 11. As part of this additional compliment the Hospital will put in place a CNM2 covering a combination of operational and practice development initiatives. Management have confirmed that they will continue with their efforts to recruit nurses using all means available to them.

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.

Home Help Service Provision

452. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an over-

view of the current provision of State-funded home help services here; his views that more State-funded home helps are needed to provide support to the elderly and infirm; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4726/15]

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Data

453. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in Dublin North East and Dublin North Central who have availed of the fair deal scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4727/15]

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

HSE Staffing

454. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health in view of the fact that there are five occupational therapist posts vacant in County Galway and 435 children in the early intervention services in County Galway who need this essential service, the reason the posts are still vacant; the action being taken to fill them and the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4740/15]

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

HSE Agency Staff Expenditure

455. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form details of agency staff costs expended by the Health Service Executive in 2012, 2013 and 2014; the specific staff roles and grades; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4746/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on the matter. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Waiting Lists

456. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if a date for a cataract operation will be provided in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [4747/15]

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

Health Services

457. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the services for cystic fibrosis patients; his plans in 2015-2016 for providing adequate care for these patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4749/15]

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

458. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health the position in regard to a ward in a hospital (details supplied) in County Dublin; if the decision will be re-examined and the ward reopened as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4775/15]

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

459. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a hospital (details supplied) in County Wicklow; if a full status report will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4776/15]

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

HSE Staffing

460. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will indicate who has been the Accounting Officer for the Health Service Executive as of 1 January 2015. [4786/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Health Service Executive (Financial Matters) Act 2014 provides for the disestablishment of the Health Service Executive's Vote with effect from the 31 December 2014 and the funding of the Executive through the Vote of the Office of the Minister for Health. The Act also sets out the new statutory financial governance arrangements for the Health Service Executive.

Under the new arrangements the Secretary-General of the Department of Health is the Accounting Officer for the Health Vote (Vote 38) which includes grants to the Health Service Executive. Under the new framework the Minister for Health sets a budget for the Executive, which is funded by means of grants made from the Health Vote.

Under the Act the Director-General of the HSE is an accountable person, with responsibilities to ensure that the Executive operates within its financial limits, reports to the Department if the Executive is likely to breach those limits and is accountable to the C&AG and PAC for the financial management of the HSE.

Obesity Strategy

461. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Health the initiatives to deal with obesity that have been taken in past ten years; the programmes or proposed programmes being rolled out to deal with this problem; and if a specific budget is being set aside for this purpose. [4788/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The National Task Force on Obesity completed its work in 2005. An Inter-Sectoral Group on Obesity, comprising relevant Government Departments and key stake-holders, was established early in 2009 to oversee and monitor implementation of the Task Force recommendations. Its report, published in April 2009, detailed the progress made on each of the 93 recommendations. It showed that significant progress was made in the case of 32% of the recommendations, partial implementation occurred on 31%, action progressed on a further 28%, leaving 9% where little progress was reported.

Since 2009 work on initiatives to tackle obesity is continuing and progress has been made in a number of key areas:

- A suite of guidelines and algorithms e.g. guidelines for treatment of adults with the ICGP, guidelines for treatment of Children with the Faculty of Paediatrics and the ICGP, Guidelines for before, during and after pregnancy in conjunction with the Faculty for Obstetrics and Gynaecology & ICGP. Currently the HSE is developing the last of these guidelines which looks at men between the ages of 35 and 65.

- Development of Physical Activity Plan for Ireland and the development of a "one stop shop" website for physical activity (www.getirelandactive.ie) in conjunction with Department of Health, Department of Education and Skills, Department of Transport, Department of Environment, Department of Sport, Representatives of the County Managers, Academic Institutions and the Irish Sports Council.

- Development of Healthy Eating Guidelines and food pyramid.

- Setting up Research and Surveillance Systems e.g. Growing Up in Ireland and the Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative.

- Social Marketing Campaigns in conjunction with *safefood* e.g. Little Steps, Stop the Spread and the three multimedia childhood obesity campaign.

In 2011 the then Minister for Health established the Special Action Group on Obesity (SAGO), comprising representatives from Department of Health, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, The Department of Education and Skills, the Health Service Executive, the Food Safety Authority of Ireland and Safefood to examine and progress a number of issues to address the problem of obesity.

Progress has been made on the Healthy Eating guidelines, Calories on Menus initiative and the Report on Recommendations to reduce consumption of high fat, salt and sugar foods and drinks from the Top Shelf of the Food Pyramid. Treatment algorithms are available for those in Primary Care health services. Arising out of the Irish Presidency of the EU an Action Plan on Childhood Obesity has been developed and Ireland is playing a key role in this initiative. In relation to funding:

- The HSE grant aids a number of organisations and voluntary bodies to help in reducing obesity in Ireland in a more targeted way e.g. Healthy Food For All, Irish Heart Foundation, Irish Cancer Society, Special Olympics, Community Games, Local Sports Partnerships and Diabetes Federation of Ireland.

- Providing funding for treatment of obese individuals and hence the establishment of adult obesity treatment centres (including Bariatric surgery) and one paediatric treatment centre.

- The HSE does not have a financial system that indicates clearly the level of funding for obesity but the HSE confirms that it employs Endocrinologists, Paediatricians, Surgeons, Allied Health Professionals (Physiotherapists, Physical Activity Co-ordinators, Dieticians, Health Promotion Officers), Public Health Nurses, Practice Nurses, Psychologists and Family Therapists. They all have an implied responsibility for treatment and prevention of overweight and obesity.

Hospital Appointment Status

462. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment to see a consultant in Letterkenny General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4790/15]

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 the Deputy directly. If he has 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.

Proposed Legislation

463. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his plans to bring forward new legislation with regard to hospital groups; if there is a statutory basis for their establishment or any requirement for such; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4792/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The establishment of hospital groups was committed to in 'Future Health: A Strategic Framework for Reform of the Health Service 2012-2015' which was approved by Government in November 2012 and is a key building block in

delivering on the Programme for Government commitment to fundamentally reform our health services.

The Reports ‘The Establishment of Hospital Groups as a transition to Independent Hospital Trusts’ (DoH, 2013) and ‘Securing the Future of Smaller Hospitals: A Framework for Development’ (HSE, 2013), provide the foundations for the reorganisation of hospital services into Hospital Groups, each with its own governance and management, that will deliver high quality, safe patient care in a cost effective manner. Within Hospital Groups, all hospitals, irrespective of size, will work together in an integrated way.

While Future Health sets the broad direction of travel for reforming the system, it was always made clear that an incremental approach to implementation would be taken. Future Health specifically referred to a “reform-learn-reform” approach being taken to the process which would enable us to make changes to the proposed approach while simultaneously making progress towards the final structures and delivering tangible improvements as we go.

Seven hospital groups have been established on a non-statutory administrative basis. My priority for 2015 is to get all the Hospital Groups up and running as single cohesive entities before then moving towards developing the appropriate underlying legislation as part of the wider structural reforms.

Medicinal Products Expenditure

464. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if negotiations involving his Department, the Health Service Executive and the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association for a successor drug pricing agreement to the three-year deal agreed in October 2012 have commenced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4795/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Negotiations have not yet commenced on a successor agreement.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Data

465. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons currently awaiting placement under the fair deal scheme; the average waiting time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4798/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): On the 28th January 2015 (latest figures available) there were 1,332 people on the national placement list for funding with an average wait time of 11 weeks.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

466. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date in the determination of an application for the fair deal scheme in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4799/15]

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 he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and

they will follow up the matter with them.

Respite Care Services

467. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if and when respite care will be arranged in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare who is cared for by her daughter on an ongoing basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4806/15]

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

Hospital Appointment Status

468. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 311 of 9 December 2014, when a reply will issue. [4810/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In relation to the particular patient query raised by the Deputy, I have again asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly. If he has 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.

Services for People with Disabilities

469. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for an assessment of need in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4811/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the issue raised by the Deputy relates to an individual case, this is a service matter for the Health Service Executive. I have asked the HSE to look into the particular matter raised and to reply directly to the Deputy. If he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Waiting Lists

470. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for assessment for a hip operation will be arranged at an early date in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow as the case is deemed urgent by her general practitioner who has written four letters requesting immediate action in the case; if he will expedite the matter; and the reason for the delay. [4815/15]

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 the Deputy directly. If he has 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 Homes Support Scheme Administration

471. **Deputy Shane Ross** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 89 of 15 October 2014, his views on the allowable deductions under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (Allowable Deductions) Regulations 2014, with particular reference to the €31 per week deduction for a couple with a child; his further views on whether that adequately reflects the cost of maintaining a child, that any deduction of a greater amount reflecting the real cost of maintaining a dependent child is permitted by the regulations only where payments are made in that regard under a separation agreement or pursuant to a court order; that the regulations in this respect are unfair, discriminate against a child being cared for within the family and are unsustainable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4822/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (Allowable Deductions) Regulations 2014, which came into effect on the 1st September 2014, expanded the definition of “Allowable Deductions” in the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act 2009 to allow the HSE to make allowance for dependent children.

The Regulations are not arbitrary but are based on rates applied elsewhere by the Department of Social Protection. Under the Regulations, the HSE may deduct from the means assessed for the Scheme the equivalent of Child Benefit, plus the full rate of the Increase for a Qualified Child in respect of each dependent child. (Individuals in receipt of certain Social Welfare payments may claim an Increase for a Qualified Child for each qualified child under the age of 18 who lives with, and is being maintained by, the claimant. The increase may also be paid in respect of a child between 18-22 if s/he is in full-time education at a recognised school/college. The full rate of the Increase for a Qualified Child is €29.80 per week (€119.20 over 4 weeks).)

The costs of caring for children, where it is relevant, will also be taken into account by deducting a fixed amount from declared means equivalent to the amounts allowed for dependent children for the purposes of medical card income assessments.

Mental Health Services Provision

472. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Health his views on the role of the arts in the health service; if there is evidence that investment in this area is worthwhile; his plans to further invest in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4834/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Minister is aware of the clear evidence of the importance of art in health, wellness and well-being. Art therapy is frequently used in mental health services. The Minister has no specific plans in relation to policy development related to art. The Minister has referred this Parliamentary Question to the mental health services in the Health Service Executive for their additional response. If he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

473. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the way the lifting of the moratorium on recruitment in the public sector will affect front-line hospital staff; the impact he envisages this measure will have on staffing levels in hospitals; the way the ending of the moratorium will affect nurses' staffing levels in the Health Service Executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4842/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform announced in budget 2014 that he intends to delegate greater autonomy to Departments and Agencies to manage their own staffing levels. The change from the application of a rigid employment control framework, with its particular focus on a moratorium on recruitment and compliance with employment ceilings and targets, to one operating strictly within allocated pay frameworks will allow for recruitment where it is determined that this can achieve more economical service delivery. It will also allow continuation of the policy of recruiting front line staff where necessary to ensure service delivery.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has advised that the HSE and Department of Health will be required to submit a 2015 Pay and Numbers Strategy. Following approval of the strategy by DPER, a letter of delegated sanction for staffing will be issued. Pending this sanction, the existing moratorium and ECF arrangements will continue to apply.

The number of nurses employed has increased by nearly 500 in the past 12 months. This increase can be attributed to the very positive 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. 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.

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.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

474. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the way the lifting of the moratorium on recruitment in the public sector will affect hospital staff numbers in County Galway; the plans by Saolta University Healthcare Group to replace agency staff with full-time permanent positions due to the lifting of the moratorium; if he will provide a breakdown of the number of full-time positions that have been provided thus far; the number it plans to provide in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4843/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform announced in budget 2014 that he intends to delegate greater autonomy to Departments and Agencies to manage their own staffing levels. The change from the application of a rigid employment control framework, with its particular focus on a moratorium on recruitment and compliance with employment ceilings and targets, to one operating strictly within allocated pay frameworks will allow for recruitment across all hospital groups, including Saolta, where it is

determined that this can achieve more economical service delivery.

The Department for Public Expenditure and Reform has advised that the HSE and Department of Health will be required to submit a 2015 Pay and Numbers Strategy. Following approval of the strategy by DPER, a letter of delegated sanction for staffing will be issued. Pending this sanction, the existing moratorium and ECF arrangements will continue to apply.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on the aspect of the question that relates specifically to Co Galway and the Saolta University Healthcare Group. If he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Services

475. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide the details of arthritis services in County Mayo; if he will ensure that a full-time rheumatologist be appointed to Mayo General Hospital in view of the under-provision of specialists in the county and the large number of people with the condition; if he will ensure that such a clinician is appointed in view of the fact that staff must currently travel in order to care for patients, one day a week, in turn wasting time on a commute that could be better spent on clinical duties; and that the quality of life of those with this, at times, debilitating condition, is reduced by travelling long distances for basic care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4861/15]

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

Proposed Legislation

476. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health regarding the health information Bill the consultation process that has taken place; if he will provide a list of those who have been directly involved in the consultation, as well as those who have made submissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4867/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Extensive consultation has taken place on the Health Information Bill, including a public consultation process. Subsequent ongoing consultation is also taking place with a number of other stakeholders, in particular the HSE, HIQA, the Data Protection Commissioner and the Health Research Board. Because of the changes to the Bill since the general scheme was first approved by Government, I intend to bring a revised general scheme of the Health Information Bill to Government in the coming months and then to forward the revised general scheme to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health and Children for pre-legislative scrutiny.

In addition to Government Departments and four individuals, the following made submissions during the public consultation process:

1. The Adelaide and Meath Hospital Dublin incorporating the National Children's Hospital
2. An Bord Altranais (now known as the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland)
3. Baronscourt Technology Limited
4. Central Statistics Office

5. Caring for Carers
6. Citizens Information Board
7. Clinical Ethics Committee of the Bon Secours Health System
8. Competition Authority
9. Consumers Association of Ireland
10. CORI Health Office
11. Crisis Pregnancy Agency
12. Data Protection Commissioner
13. Disability Federation of Ireland
14. Economic and Social Research Institute
15. Faculty of Public Health Medicine
16. Food Safety Authority of Ireland
17. Global Standards 1 (Ireland) Limited
18. Health Information and Quality Authority
19. Health Research Board
20. Health Service Executive
21. Information Commissioner/Ombudsman
22. Institute of Community Health Nursing
23. Institute of Public Health in Ireland
24. Irish Association of Palliative Care
25. Irish Cancer Society
26. Irish Hospice Foundation
27. Irish Human Rights Commission
28. Irish Medical Organisation
29. Irish Medicines Board (now known as the Health Products Regulatory Authority)
30. Irish Patients Association
31. Irish Platform for Patients' Organisations, Science & Industry
32. Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association
33. Irish Pharmacy Union
34. Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists
35. Molecular Medicine Ireland
36. National Cancer Registry Board
37. National Council on Ageing and Older People
38. National Disability Authority
39. National Perinatal Epidemiology Centre
40. Not for Profit Business Association (CRC, Cheshire Foundation, Enable, Gandon Enterprises, Irish Wheelchair Association, NCBI, National Learning Network, RehabCare)
41. Pavee Point Travellers Centre
42. Pharmaceutical Society
43. The Rotunda Hospital
44. Royal College of Physicians in Ireland
45. Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
46. Rehab Group
47. St. James's Hospital
48. Women's Health Council.

Hospital Waiting Lists

477. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied that the national waiting list management protocol system with its stated waiting time of eight months as it pertains to scheduled care treatment is operating in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4877/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Government is committed to reducing numbers on waiting lists for scheduled care, with particular focus on those waiting in excess

of 18 months. The HSE has already put in place specific measures to address waiting lists more efficiently in collaboration with acute hospitals, the SDU and the NTPF. These include observation of the National Waiting List Management Protocol (2014), adherence to relevant HSE National Clinical Programme guidelines and prioritising Day-of-surgery admission where clinically appropriate.

The National Waiting List Management Protocol, *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 protocol, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes by which hospitals are to manage waiting lists.

The scheduling of appointments for individual patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred taking into account his or her clinical need. 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 the Deputy directly. If he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up with them.

Hospital Waiting Lists

478. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the measures in place to deal with waiting lists for necessary investigations and treatments; and his views on an acceptable waiting time for investigations where the timing of diagnosis may affect the prognosis. [4886/15]

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

Mental Health Services Provision

479. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of mental health beds available for under 18 year olds; the number of these beds used in 2014; and the mental health outpatient services available for under 18 year olds. [4887/15]

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

Accident and Emergency Departments

480. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the accident and emergency figures for Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9, for 27 January 2015 and for the previous week; and the average response times for the ambulance service call-outs for Beaumont Hospital in 2014 and to date in 2015. [4888/15]

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

481. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if a full-time bone marrow transplant consultant will be appointed to Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9. [4898/15]

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

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

Mental Health Services Provision

482. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of mental health posts that were approved in 2013 and still remain unfilled. [4899/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): In 2013, a special allocation of €35m and 477 additional posts were provided for mental health to be used primarily to further strengthen Community Mental Health Teams in both adult and children's mental health services, to advance activities in the area of suicide prevention, to initiate the provision of psychological and counselling services in primary care, specifically for people with mental health problems and to facilitate the re-location of mental health service users from institutional care to more independent living arrangements in their communities, in line with A Vision for Change.

The recruitment process for the posts approved in 2013 is continuing with 367.5 or 78% of the posts filled as at end December 2014, with a further 4 posts with agreed start dates. Other posts are at various stages of the recruitment process. There are, however, a number of posts for which there are difficulties in identifying suitable candidates due to factors including availability of qualified candidates and geographic location. The HSE's National Recruitment Service is currently working to ensure that the remaining posts will be filled as soon as possible, from existing panels or through competition in the absence of panels.

Patient Transport Provision

483. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if transport to and from hospitals in Dublin will be provided or paid for by his Department or the Health Service Executive in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4925/15]

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

484. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding St. Joseph's Hospital, Ardee, County Louth; the outcome of the proposed spend of the budget of €750,000; in view of the planning application of 23 December by the Health Service Executive lodged to Louth County Council, if the plan has the Health Information and Quality Authority guaranteed approval; the actual budget provided; if there is any truth in reports that agreements have been made between the HSE and HIQA to postpone 2015 standards, in public facilities, for a period of three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4928/15]

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

Health Services Data

485. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health the number of children in County Donegal with high medical needs, that is, complex disabilities, life limiting diseases and terminal illnesses. [4930/15]

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 for direct reply to the Deputy. If he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Cancer Screening Programmes

486. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the introduction of BreastCheck for women aged 65 to 69; when the first cohort of women aged 65 will be called; when the first cohort of women aged 66 will be called; when the first cohort of women aged 67 will be called; when the first cohort of women aged 68 will be called; when the first cohort of women aged 69 will be called; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4940/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): 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.

To accommodate such a substantial increase safely and effectively, it will be necessary for BreastCheck to implement the extended screening on a phased basis. All women involved in breast screening are offered screening every two years and this complicates the organisation of an age extension. The broad approach will involve those who are under the current programme having their period of screening extended until they reach 69 years of age. Accordingly, those aged 65 will be the first to be invited.

Exact details of when women of each age will be invited will be worked out as part of the ongoing planning process.

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.

Health Services Data

487. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with heart failure here; the estimated cost of treating the condition on an annual basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4945/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Statistics on the number of persons with heart failure or the cost of treatment are not routinely available.

The number of patients hospitalised with a diagnosis of heart failure in 2013 was 21,725. It should be noted, however, that if a patient is admitted to hospital more than once in 2013, each admission is counted separately. For this reason, this data should not be interpreted as a prevalence estimate for this condition.

In 2010, the Quarterly National Household Survey Health Module conducted by the Central Statistics Office showed that 1% of adults aged 18 years and over declared that they have had a doctor diagnosed health condition of heart failure.

Residential Institutions

488. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Health the way he will address the disturbing revelations of the unacceptable and poor standards of care at certain parts of Áras Attracta, County Mayo. [4947/15]

489. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Health the measures that are in place to ensure the highest standards of care at residential facilities for persons with a disability; and the method and frequency of inspections to ensure continued observations of such standards. [4948/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 488 and 489 together.

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.

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 gardaí 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 the gardaí have now cleared the way for the investigation to commence.

The HSE has undertaken a number of additional initiatives to ensure that quality and safe care in residential services for people with disabilities is appropriately implemented and monitored, including:

- The establishment of a National Implementation Taskforce, including a series of National Summits to improve client safety, dignity, respect and culture;

- Implementation of the National Policy & Procedures on Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse;

- Development of an advocacy programme;

- Implementation of an evaluation and quality improvement programme in disability residential centres;

- Development of an implementation plan for any recommendations arising from the McCoy review of residential services in Áras Attracta when complete and,

- Development of long-term sustainable & evidence-based safeguarding practices and training programmes specific to residential settings.

I have asked the HSE to keep me informed of progress.

I am informed that the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) commenced the regulation of residential centres for people with disabilities in November 2013. The purpose of this regulatory process is to ensure that service providers deliver a safe and good quality service to people with disabilities. Where HIQA finds that this is not the case, providers are required to take action to address the issues identified.

In 2014, HIQA conducted 603 inspections of designated centres, and 116 centres received two or more inspections.

HSE Complaints Procedures

490. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the levels of accountability in the Health Service Executive nationally when members of the public write to express concern or complain about a subject; if each letter or e-mail is responded to; if all such items of correspondence are logged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4953/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I want to assure the Deputy that when any member of the public writes to the HSE expressing concern it is given due consideration and the appropriate attention.

As this is a service issue I have referred the Deputy's question to the HSE for direct reply. If he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Appointment Status

491. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if an immediate appointment will be provided in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [4960/15]

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 the Deputy directly. If he has 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 Applications

492. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Carlow will receive urgently needed hearing aids; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4990/15]

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 the Deputy directly. If he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Semi-State Bodies Remuneration

493. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a list of all bonus payments to chief executives of commercial semi-State agencies paid in each year from 2011 to 2014 under the remit of his Department; if bonuses were withheld by commercial semi-State companies during the period; the reasons for withholding of bonuses; the current policy regarding the payment of bonuses in the commercial semi-State sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5202/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Voluntary Health Insurance Board is the only commercial semi-state agency under the aegis of my department. The Chief Executive of this company did not receive any bonus payments from 2011 to 2014 and there is no provision for bonus payments in his contract. In 2013 the Government reviewed the position on the payment of performance related reward schemes or bonuses for Chief Executive Officers in Commercial State Companies and agreed to continue with the policy which it introduced in 2011 of requesting the State Companies concerned not to award such bonus payments in light of the serious state of the public finances. Furthermore the Government agreed to continue with the practice of excluding the payment of bonus provisions in the employment contracts of newly appointed CEOs to such State Companies as well as in respect of contract renewals for incumbent CEOs.

Departmental Expenditure

494. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide, in tabular form, for the years 2007 to 2010 the total photography costs in his Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and a breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [4494/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The cost of photography in my Department from 2007 to 2010 is as set out in the following table. The total costs include all official photography charged to the Department over this period. As the Deputy will see from the table, there was a higher-than-average spend in 2008. This was the result of an increase in the number of State and official events, such as visits by the President of Estonia, the President of the European Commission and a State visit by the leader of the Czech Republic. In September 2011, my Department led a collaborative advertised tender process for the procurement of a multi-supplier competitive framework of photographic service providers.

This is now available for use by all Government Departments. Details of the framework arrangements and the photographers used are posted on the National Procurement Service website: www.procurement.ie/suppliers/contracts/1298.

The purpose of this framework is to ensure Departments' compliance with EU procurement rules and to ensure value for money by having a competitive process for photographic assignments.

In the time available it is not possible to give a complete breakdown of the costs associated with each event.

Table

2007	53,955.45
2008	86,144.68
2009	37,107.30
2010	36,629.23
Total	213,836.66

Departmental Expenditure

495. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide, in tabular form, for the years 1997 to 2007 the total photography costs in his Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and a breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4510/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The cost of photography in my Department from 1997 to 2007 was the subject of a previous question in December 2007 and the figures provided at that time are set out in the following table. In September 2011, my Department led a collaborative advertised tender process for the procurement of a multi-supplier competitive framework of photographic service providers. This is now available for use by all Government Departments. Details of the framework arrangements and the photographers used are posted on the National Procurement Service website: www.procurement.ie/suppliers/contracts/1298.

The purpose of this framework is to ensure Departments' compliance with EU procurement rules and to ensure value for money by having a competitive process for photographic assignments.

In the time available it is not possible to give a complete breakdown of the costs associated with each event.

Year	€
1997	€4,237.70
1998	€3,633.34
1999	€5,433.23
2000	€7,425.90
2001	€11,517.24
2002	€18,509.35
2003	€9,503.71
2004	€44,342.54
2005	€29,306.70
2006	€84,263.13
2007	€53,955.45
Total	€272,127.63

National Flag

496. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the flag over his Department's building was flown at half mast on 23 January 2015 to mark the death of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia; and if his Department requested that other Department buildings do the same. [4518/15]

499. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he approved the lowering of the national flag over his Department's building on St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, on 23 January 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4569/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 496 and 499 together.

On the occasion of the death in office of Heads of State or Government, or other figures holding high office in the international community such as Foreign Ministers or others, the condolences of the Irish authorities can be expressed in a number of ways. Following the death recently of Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, Ireland's Ambassador in Riyadh offered condolences and attended the traditional occasion for the paying of respects. The Book of Condolences at the Embassy of Saudi Arabia was also signed by an official of my Department. The national flag was not flown at half mast over the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on this occasion.

Public Relations Contracts Data

497. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide, in tabular form, a list of all external public relations firms hired by his Department and associated costs incurred from 2007 to 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4544/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): A table containing the information is set out as follows. It is important to note that the expenditure in question was for the management of specific projects and events under Ireland's overseas development programme. It was not for general public relations services. In 2007, following a competitive tendering process, a contract valued at just over €5,000 was awarded to a firm to support the

work of the Government's Hunger Task Force. The Task Force comprised 14 Irish and international experts who examined the particular contribution that Ireland could make to tackling the root causes of hunger. The Hunger Task Force Report was published in 2008 and continues to guide Ireland's approach to this priority global issue. The firm concerned assisted the Hunger Task Force in engaging with the public and media on Ireland's role in tackling hunger in the developing world.

Between 2008 and 2010, following a competitive tendering process, the Department engaged a firm with a public relations background to provide professional services including project management, logistics and event management for the national Africa Day celebrations, which were hosted by the Department in Dublin Castle in 2008 and in Iveagh Gardens in 2009 and 2010. In partnership with a number of local authorities, the firm also administered a small grants scheme for community and other groups to participate in regional Africa Day events. A small public awareness-raising dimension was involved in this work on Africa Day events and was conducted in close cooperation with the Department's press office.

Following a competitive tender process, the same firm was engaged in 2010 to manage and administer the Department's Simon Cumbers Media Fund (SCMF), which provides small grants to journalists to facilitate coverage of the developing world and raise awareness of development issues in Ireland.

The contract involved the management of three funding rounds each year, entailing:

Processing grant payments and keeping detailed administrative and financial records;

Convening national and regional information workshops;

Managing and administering the application process;

Organising the process of judging of applications by an independent panel;

Providing detailed feedback to all applicants;

Maintaining and updating the SCMF website

Expenditure, 2007 - 2010

Receipt and Project/Event	2007	2008	2009	2010
Bannon & Bannon – Support to the Hunger Task Force	€5,082	Nil	Nil	Nil
DHR Communications – Simon Cumbers Media Fund	Nil	Nil	Nil	€31,363
DHR Communications – Africa Day	Nil	€34,485	€63,058	€56,023
Total	€5,082	€34,485	€63,058	€87,386

International Relations

498. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to invite his Spanish counterpart to Dublin to discuss strengthening ties between the two countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4558/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Ireland and Spain enjoy excellent bilateral relations and maintain frequent contact at the highest levels, especially

as partners in the European Union. The President and the Taoiseach have both made official visits to Spain in recent years while Prime Minister Rajoy visited Dublin in March of last year. Government Ministers maintain direct contacts with their Spanish counterparts. Most recently Minister Coveney visited Madrid on 29 January for discussions with his Spanish counterpart, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Environment Isabel García Tejerina. I meet regularly with my Spanish counterpart, José Manuel García-Margallo, at the EU Foreign Affairs Council where we can discuss bilateral issues informally, in addition to the EU agenda. At last week's Council meeting, I conveyed the sympathy of the Irish people to Minister García-Margallo on the death of a Spanish UN peacekeeper with UNIFIL in Lebanon where an Irish contingent also serves. I would be most happy to receive Minister García-Margallo if an occasion arises on which he would wish to visit Ireland.

Question No. 499 answered with Question No. 496.

Military Aircraft Landings

500. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 618 of 27 January 2015, if he is responsible for authorising the transiting of foreign military personnel through Irish territory on civil aircraft, and, if so, under what legislation. [4844/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Primary responsibility for the regulation of foreign aircraft depends on whether such aircraft are designated as civilian or military. The Air Navigation (Foreign Military Aircraft) Order 1952 gives the Minister for Foreign Affairs primary responsibility for the regulation of activity by foreign military aircraft in Ireland. 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.

Where it is proposed that military personnel travelling on civilian aircraft should be accompanied by personal weapons, an exemption must be sought from the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. In considering these requests, the Department of Tourism, Transport and Sport seeks the advice of relevant Government Departments and agencies, including my Department.

My Department also deals with requests to permit the wearing of foreign uniforms which is governed by the Defence Act 1954.

Passport Services

501. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the arrangements his Department has in place to identify Irish citizens living in Taiwan should the circumstances arise; the arrangements in place for the same citizens to renew their Irish passports or to obtain Irish passports for their children within Taiwan; the contact details for officials within Taiwan dealing with these issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4918/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Ireland adheres to the One China policy and does not recognise Taiwan as a State. As a result, Ireland does not

have diplomatic relations with Taiwan and does not have an Embassy in Taipei. Irish citizens travelling to, or resident in, Taiwan can register their details on the Citizens' Registration facility on the Department's website at www.dfa.ie. The Citizen's Registration service is a voluntary service which encourages Irish citizens travelling or living overseas to register their contact details with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. This means that in the event of an unforeseen crisis such as a natural disaster or civil unrest, the Department can proactively contact the citizen, ensure they are safe, keep them informed of any evacuation plans and provide assistance where necessary.

Citizens resident in Taiwan are advised to submit their passport applications through the Irish Embassy in Beijing. The turnaround time averages about 4-6 weeks which is the equivalent turnaround time for citizens resident in the UK. Additionally, citizens requiring passport information may also contact the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Dublin on +353 (0) 1 408 2000.

If Irish citizens are in difficulty in Taiwan and require Consular Assistance, they can call our Consular Assistance Unit in Dublin on +353 (0) 1 408 2000. They can also email the Department using the 'Travel Advice', 'Consular Assistance' or 'Passport Office' options in the dropdown menu of the contact details page of the Department's website.

Qualifications Recognition

502. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if prior recognition is accepted by Bord Fáilte for chefs with apprenticeships combined with continual service and references, in place of certificates in hotel operations or certificates through culinary institutions or through FETAC qualifications for chefs who served apprenticeships before certification was available or widely in use; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4424/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Fáilte Ireland no longer operates as a training provider itself, therefore responsibility for the recognition of prior learning or experience in the hospitality and culinary sector rests with the training provider or institution offering the programme of interest.

Individuals can approach Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) directly to enquire about recognition of prior learning opportunities and to seek information on gaining certification for existing knowledge, skill or competence. It is a matter for QQI to decide how this prior learning and prior experience can be assessed and QQI advise that they may look for help and advice from relevant providers of education and training in making this assessment.

SOLAS Training and Education Programmes Expenditure

503. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the reinstatement of the training allowance paid to persons in SOLAS-funded training programmes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4436/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The payment of an additional training allowance of €31.80 per week for the long term unemployed was introduced during a period of high employment levels as an incentive for the long term unemployed to participate in FÁS (now Education and Training Board) training courses. The former FÁS training provision was transferred from SOLAS to the Education and Training Boards during 2014. The payment

was reduced from €31.80 per week to €20 per week as part of Budget 2011. In the present economic situation this incentive is no longer considered appropriate and as part of Budget 2014 it was decided to cease this payment for all Education and Training Board participants commencing courses after 1st January 2014. Travel supports continue to be available to these Education and Training Board participants where appropriate.

This is a decision taken in the context of the overall savings this Department had to find for 2014 and future years. It was taken against a difficult budgetary background and there is no scope to re-visit it.

SOLAS Training and Education Programmes Provision

504. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to continue the overseas graduate programme which was operated by FÁS; if any analysis of the programme was undertaken; if so, if the outcomes were published; if graduates who availed of the scheme have been contacted to assess their view of value to them of the scheme; the reason it was discontinued; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4951/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The FÁS Overseas Graduate Programme (OGP), which began in 1983, placed newly qualifying graduates with honours degrees in Business, Engineering or the Sciences, into full-time employment with companies in Japan and China. The overarching aim of the Programme was to increase the number of Irish qualifying graduates with top quality international experience in their chosen discipline, thereby enhancing the capability of Ireland to trade internationally.

Officials in the then Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment carried out a review of the programme in early 2010. At that time, the core remit of FÁS was to focus its training and employment programmes on those cohorts who were most likely to remain unemployed. Following the review it was decided that this programme did not fit with that core remit and it would be inappropriate for FÁS to retain responsibility for its management and the programme was closed down.

At that time Enterprise Ireland managed a comparable overseas programme, aimed at graduates in almost identical disciplines. The overarching objective of the Enterprise Ireland’s International Graduate Programme is the provision of in-depth international marketing experience to graduates to ensure that they can contribute to the success of emerging Irish companies in rapidly changing international business environments. I understand that this programme is still being managed by Enterprise Ireland.

Education and Training Boards

505. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will report on the situation facing education and training boards, following the 2014 local elections, who have not reconstituted their school boards of management; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4381/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Boards of management of schools and other centres of education operated by Education and Training Boards (ETBs) are sub-committees of an ETB.

At the request of Education and Training Boards Ireland, Minister Quinn agreed to extend

the term of office of boards of management of school and other education centres to the 31st December 2014. I subsequently provided for a further extension to a date not later than the 31st March 2015.

Education and Training Boards have been requested to constitute new boards of management, and these new boards of management will take up office not later than the 1st April 2015.

Schools Building Projects Status

506. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when funding will be provided for a new school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4401/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the school in question has submitted an application for additional accommodation to my Department. The application will be assessed and a decision will be conveyed to the school authorities as soon as this process has been completed.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

507. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person in receipt of the back to education allowance will qualify for a Student Universal Support Ireland grant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4405/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The main financial support available to students attending further and higher education courses is my Department’s Student Grant Scheme. Under the student grant scheme, eligible candidates may receive funding provided they are attending an approved course at an approved institution and meet the prescribed conditions of funding, including those which relate to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment and means.

Since September 2010, all new applicants in receipt of the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA), and the VTOS allowances for those pursuing PLC courses, are no longer eligible for maintenance support under the student grant scheme. However, students who qualify for the BTEA may be considered for support for the student contribution under the student grant scheme provided they satisfy the conditions of the relevant Student Grant Scheme and Student Support Regulations including those relating to residence, nationality, approved course, previous academic attainment and means.

Schools Building Projects Status

508. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to replace the 30-year temporary accommodation for a special national school (details supplied) in County Dublin with a new building; if she will confirm its new location in addition to when the building works will commence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4448/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that a major capital project for the school referred to by the Deputy has been included in my Department’s 5 Year Plan.

In line with the Memorandum of Understanding which formalises the local authorities' part in securing sites for educational use, my Department has sought the assistance of, and is working closely with, the relevant Local Authority in relation to identifying and acquiring a suitable site for the school concerned. However due to the commercial sensitivities associated with land acquisitions generally, I am not in a position to comment further at this time.

When a site has been acquired by the Department, the project will be progressed into the architectural planning process and on to construction as soon as the architectural planning process is completed.

Primary Online Database

509. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her Department plans to defund the education of any children whose parents object to their information going on the primary online database, POD; if so, the statutory basis for that action; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4471/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): From the 2016/2017 academic year, it is intended that teacher allocations and capitation grants will be made on the basis of POD data, and the previous basis for allocations, the National Annual School Census will cease operation from that point. There is no mechanism for separate payment and allocation to schools for pupils that are not on POD, and from a practical point of view it is difficult to see how such a system could work in practice.

Under Section 12 of the Education Act 1998, the Minister of Education shall determine and publish the criteria in each school year by which funding shall be provided to schools in the following academic year. Over 3 billion euro of taxpayers money is spent annually on funding our primary school system. The vast majority of this funding is allocated to schools on the basis of reported pupil numbers. It is more than prudent from an audit and financial accountability point of view that we validate the data underlying these payments and ensure that payment is made only once in relation to each pupil.

Data Protection

510. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the primary online database and the Data Protection Commissioner, following her statement that the Data Protection Commissioner had approved retaining children's data until they were at least 30 years, and following the Data Protection Commissioner's statement that it seems to be the case that there is an inadequate explanation of the reasons it needs this data or needs to hold it for as long as it is being held; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4472/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department is in ongoing contact with the Data Protection Commissioners Office in relation to the retention period for POD data. The Department has previously received advice from the Data Protection Commissioners Office in this regard and will continue to closely consult with and seek the advice of the Commissioners office while reviewing the retention policy for POD data.

I understand that there are concerns from a data protection and privacy point of view around the retention period for the data. The Department is considering these concerns, and also needs to consider the fact that in the future POD will serve as the official record of primary school

enrolment for everybody, and as such it forms part of an individual's personal history. While some people might prefer their record to be deleted as soon as possible, others may prefer to have their record accessible should they want or need to get it in the future. The Department will review its retention policy bearing in mind these issues, as well as all the legal obligations on us in the areas of data protection and records management. Individuals also have the right under data protection legislation to request in writing to any public body that their records held by that body be removed or amended and their reasons for the request, and the public body must consider and respond to such requests within 40 days.

Data Protection

511. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills in view of the Data Protection Commissioner's statement on the primary online database that there is an inadequate explanation as to why it needs it and why it needs to hold it for as long as it is holding it, if she or her Department alerted schools that compliance with the POD database plan may be a breach of their duties as data controllers under the Data Protection Acts; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4473/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department is in ongoing contact with the Data Protection Commissioners Office in relation to the retention period for POD data. The Department has previously met with and received advice from the Data Protection Commissioners Office in this regard and no issues of concern were raised at that time. My Department will continue to closely consult with and seek the advice of the Commissioners office while reviewing the retention policy for POD data.

The Department understands that there are concerns from a data protection and privacy point of view. The Department is exploring these concerns but also needs to consider the fact that in the future POD will serve as the official record of primary school enrolment for everybody, and as such it forms part of an individual's personal history. While some people might prefer their record to be deleted as soon as possible, others may prefer to have their record accessible should they want or need to get it in the future. The Department will consider its retention policy bearing in mind these issues, as well as all the legal obligations on us both in the areas of data protection and records management, in concert with the Data Protection Commissioners Office.

Primary Online Database

512. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount that has been spent on the primary online database project since its inception; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4474/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The software development costs of the POD project to date are approximately €230K. A POD Implementation Grant was issued to every primary school in December 2014. The total cost of the grant was €830,518.

Primary Online Database

513. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her Department hired or engaged any external expertise to advise on data protection or data gover-

nance in relation to the primary online database; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4475/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My Department has consulted and is in continued contact with the Data Protection Commissioner’s Office in relation to data protection and security matters for the primary online database (POD). My Department did not hire any additional external or private expertise to advise on data governance matters for POD.

Primary Online Database

514. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of staff in her Department who have been designated with administrator rights in the primary online database; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4476/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Four members of staff in my Department have administrator rights on the primary online database.

Primary Online Database

515. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the primary online database plan will allow for data to be automatically synchronised with commercial databases used by schools; the details or control that her Department holds relating to the encryption, storage and access rights over data in those commercial databases; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4477/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): It is a matter for each individual school to decide whether or not to purchase and run specialist school management information systems in their schools. Some primary schools have such systems in place while others maintain paper or simple spreadsheet records.

My Department has provided a facility for primary schools to automatically synchronize data from POD to their local management information systems. This facility is being provided to remove from schools the burden of double-keying data i.e. entering the data once on POD and a second time on their local system. The data is transmitted securely from POD to the local systems using HTTPS. It is the responsibility of Primary Schools as Data Controllers to ensure that data held on their local systems is held securely

Departmental Expenditure

516. **Deputy Patrick O’Donovan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide, in tabular form, for the years 2007 to 2010 the total photography costs in her Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4491/15]

517. **Deputy Patrick O’Donovan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide, in tabular form, for the years 1997 to 2007 the total photography costs in her Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if she will make

a statement on the matter. [4507/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 516 and 517 together.

The following tabular statement contains details of expenditure on photography and the photography companies that were engaged and a description of the event where this was recorded.

Details for the years 1997 to 1999 pre-date the introduction of the Financial Management System at my Department. As such, the data for these years is not readily available and would take an inordinate amount of time to compile.

DATE OF INVOICE	NAME	AMOUNT	REF
13/05/2010	Nick Bradshaw	€326.70	Seán Lemass Awards
02/06/2010	Nick Bradshaw	€326.70	Signing of building contracts
09/06/2010	Nick Bradshaw	€326.70	Maths report
20/07/2010	Nick Bradshaw	€326.70	Signing of building contract
15/09/2010	Clive Wasson	€254.10	Opening of two schools
05/11/2010	Nick Bradshaw	€326.70	Announcement of high-tech classroom grants
23/11/2010	Nick Bradshaw	€326.70	Literacy and Numeracy plan
-	TOTAL 2010	€2,214.30	-

Public Relations Contracts Data

518. **Deputy Patrick O’Donovan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide, in tabular form, a list of all external public relations firms hired by her Department and associated costs incurred from 2007 to 2010; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4541/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My Department did not incur any expenditure on external public relations from 2007 to 2010.

School Funding

519. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide additional funding in respect of a school (details supplied) in Dublin 20 to allow it to carry out a dyslexia assessment on one of their students. [4554/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I can inform the Deputy that my Department’s National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychology service to all primary and post primary schools through an assigned NEPS psychologist and in some cases through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA), full details of which are on the Department’s website. Under this scheme schools can have an assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists

approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly.

In common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution focused consultative approach to maximise positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment.

This system allows psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually. It also ensures that children are not referred unnecessarily for psychological intervention.

I have made inquiries in the matter and find that the child in question has not been brought to the attention of the assigned Psychologist by school authorities. If the parents of the child have specific concerns about his educational progress I would advise in the first instance that they speak to the Principal of the school with a view to raising these concerns with the assigned NEPS psychologist.

Schools Building Projects Status

520. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a unit will be approved in a school (details supplied) in County Laois; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4559/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is not in receipt of any application or proposal from the school in question in relation to an ASD unit, but the school authorities can contact my Department should they wish to discuss the matter further.

Teachers' Remuneration

521. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps she will take to address the anomaly which has deprived 30 or so teachers of just over €3,000 annually since the teaching qualification allowances were discontinued in 2012 (details supplied). [4584/15]

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 Building Projects Expenditure

522. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of funding her Department has spent on new school building projects in County Meath since 2011; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4597/15]

523. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of funding her Department has spent on additional accommodation in County Meath since 2011; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4598/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 522 and 523 together.

The capital funding issued to schools in County Meath in the years 2011 to 2014 in respect of Large Scale projects is as follows: 2011 - €9.4m, 2012 - €14.5m, 2013 - €23.6m, 2014 - €13.2m.

The capital funding issued to schools in County Meath in the years 2011 to 2014 in respect of the Additional Accommodation Scheme is as follows: 2011 - €3.2m, 2012 - €3.3m, 2013 - €3.9m, 2014 - €1.1m.

School Accommodation

524. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of funding her Department has spent on emergency works in County Meath since 2011; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4599/15]

525. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of funding her Department has spent on prefab replacement in County Meath since 2011; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4600/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 524 and 525 together.

Details of funding provided under my Department’s Emergency Works Scheme for schools

in Co Meath for the years 2011 to 2014 is outlined in the following table.

Under my Department's Prefab Replacement Initiatives 10 schools in Co. Meath received funding totalling €3.4m to replace prefabs with permanent accommodation.

In addition to the prefab replacement initiatives as part of my Department's large scale school building programme, prefab accommodation continues to be replaced with permanent structures on an on-going basis. Details of all schools on the 5 year capital programme is available on the Department's website.

Emergency work funding to schools in County Meath 2011 - 2014

-	2011	2012	2013	2014
-	€	€	€	€
EWG	184,930	337,475	160,390	291,200

Teaching Qualifications

526. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a degree course will be recognised by the Teaching Council of Ireland for the purpose of teaching at second level (details supplied). [4617/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Since 2006, under the Teaching Council Act 2001, the Teaching Council is the regulator of the teaching profession. One of the main ways in which it regulates the profession is by reviewing and, where appropriate, accrediting programmes of Initial Teacher Education. As this is an operational matter for the Teaching Council the course provider should contact the Teaching Council in the first instance.

School Placement

527. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 142 of 21 January 2015, the manner in which this issue is being examined; the persons responsible for examining it; and if she has set a date for receiving a report on the matter. [4719/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The practical implications of implementing the School Placement guidelines are acknowledged. Relevant stakeholders in education need to work together to resolve these issues. I understand that discussions are ongoing between the Teaching Council and providers of Initial Teacher Education as to how a more streamlined approach might be introduced nationally with regard to School Placement. The Teaching Council will continue to promote and encourage the development of a single national system for allocation of school placement positions as a clear indication of a partnership approach between HEIs and schools, which is critical to the success of this essential component of ITE.

While I do not expect to receive a report on the matter, my officials have ongoing contact with the Teaching Council regarding this matter and my Department will support, as appropriate, any developments which facilitate the smooth operation of school placement in terms of logistics and the further development of schools as hosts for school placement.

528. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide in tabular form the details of agency staff costs incurred by her Department or its aegis in 2012, 2013 and 2014, including the breakdown of the staff roles involved and the area within her Department's aegis where they are contracted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4743/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department did not incur any costs in respect of agency staff in 2012, 2013 or 2014. With regard to agencies under the aegis of my Department, details of agency staff costs incurred by them is a matter for each agency. This information is not collated centrally by my Department.

Schools Data

529. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a recent form issued by her Department to be completed by primary school students seeking information on their ethnic background contains the terms white Irish and black background when these terms do not identify ethnicity; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4748/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): There are many different definitions and understandings of what comprises ethnic and cultural background, and it is understood that the range of possible categories is wider than what is outlined in the Deputy's question. The question in relation to ethnic and cultural background are based on the categories from the two most recent Census of Population questions, and similar to those asked in many other countries.

The Department welcomes and will take under consideration all feedback in relation to the structure of the Ethnic and cultural background question. We are committed to continually reviewing the variables in POD, and in response to feedback given we are proposing to review some of the labelling of the categories in this question. We will notify schools on this in due course.

In relation to the overall question the Statistics Section of the Department met with the CSO's Census of Population Division to discuss concerns around this question. They accept that the variant of the ethnicity question on the 2016 census may fall short of what could be expected in today's multiracial Ireland. Given the no-change' census approach being adopted for Census of Population 2016 it is not possible to change the CSO question at this stage.

However the CSO has indicated that it is considering holding a seminar this year to examine how the data in this area can be improved from the point of view of maximising the number of write-in responses to increase the variety of ethnic descriptions captured, the classification system used, and also looking at the nationality vs. citizenship issue and examining generally how the outputs from the census can be improved in this important area. The Department of Education and Skills will be participating in this seminar.

Note that the question on POD is intended to capture ethnic and cultural background only and there is a separate question on POD for nationality. If a category such as other black background or other inc. mixed background is chosen the pupil can record their Irish nationality in the nationality question.

State Examinations

530. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) in Dublin 12 will be provided with access to a scribe for the leaving certificate examination in view of the fact they have a condition called dysgraphia. [4768/15]

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 the Deputy’s query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply.

State Examinations

531. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will re-examine the new criteria put in place to be eligible for access to a scribe or word processor in State examinations as the criteria is too stringent and students such as a person (details supplied) in Dublin 12 are missing out on this vital service by a mere 1% in the qualifying tests; and if discretion can be applied when a student misses out by such a small margin. [4769/15]

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 the Deputy’s query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

532. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a student whose parent is a State employee earning in the region of €65,000 per year, but who is engaged in the insolvency process and consequently has no disposable income whatsoever, is eligible for the student grant scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4783/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Under the terms of the student grant scheme, grant assistance is awarded to students who meet the prescribed conditions of funding, including those relating to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment and means.

The Deputy will appreciate that, in the absence of all of the relevant details that would be contained in an individual’s application form and supporting documentation, it is not possible to say whether or not a particular student would qualify for a grant.

The eligibility of the individual to which the Deputy refers is a matter for SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland) to determine; upon receipt of the relevant application form and supporting documentation.

Obesity Strategy

533. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the initiatives to deal with obesity that have been taken in the past ten years; the programmes or proposed pro-

grammes being rolled out to deal with this problem; and if a specific budget is being set aside for this purpose. [4789/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My Department is involved in a number of measures to promote student well being as part of the overall government ‘Healthy Ireland’ agenda that is being led by the Department of Health. This encompasses measures to promote physical activity, healthy eating, and overall healthy lifestyles.

Schools are required to deliver a minimum of 1 hour per week Physical Education at primary level and 2 hours per week at post primary level. In 2012, this Department carried out a Lifeskills Survey in primary and post primary schools. The data indicated that, in addition to this formal PE provision, over 80% of schools encourage not only physical activity and regular exercise during school breaks, but they also facilitate young people’s participation in sport outside school time.

My Department’s Professional Development Support Service for Teachers (PDST) is currently developing a CPD programme for primary and post primary teachers in P.E.. The initial focus of this professional support will be on developing fundamental movement skills and building the knowledge, skills and capacity of teachers to meet the physical literacy needs of learners through the P.E. curriculum.

The Department also supports the Active Schools Flag. This initiative, which was launched in 2009, recognises schools that provide a quality programme for all students and promote physical activity across the whole school community. A total of 434 primary and 33 post primary schools have achieved an Active Schools Flag to date. More schools are registering to participate each year.

Physical activity by pupils is not the sole remit of schools. PE in schools is designed to complement activity and other lifestyle habits outside of school. In fact, this “whole of life” approach is being adopted in the National Physical Activity Plan, which is currently being finalised by a cross-sectoral working group co-chaired by the Department of Health and the Department of Tourism and Sport. The Department of Education and Skills is a member of this group.

Supporting our young people to acquire the knowledge and develop the skills to make healthier choices in life is also very important to overall student well-being. The issue of promoting healthy eating is addressed in schools through subjects such as Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), and Home Economics as well as in PE. With such skills and knowledge it is hoped that our young people will make appropriate choices so that this informed approach will help to reduce the incidence of obesity in our young people.

In my November 2014 proposal on junior cycle, Well-being is included as a compulsory element of a school’s junior cycle programme. It would include Physical Education; Social, Personal and Health Education; and Civic Social and Personal Education.

In addition, I will shortly be issuing guidance to all schools about measures to promote healthy lifestyles. This guidance encompasses measures to promote healthy eating, healthy vending, as well as the promotion of P.E. and Physical Activity. The guidance has been drafted in consultation with the Department of Health and the HSE.

School Funding

534. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of

funding invested by her Department in schools in County Cork, broken down by year, between 2011 and 2014, and by primary and post-primary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4800/15]

535. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of funding invested by her Department in schools in County Cork since 2011, broken down by school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4801/15]

537. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of funding invested by her Department in schools in Cork South-West, broken down by year between 2011 and 2014, and by primary and post-primary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4812/15]

538. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of funding invested by her Department in schools in Cork South-West since 2011, broken down by school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4813/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 534, 535, 537 and 538 together.

The capital funding issued to schools in the primary and post-primary sectors in County Cork in the years 2011 to 2014 is as follows:

PRIMARY

2011 - €24.8m

2012 - €23.8m

2013 - €31.1m

2014 - €37.4m

POST-PRIMARY

2011 - €6.4m

2012 - €7m

2013 - €14.2m

2014 - €16.2m

It is not possible to provide data in respect of a region within a county. However, if the Deputy wishes to nominate a specific school, I would be happy to provide the level of capital funding issued in such an instance.

Teachers' Remuneration

536. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to review the measures taken with regard to teachers' allowances as outlined in her Department's Circular 70/2011. [4802/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The public service-wide review referred to in Circular 70/2011, 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. My Department's Circular 0008/2013 outlines the effect of this decision on teachers.

Questions Nos. 537 and 538 answered with Question No. 534.

School Transport Eligibility

539. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the provisions her Department has in place for providing transport for students with disabilities who wish to attend the North West Regional College in Derry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4814/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English): My Department is responsible for the provision of school transport within this jurisdiction. As the college referred to by the Deputy is not within this jurisdiction the provision of school transport does not arise.

School Funding

540. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding funding applications in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Kerry. [4871/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): On 8 January, 2015 the school referred to by the Deputy was sanctioned a devolved grant under my Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme to provide a Resource Room.

The school has recently submitted an application for funding for sewerage works under my Department's Emergency Works Scheme. This application is currently under consideration and the school authorities will be notified of the outcome once this assessment has been completed.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

541. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) in County Laois who is in receipt of one-parent family payment will be approved for a SUSI grant for a third level education course where the application was not submitted in the original timescale because the person who was on this payment was advised by the Department of Social Protection that if they were returning to college, they should apply for the back to education allowance which they did and then were told they were not eligible for the grant because they are in receipt of this payment and then sought to have their payment transferred back to the one-parent family payment to make them eligible, by which time they were informed by SUSI they were too late to make the application; if she will ensure that this person is not left without their SUSI grant and that a decision be made to accept this application which is due to circumstances between two Departments outside the control of the person concerned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4881/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I understand from SUSI that the applicant to whom the Deputy refers, has been advised to submit a late application. Upon receipt of same, the case will be reviewed in light of the additional information provided.

School Playgrounds

542. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if it is open to schools to apply for one off funding for developing a play space facility; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4896/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The provision of playspace, where site conditions and circumstances allow, is one of the issues considered in the architectural design of new schools and major extensions. My Department’s design guidelines for schools include guidance in the provision of P.E. Halls, general purpose rooms and outdoor hard play areas such as basketball courts.

I wish to assure the Deputy that my Department fully recognises the key role of physical exercise within the school environment and continues to respond to the need to improve PE facilities for all pupils attending schools within the constraints of the available funding.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that the Physical Education curriculum has been designed on the basis that facilities in schools may vary. Many primary schools have a general purpose room and practically all schools have outdoor play areas which are used for teaching different aspects of the P.E. programme. A similar situation with sports halls and outdoor facilities applies at second level. In addition, many schools use adjacent local facilities, including public parks, playing fields and swimming pools.

In December 2014, the Minor Works Grant issued to all primary schools for the school year 2014/2015 at a cost of over €28 million and it is open to schools to use this funding for the development of a play facility.

Where schools are unable to address all issues arising on an incremental basis, it is open to the school authority to apply for funding for developing play space under the Summer Works Scheme.

The Deputy will be aware that spending of more than €70 million was approved for the 2014 Summer Works Scheme to allow over 770 schools undertake improvement works. This allowed for the funding of applications received under categories 1-6. Schools which had applied under categories 7-10 were advised that their applications would be retained for prioritisation if funding for further summer works projects could be secured for 2015.

Primary Online Database

543. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason her Department is developing a primary online database; the reason her Department is seeking to collect data in relation to the ethnicity and religion of students; the length of time which it is planned to store data collected via the primary online database system; the places this data will be stored; the persons that will have access to this data; if her Department has engaged with the Data Protection Commissioner on this issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4897/15]

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. Parental consent is also required to answer the questions relating to religion and ethnic or cultural background. The information in relation to religion is being gathered purely for statistical purposes – there will be no other use made of this information. In relation to ethnicity and cultural identity, organisations like the Irish Traveller Movement and advocates of greater social equality have been campaigning for a record of Traveller identity to be kept as part of a learner database for many years. This is to allow us to determine the effect of targeted educational interventions on Travellers, and indeed to direct the additional capitation grant funding to schools who enrol Traveller pupils.

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. My Department has consulted with the Data Protection Commissioner in December 2013 and no issues of concern were raised at that time. My Department will review, on an ongoing basis, our retention policy taking account of any concerns raised. I am also aware that the Data Protection Commissioner has made clear that there is still active engagement between her office and my Department on this issue. I welcome that confirmation.

The Department takes the protection of pupil's data very seriously. Pupil data is stored securely in the Department's Oracle database. This database is hosted on the Department's servers which are located in the Revenue Commissioners data-centre in St Johns' Road. Access to the servers is protected by both Revenue and Government firewalls. Staff of the Revenue Commissioners do not have access to the data in the database. 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.

Schools Building Projects Status

544. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will make arrangements for a meeting between her Department's building unit and a delegation from a school (details supplied) in County Donegal to discuss future development plans for a new school building and development of the school campus; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4923/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): As the Deputy will be aware, as a result of planning permission for a new school building for the school in question being refused by An Bord Pleanála in 2012, the school authorities were requested to identify and prioritise the most urgent health and safety issues within the existing school building.

The accommodation needs which emanated from that assessment were considered and in

July 2013, my Department approved substantial funding to improve the accommodation facilities available at the school. The scope of works approved permitted the school authorities to carry out works including roof repairs, replacement of windows & doors and of two heating boilers, the upgrade of dust extraction systems plus the provision of a fire alarm & emergency lighting. In addition, in September 2013, the school in question was invited to participate in the Prefab Replacement Scheme II to replace four temporary rented general classrooms with permanent accommodation and in February 2014, my Department approved further devolved funding to provide two new Science Rooms.

The Department is aware that the school authorities have been developing proposals in relation to the further future development of the school and have asked the school to forward these proposals. Once the proposals have been received the matter will be considered further. In the event that further clarifications are required, officials from the Department will be in contact with the school authorities.

School Accommodation

545. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will liaise with the Office of Public Works in order to have temporary premises in place for the summer in respect of a school (details supplied) in Dublin 8. [4932/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that my Department has recently informed the Office of Public Works that they may lodge a planning application for the temporary accommodation required to facilitate the decant of the school in question.

Broadband Service Provision

546. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a tender will be allocated in respect of a school (details supplied) in Dublin 8; when the broadband speed will be updated and improved; when the PDST will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4936/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Under the Schools Broadband Access Programme, my Department provides for the supply of internet connectivity for all recognised primary schools. A framework involving more providers was put in place in 2012 which ensures that improved solutions are available to schools. The Department is continually working with providers to ensure that where possible improved services are made available to schools.

The broadband connection for Francis St. C.B.S. will be re-tendered in the first half of 2015 with a view to having a improved connection in place for September 2015. In relation to the issues raised by Francis St C.B.S. regarding the Schools Broadband Service Desk, enquiries are being made about these matters and a response will issue to Francis St. C.B.S. as soon as possible.

School Funding

547. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the financial support received from the Department for the development of sports facilities at a school (details sup-

plied) in County Westmeath. [4946/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): In 2011/2012 an extension refurbishment programme was carried out at the school referred to by the Deputy at a cost of circa €4.8m. As part of these works a new single storey P.E. Hall with ancillary accommodation including toilets, changing rooms, stores, offices and a first floor viewing balcony was provided. The works also included the provision of an all-weather pitch.

Schools Amalgamation

548. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application by schools (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4963/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): An application in relation to the proposed amalgamation of schools referred to by the Deputy has recently been received by my Department. This proposal is currently under consideration and officials from my Department will be in contact with the Management Authority of the schools concerned shortly.

Teachers’ Remuneration

549. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding the honours degree allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4992/15]

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.

Departmental Programmes

550. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will report on the evaluation of Springboard; if the evaluation reports are made available; if she will report on the group charged with evaluating the programme; and her plans to increase the number and scope of the courses available to jobseekers. [4993/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The evaluation framework for Springboard provides for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of outputs. Reports published by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) to date provide information on the number and profile of participants, number of awards granted, and employment outcomes. Overall, feedback on Springboard is very positive: 40% of the 2012/13 graduates were in employment/self-employment within 6 weeks of graduating – rising to 52% within 6 months of graduation.

Evaluations have been carried out by the HEA, with support from the UCD Geary Institute and Eustace Patterson Ltd. The evaluation reports are available on the Springboard website at www.springboardcourses.ie.

A call for proposals for courses to be run under Springboard 2015 published to higher education providers and on the HEA website at www.hea.ie on 28 January. The deadline for submissions is Wednesday, 11 March 2015. Details of courses subsequently selected for funding and the eligibility criteria for participation will be available on the dedicated information and applications website www.springboardcourses.ie from May 2015

Schools Building Contractors

551. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to parliamentary Question No. 508 of 20 January 2015, if the annual number of school build programme direct jobs created she has supplied are workers directly employed by the principal contractor of each of the projects accounted for in the annual period; and if not if she will provide a breakdown for each year of the way her Department has accounted for the figures provided. [5017/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The numbers provided to the Deputy on 20 January 2015 in respect of direct and indirect jobs supported within the School Building Programme through the delivery of Large Scale Projects, the Additional Accommodation Scheme and the Prefab Replacement Scheme were calculated on the basis of the Construction Industry Council norm which advises that there are 10 direct jobs and 2 indirect jobs for every €1m capital spend.

Water Conservation Grant

552. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the €100 water conservation grant will be backdated to assist persons with water charges to cover the period from 1 January to September; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4411/15]

555. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the conditions that will be attached to the issuing by his Department of the water conservation grant; and if there will be a requirement that applicants for the grant have or will spend money on a water conservation measure. [4784/15]

560. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if full water charges will be applied from 1 January 2015, although the water conservation grant will not be applied until September 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4410/15]

586. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if households which have not registered with Irish Water before 2 February 2015 will still be able to avail of the water conservation grant after that date. [4933/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 552, 555, 560 and 586 together.

With effect from 1 January 2014, Irish Water is responsible for public water services. The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides that Irish Water shall collect charges from its customers in receipt of water services provided by it.

As set out in the Water Services Act 2014, which was enacted on 28 December 2014, water charges for domestic customers commenced on 1 January 2015, with the first bills due to issue from April 2015. The Act also provides for the payment of an annual water conservation grant.

To promote sustainable use of water and to enhance water conservation in households, the Department of Social Protection will administer, on behalf of my Department, a €100 water conservation grant for households (principal private dwellings) that complete a valid response to Irish Water's customer registration process. It is proposed that the grant will be paid in one instalment to all eligible households in September 2015 and on an annual basis thereafter. I will shortly bring forward regulations and a communications campaign that will set out the terms, conditions and eligibility criteria applying to the scheme, including the date by which a response to Irish Water's customer registration process will be required in order to be eligible for the grant.

While Irish Water, as part of the transition phase, will have a 'first fix free' scheme to fix customer leaks, it is recognised that some leakage may be internal to the house. The €100 annual water conservation grant can be used in this regard to address issues such as leaking cisterns, dripping taps etc. Equally, households can use the grant towards other conservation measures such as the costs of water butts or installing dual flush toilets or rain water systems, de-sludging septic tanks or maintaining wells to ensure operating efficiency.

The water conservation grant replaces the tax rebate and social protection measures previously announced, as it is a more straightforward means of addressing water issues for all households on equal terms and will reduce households' outlay on water services both now and in the future.

As the Department of Social Protection will administer the grant the process is streamlined and clearer for householders. It is also important that all households have an equal chance to reduce their water consumption in their principal private dwellings. This approach has a number of policy advantages as it makes water charges more affordable for lower income groups; conservation ensures a better use of our water resources and avoids unnecessary or premature expansion of water treatment plants; and it is environmentally sustainable and protects our water environment which is to the benefit of all citizens.

Water Charges Administration

553. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and

Local Government if his Department has estimated the level of non-payment of water charges that would result in expenditure in Irish Water being deemed not to be an off balance sheet expenditure item; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4479/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The expected level of bills to be issued to domestic customers in 2015 and 2016, being €271m and €274m respectively, was set out in November 2014 by my Department in the document entitled “Fact Sheet 1: Financing Irish Water”. This document is available on my Department’s website at <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/Environment/Water/FileDownload,39557,en.pdf>. In November 2014 I announced a package of measures to ensure that domestic water charges are certain, affordable and clear. The package of measures included proposals to enhance the collectability of domestic water charges. These measures, when enacted, will ensure that any charges not initially paid when due, will ultimately be recovered by Irish Water, together with any applicable late payment fees.

Leader Programmes Administration

554. **Deputy Tom Barry** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when rural development plan funding will be open for applications, following the reconfiguration of Leader groups. [4580/15]

557. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the proposed timetable for negotiation of the new Leader roll-out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4366/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 554 and 557 together.

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 in the coming weeks.

The selection process will be open and transparent and will consist of two separate stages, providing the opportunity for all interested local development and community groups to participate. Stage one, a call for Expressions of Interest to design and implement LEADER Local Development Strategies for the 2014-2020 programme period, will commence shortly. This stage will be open to any entity that can demonstrate broad local and community participation and that has a coherent vision for the development of their area. In stage two of the selection process Local Action Groups successful in stage one will be invited to submit a Local Development Strategy for their area. Groups will be given a minimum of six months to prepare their strategies however if a strategy should be complete within the six month period it will be assessed on completion with a view to getting successful strategies operational as soon as possible. Where multiple strategies are expected from any sub regional area, final decisions regarding the selection of strategies will not be made until all viable strategies have been assessed.

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.

Question No. 555 answered with Question No. 552

Foreshore Licence Applications

556. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he has authorised by way of foreshore licence or by other means the removal of sand from the tidal part of the Akeragh river in the Banna Ballyteigue dune system, County Kerry. [4829/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): My Department has no record of a foreshore licence application for the works described. Kerry County Council have advised my Department that the Council have responsibility under the Arterial Drainage Acts for the maintenance of the local Akeragh drainage network incorporating the Kilmoyley and Ardfert land drainage networks. The mouth of the Akeragh is susceptible to blockage and the Council routinely clears it in order to maintain land drainage. My Department will engage directly with Kerry County Council regarding any obligations arising under the Foreshore Act 1933.

Question No. 557 answered with Question No. 554

Pyrite Remediation Programme

558. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the exact circumstances in which a home owner can have his or her property remediated when the home deteriorates from a damage rating over one to one with progression within a year. [4391/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The pyrite remediation scheme, which was published by the Pyrite Resolution Board in February of 2014, was developed having regard to the recommendations set out in the Report of the Pyrite Panel (July 2012). The full conditions for eligibility under the scheme are set out in the scheme which is available on the Board's website (www.pyriteboard.ie). It is a condition of eligibility under the scheme that an application to the Board must be accompanied by a Building Condition Assessment, carried out by a competent person in accordance with I.S. 398-1:2013, with a Damage Condition Rating of 2. There are no proposals to amend this eligibility criterion.

My Department understands that, in a number of cases, dwellings which had a Damage Condition Rating of 1 when their Building Condition Assessments were first completed have now progressed to a Damage Condition Rating of 2; these dwellings have now been included in the pyrite remediation scheme.

While dwellings with Damage Condition Ratings of 1 do not qualify under the scheme, some may be considered in accordance with the exceptional circumstance provisions set out in section 17 of the Pyrite Resolution Act 2013. In broad terms, section 17 provides that exceptional circumstances may apply where:

- failure to include a dwelling with a damage rating of 1 in the scheme may result in damage to a dwelling which is being remediated under the scheme, or
- pyrite remediation work is causing or may cause damage to the dwelling with the damage rating of 1.

Where a dwelling with a Damage Condition Rating of 1 adjoins a dwelling with a Damage Condition Rating of 2, the Housing Agency will be notified and will consider if exceptional circumstances apply when the Remedial Works Plan is being drawn up; the Board will be informed of any recommendation in the matter.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

559. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when an allocation for funding to local authorities for social housing will be approved; the overall estimate for this figure for 2015; when councils will be provided approval to commence purchasing these houses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4402/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Social Housing Strategy 2020 targets the provision of over 35,000 new social housing units over the lifetime of the Strategy. I expect that 7,400 of these will be delivered in 2015 through the following methods: 3,000 through leasing, 2,000 through the Rental Accommodation Scheme, 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. The actions contained in the Strategy include the agreement by Q1 2015 of targets with local authorities for the delivery of social housing units in 2015. Consultation with individual local authorities in this regard is currently taking place and the allocation of funding to the authorities is based on the targets that are set and the plans of individual authorities to deliver on those targets. The 2015 allocation of funding to the Local Authority Construction and Acquisition Programme, through which the local authorities build and acquire additional social housing units, is €149.185 million, with a further €22.64m being provided by certain local authorities themselves.

Question No. 560 answered with Question No. 552

Political Funding

561. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the reason political party units are not permitted from opening an account in a credit union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4414/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The relevant legislation dealing with political donations accounts is the Electoral Act 1997. Section 23B(1) of this Act provides that an accounting unit of a political party which receives, in any particular year, a monetary donation the value of which exceeds €100 shall open and maintain an account in an institution in the State and shall lodge that donation and any further monetary donations received by it to that account.

The term 'institution' is defined in section 22 of the Act as meaning:

- (a) the holder of a licence under section 9 of the Central Bank Act, 1971,
- (b) a building society incorporated or deemed to be incorporated under the Building Soci-

eties Act, 1989, or a body incorporated in a corresponding manner under the law of any other Member State of the European Communities,

(c) a trustee savings bank within the meaning of the Trustees Savings Bank Act, 1989,

(d) ACC Bank plc,

(e) An Post, or

(f) a person authorised in accordance with the European Communities (Licensing and Supervision of Credit Institutions) Regulations, 1992 (S.I. No. 395 of 1992), to carry on business in the State.

This definition of 'institution' does not include a credit union. The institutions referenced in the Act provide for a general public access in opening an account, which is not available in a credit union by virtue of the rules under which it must operate.

Waste Management

562. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to introduce a new waste regulator to help bring down costs for consumers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4418/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I am committed to ensuring that the regulatory regime applying to waste collection is robust and delivers quality outcomes for householders and the environment. As part of implementation of the Government's waste policy, A Resource Opportunity, my Department carried out a public consultation last year on options for revising the existing regulatory regime which applies to waste collection. Arising from that process, my Department is finalising a robust new regulatory framework aimed at professionalising and modernising Ireland's system of household waste collection. I expect to finalise the new legislation shortly.

Key among the new provisions will be the introduction of a pay-by-weight pricing structure for household waste collection. The intention is that collectors will be required to be 'pay-by-weight' ready by 1 July 2015 and will be required to charge all their customers on a pay-by-weight basis from 1 July 2016. The period of 12 months during which collectors will be required to weigh the waste collected and indicate the weight to customers will allow householders time to adjust to the new pricing structure before it becomes mandatory.

Weight-based charging for waste collection has been shown to significantly reduce the quantity of waste that households produce and provides clear pricing incentives for households to prevent and better segregate their waste. It also gives households greater control over their costs - the less their bins weigh, the less they will pay. Clear and effective communication with households on the new pricing system and on how to best reduce waste management costs is essential and a comprehensive awareness campaign will be commencing shortly.

My focus is on full implementation of the Government's waste policy and I have no plans for the establishment of a waste regulator at the current time.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Administration

563. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local

Government if he will provide an update on the implementation of the tenant purchase scheme; if he will provide a list of all local authorities where this scheme will be available; and the expected time at which it will be commenced in these areas. [4423/15]

582. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will announce the regulations and start date for the proposed new tenant purchase programme. [4891/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 563 and 582 together.

Part 3 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 provides for a new scheme for the tenant purchase of existing local authority houses along incremental purchase lines. Statutory instruments will be made setting a single commencement date for the introduction of the new scheme by all housing authorities and prescribing the detailed terms of the scheme. The Government's Social Housing Strategy 2020, published in November 2014, includes a commitment to introduce the new scheme by the second quarter of this year.

Waste Disposal

564. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the proposals his Department has to impose a levy on end of life tyres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4460/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): As part of the Producer Responsibility Initiative (PRI) Review, my Department published a report on waste tyres in November 2013, which concluded that the current system is not functioning as intended, with a lack of basic information, poor structure, poor environmental outcomes in the form of large stockpiles of waste tyres and a substantial proportion of waste tyres unaccounted for. The report also identified significant non-compliance among those with responsibilities under the current Waste Tyre Regulations.

To address these significant shortcomings, my Department has been working, in full consultation with all parts of the tyre industry, to assist it in putting in place a system of producer responsibility, in line with those that apply to other sectors, to provide for the collection, sorting and management of the waste they produce in an environmentally sound manner. This is in line with the "polluter pays principle" which is a firmly established feature of both domestic waste policy and legislation. This will require an overhaul of existing structures, but I believe that this can be achieved without distorting the tyres market in Ireland, without encouraging customers to buy tyres outside of the jurisdiction and without widespread job losses. Moreover, I believe that such a scheme could be provided for without introducing any new costs, but rather by effectively formalising the existing charge that is already applied to almost all tyre purchases.

Arising from the work of the Tyres Working Group, which includes representatives from across the waste and tyres industries, my Department has now received proposals for the future management of waste tyres from the Independent Tyre Wholesalers and Retailers Association (ITWRA) and the Irish Tyre Industry Association (ITIA). While it would have been my preference for all sides within the industry to come together in support of a single proposal, the separate proposals have been considered by my Department, and I have now informed all sections of the tyre industry of my decision to establish a full Producer Responsibility Initiative scheme for waste tyres.

A copy of the letter to the tyre industry, setting out in greater detail the specific details of the

scheme and proposed next steps has been forwarded separately to the Deputy.

Public Private Partnerships Data

565. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the role of elected officials in a public-private partnership project between a local authority and a private company, with particular reference to reporting requirements and the provision of information to, and at the request of, elected members by the private partner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4469/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The respective functions of local authority officials and elected members are provided for in the Local Government Acts and in a wide range of other legislative codes. Under local government law, elected members act by resolution in performing reserved functions specified in legislation. Any functions which are not specifically designated as reserved functions are deemed to be executive functions and are exercisable by the chief executive, subject to the provision that members may direct him or her in certain circumstances. However, the Local Government Acts do not contain specific provisions relating to public private partnership arrangements and responsibilities of private entities in such arrangements do not come within the scope of the Local Government Acts. Policy and guidance in relation to public private partnerships generally are matters for the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. The respective roles of parties to a public private partnership and requirements in that regard would depend, primarily, on the provisions and arrangements relating to a particular project.

Arts Funding

566. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the requirements for the provision of art work under the percent art scheme whereby the public partner in the PPP is a local authority and has provided land for development as part of the partnership; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4470/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The provision of art works associated with capital projects funded through my Department's capital programmes is a matter primarily for the relevant local authority. Details in relation to the scheme are available on the Publications page of my Department's website at <http://www.enviro.n.ie/en/LocalGovernment/PublicArt/>. It is stated in the circular letter to local authorities that the allocation for the art project under the scheme should be calculated on the basis of the overall construction cost of the project.

Departmental Expenditure

567. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide, in tabular form, for the years 2007 to 2010 the total photography costs in his Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4492/15]

568. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide, in tabular form, for the years 1997 to 2007 the total

photography costs in his Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4508/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 567 and 568 together.

Information sought by the Deputy in relation to the period prior to 2004 is not readily available in my Department and would involve a very significant amount of administrative time to compile due to changes to financial systems in the period concerned. However, those details which are available are being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy shortly.

Public Relations Contracts Data

569. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide, in tabular form, a list of all external public relations firms hired by his Department and associated costs incurred from 2007 to 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4542/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department has engaged the services of external public relations companies for a number of specific high profile campaigns including Race Against Waste and climate change awareness. Details of the amounts paid in respect of hiring external public relations companies for such services are set out in the following tables.

Company Name	Contract	Amount Paid (including VAT)	Year
Mary Murphy & Associates	Public relation services for the Race Against Waste Campaign	€953	2007
Brindley Advertising	Draft Register of Electors Awareness Campaign	€ 167,903.	2007
Mary Murphy & Associates	Public relations services for National Climate Change Awareness Campaign	€587,562	2008
First Communication & Advertising	Public relations services for National Climate Changes Awareness Campaign	€ 158,894.28	2008
Mary Murphy & Associates	Public relations services for National Climate Change Awareness Campaign	€283,751	2009
Mary Murphy & Associates	Public relations services for National Climate Change Awareness Campaign	€59,392	2010

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Mary Murphy & Associates	Public relations services for National Climate Change Awareness Campaign	€59,392	2010

Legislative Measures

570. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when he will sign off on legislation or statutory instrument, further to and inclusive of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014, empowering local authorities to deal with tenants engaged in anti-social behaviour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4565/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Part 2 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 introduces a new court procedure for the recovery of possession of local authority dwellings and strengthens the powers of housing authorities to obtain court orders excluding persons engaged in anti-social behaviour from local authority accommodation and estates. The Government's Social Housing Strategy 2020, published in November 2014, includes a commitment to commence Part 2 of the 2014 Act in the first quarter of this year.

National Volunteering Strategy

571. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his Department has developed a national volunteering strategy; when this strategy will be implemented; the content of this strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4585/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): As the Deputy will be aware my Department supports the community and voluntary sector in its contribution to an active, democratic and pluralist society. There is a particular focus on supporting communities that are vulnerable, disadvantaged or under threat through a suite of schemes.

In relation to the specific issue concerned, my Department's policy and strategy is to promote active citizenship and volunteering. In this regard my Department funds a network of twenty one Volunteer Centres, which support volunteering and provide advice to potential volunteers and also to organisations seeking volunteers. They also work with organisations to develop their volunteer management capacity and facilitate Garda vetting requirements of small voluntary organisations.

My Department also provides funding to Volunteer Ireland, the national volunteer development agency and a number of other organisations that promote volunteering. 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.

My Department continues to review its policy on volunteer centres and other community programmes, having regard to the need for a sustainable, nationwide approach to supporting volunteering and active citizenship, and will amend its schemes and strategies, where required, to meet the changing needs of our communities.

Seniors Alert Scheme

572. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his future plans for the seniors alert scheme; if his Department plans to continue administering the scheme; if the value of the grant per alarm will be maintained into the future; the overall budget for 2015 compared to 2012, 2013 and 2014; the number of units provided under the scheme nationwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4645/15]

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.

The maximum grant per beneficiary for equipment is as follows:

- Monitored personal alarms (with pendant) - €250
- Additional pendant/Re-installation - €50

The annual monitoring costs (generally between €60 - €80 per annum) are borne by the beneficiary.

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 included 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 and following this a panel of regional suppliers will be contracted to provide the equipment within specific regional areas.

Monitoring has always been the responsibility of the beneficiary and this is not changing. There are no implications for existing installations in respect of the Pobal tender competition; however, under the new arrangements, Pobal are also providing a facility for beneficiaries to choose from a panel of monitoring companies or to continue with their current monitoring company. In this regard Pobal will also set up a panel of pre-qualified telecare service providers, who provide monitoring services and this was publicly advertised on eTenders on 6 November 2014.

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.

The funding allocated for the Seniors Alert Scheme in 2015 is €2.35m. The following table outlines the expenditure for this scheme and the overall number of beneficiaries from 2012 to 2014.

Year	Expenditure	Beneficiaries
2012	€2.52m	9,142
2013	€2.32m	10,597
2014	€1.7m	7,120

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

573. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update regarding the refurbishment work due to be undertaken in an area (details supplied) in Dublin 17; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4730/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The construction of 35 new social housing units and ancillary works at the location referred to was approved in principle by my Department in March 2014. Dublin City Council has since advanced the planning and tendering of the project and I understand that construction is due to commence later this month.

Election Management System

574. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will clarify the position regarding Northern Ireland holders of Irish passports and entitlements to vote in elections (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4739/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): In order to be able to vote at an election or referendum in Ireland, a person's name must be entered on the register of electors for the constituency in which the elector ordinarily resides in the State. The compilation and maintenance of the register of electors is a matter for each local registration authority (City, County or City and County Council).

Subject to age and residency requirements, a registered elector's citizenship determines the polls at which he or she is entitled to vote. British citizens may vote at Dáil, European Parliament and local elections; EU citizens may vote at European Parliament and local elections; non-

EU citizens may vote at local elections; Irish citizens alone are entitled to vote at Presidential elections and referendums.

Recommendations made in the Fifth Report of the Convention on the Constitution relating to giving citizens resident outside the State and citizens resident in Northern Ireland the right to vote in Presidential elections are being examined in my Department.

Local Authority Staff Data

575. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide in tabular form by local authority such as service area housing, planning and so on, the number of requests for additional staff received; the number of requests granted; the number of new staff commenced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4752/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department received local authority staff sanction applications for 2,394 acting, contract or permanent positions during 2014, of which 1,854 have been approved to date. In addition, 427 sanction requests have been received since the beginning of 2015, of which 227 have been approved. A breakdown of sanction requests by local authority is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible. In this regard, commencement dates for new staff and individual staff assignments are a matter for Chief Executives and I have no direct function in relation to these matters.

Foreshore Licence Applications

576. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is satisfied that a foreshore licence application (details supplied) has remained in the Chief State Solicitor's office for four years without being finalised; the reason for this delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4819/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): My Department is continuing to engage with the Chief State Solicitor's Office concerning matters in relation to the foreshore lease application concerned. There is a challenge by a Third Party to the State's ownership of the foreshore and this challenge relates to an area of foreshore that forms part of the application. I will only be in a position to make a determination on the application following resolution of the ownership issues.

Arts Funding

577. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will take into account the importance of the role of the arts in rural communities when allocating future Leader and-or SICAP funding to community development organisations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4833/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Gov-

ernment (Deputy Ann Phelan): My Department provides supports and funding to communities, urban and rural, which enables them to identify and address issues and priorities for action in their own areas. In this regard, communities regularly identify the arts and creative industries as priorities for action in their areas and indeed many projects of this nature have been funded under the current Leader elements of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2014 and the Local Community Development Programme.

In relation to the role of the arts in rural communities and future funding of arts projects, the forthcoming LEADER elements of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 will provide €250 million in resources to support the sustainable development of rural communities across the country. This funding will be delivered using a community led local development approach based on local development strategies designed and implemented by groups of people from a given sub-regional area or a Local Action Group (LAG). It should be noted that all decisions related to funding specific projects, including those that relate to the arts and creative industries, will be a matter for the Local Action Group and will be made based on the needs and priorities that the Local Action Group have identified in their local development strategy. My Department will have no role to play in the selection of individual projects at local level under this programme.

The Local Community Development Programme (LCDP) is the largest social inclusion intervention, of its kind, in the state. It is a key tool of Government. The successor programme to the LCDP, the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) to be rolled out in April next, will build on the LCDP aims and objectives, including supporting and resourcing disadvantaged communities and marginalised target groups through life-long learning opportunities and interventions which may involve the arts.

As part of the programme of reform of local government, Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) were established in all local authorities and these Committees, comprising public-private socio-economic interests, will have responsibility for local and community development programmes on an area basis, including the role of co-ordinating, managing and overseeing the implementation of SICAP. 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.

Waste Management Expenditure

578. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the steps that have been taken to tackle the increasing cost of waste disposal in County Sligo; and his views on restoring power over waste disposal back to Sligo County Council. [4872/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Section 33 of the Waste Management Act 1996 requires a local authority to collect, or arrange for the collection of, waste within its functional area. However, it also provides that this requirement does not apply where any of the following conditions are met:

- (a) an adequate waste collection service is available,
- (b) the estimated costs of the collection of the waste concerned by the local authority would in the opinion of the authority be unreasonably high, or
- (c) the local authority is satisfied that adequate arrangements for the disposal of the waste

concerned can reasonably be made by the holder of the waste.

I am precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to the performance by the Agency or a local authority, in particular circumstances, of a statutory function vested in it. In this regard, the involvement or otherwise of Sligo County Council in the collection of waste is a matter solely for that local authority.

Private Rented Accommodation Price Controls

579. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if consideration has been given to the introduction of some form of rent control; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4879/15]

581. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will introduce fair rent regulations based for example on changes in the CPI in the January 2012 to December 2013 period in order to address the growing housing crisis where spiralling rental prices are pushing families and persons into emergency homeless services and onto the street. [4890/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 579 and 581 together.

In the third quarter of 2014, rents were 5.6% higher nationally than in the same quarter of 2013, according to the most recent rent index from the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB). Rents for houses were 4.3% higher while apartment rents were 7.3% higher than in the same quarter of 2013. In Dublin, which is seeing the highest rates of increase nationally, overall rents were higher by 9.5% although the rate of annual increase was down slightly.

Fundamentally, the main cause of rising rents is a lack of supply in the market and the recently published Social Housing Strategy 2020 sets out clear, measurable actions and targets to increase the supply of social housing, reform delivery arrangements and meet the housing needs of all households on the housing list. In addition, the implementation of the range of actions under the Government's Construction 2020 Strategy will support increased supply in the wider housing market.

A recent poll for the PRTB found that only 64% of tenants are aware of their rights under the 2004 Act, including in relation to rent increases. Tenants must be given 28 days' notice of new rent and can make an application for dispute resolution to the PRTB where they feel the rent increase is in excess of the market rent. These provisions have effect notwithstanding any provision to the contrary in a lease or tenancy agreement.

The PRTB is developing a new education and communications strategy to address the awareness issue. The first element in the strategy, a 'do you know' campaign, commenced recently in the national press and will be rolled out in citizens information centres, libraries and other public spaces as well as on social media.

The Government is monitoring the rental market closely and is considering policy options in relation to achieving greater rent certainty. The options put forward in the report, Rent Stability in the Private Rented Sector, commissioned by the PRTB and published in Autumn 2014, form part of these considerations.

Rental Accommodation Scheme Data

580. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of units currently under the rental accommodation scheme in County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4880/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Up to the end of December 2014 some 955 households have been transferred by Meath County Council from Rent Supplement to the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) and other social housing supports in County Meath.

Numbers in RAS in each local authority area are subject to continuous fluctuation as contracts end, tenants move on, landlords withdraw from the scheme and new tenancies are allocated or vacancies in contracted units are filled. My Department does not hold information on the number of households accommodated in RAS, in each local authority area, on a day to day basis.

Question No. 581 answered with Question No. 579.

Question No. 582 answered with Question No. 563.

Tribunals of Inquiry Expenditure

583. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide the details of the 24 orders for reduced costs for persons on foot of findings of non-co-operation made as part of a separate process subsequent to the publication of the final report of the Mahon tribunal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4895/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Tribunal of Inquiry into Certain Planning Matters and Payments (the Mahon Tribunal) was established in October 1997 and published its Final Report in March 2012. The work of the Tribunal at present is largely focused on the settlement of the remainder of third-party and court costs incurred during the work of the Tribunal.

In relation to costs applications arising from the publication of the Tribunal's Final Report in March 2012, the Tribunal has to date reduced the cost orders of twenty one parties on the basis that they have not fully co-operated with the Tribunal in its inquiries. The decision of the Tribunal Chairman to reduce costs was made in each case following the receipt of submissions on behalf of the party concerned, both in relation to the issue of their co-operation (which was ruled on by the Tribunal Members) and the percentage of the reduction to be applied in each case. I have been advised by the Mahon Tribunal that the cost reductions applied in relation to these twenty-one parties have ranged from 7½% to 70%, depending on the extent of the level of cooperation.

A further three parties are still involved in this legal costs submission making process. It is expected that a determination by all three Tribunal members will be made in each of these cases regarding the issue of cooperation over the coming weeks. Thereafter, the Tribunal Chairman will determine what, if any, reduction in costs is appropriate in each of these outstanding cases.

Similar to the practice with other previous Tribunals of Inquiry, my Department is involved in recouping the final third-party costs of witnesses to the Mahon Tribunal. This process involves the assessment of claims by legal cost accountants acting on behalf of the State prior to the submission of final claims to my Department. Reductions of costs claimed by witnesses to the Tribunal are determined in the first instance by the Chairman of the Tribunal and subse-

quently by legal cost accountants and my Department has no role in these matters.

None of the parties who were entitled to seek the payment of their legal costs, and who did so, have been refused their entire costs.

Proposed Legislation

584. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to introduce legislation to protect the rights of residents in mobile home parks; if his attention has been drawn to such protections under the Caravans Act in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4921/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The Residential Tenancies Acts 2004 and 2009 apply to every dwelling that is the subject of a tenancy. The definition of “dwelling” in section 4(1) of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 excludes a structure that is not permanently attached to the ground and a vessel and a vehicle (whether mobile or not). In addition, section 3 of the Act provides that the Act does not apply to dwellings let to a person whose entitlement to occupation is for the purpose of a holiday only. The relationship between residents in mobile home parks and the owners of such parks is the subject of a private commercial agreement and is a matter of contract law. I have no function in that regard.

Local Authority Charges Application

585. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the plans by Limerick council to place a charge on local authority tenants to cover the cost of the local property tax; if this policy is to be taken up by other councils; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4927/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Under section 11 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012, local authorities are liable to pay Local Property Tax (LPT) in respect of a dwelling that they own, other than a dwelling that accommodates people with special housing needs

The rents charged by individual housing authorities for their housing stock, under the Housing Acts, is a matter for local authorities. In accordance with the timelines outlined in the Government’s Social Housing Strategy 2020, published in November 2014, the necessary order and regulations to initiate a new rent framework for local authorities will be made in the first quarter of this year.

Question No. 586 answered with Question No. 552.

Air Quality

587. **Deputy Áine Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update on his Department’s plans on implementing the decision of the Government to ban the sale of smoky coal by 2016 (details supplied). [4937/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The ban on the marketing, sale and distribution of bituminous fuel (or ‘smoky coal ban’ as

it is commonly known) was first introduced in Dublin in 1990 in response to severe episodes of winter smog that resulted from the widespread use of smoky coal for residential heating. The ban proved very effective in reducing particulate matter and sulphur dioxide levels in Dublin. As well as bringing air quality levels into compliance with the then EU standards, the ban also had the effect of significantly improving human health in the capital. Research indicates that the ban in Dublin has resulted in over 350 fewer annual deaths. The ban was subsequently extended to other urban areas.

In August 2012, following a public consultation process, new solid fuel regulations (S.I. No. 326 of 2012) were introduced with the aim of ensuring that the smoky coal ban remains fit for purpose in safeguarding air quality by limiting harmful emissions of air pollutants arising from the use of certain residential solid fuels. The ban now applies in 26 urban areas nationwide, including all towns with a population greater than 15,000 people, bringing the ban areas broadly into line with national EPA air quality management zones. While my Department keeps the matter under regular review, I have no immediate plans at present to extend the ban to new towns.

Air quality monitoring by the EPA has shown that air quality is poorer in towns where the smoky coal ban does not apply, although there is evidence that smaller smoky coal ban areas tend to be less effective. The further extension of the ban to smaller towns on an individual basis may not be the most effective solution to addressing the problem of emissions from residential solid fuel use in these areas. Similarly, the border with Northern Ireland would present enforcement challenges if a national ban on smoky coal were unilaterally introduced. However, it is recognised that having different regulations between urban and rural locations is not ideal, as it results in different levels of environmental protection and clean air benefits for citizens in different locations.

Under the auspices of the North South Ministerial Council, and in conjunction with the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, my Department has commissioned a study to inform a discussion on policy options to further address emissions from residential solid fuel use on an all-island basis. The study includes-

- an assessment of the solid fuel market and barriers to the use of cleaner fuels;
- consideration of the role and impacts of biomass (primarily wood and wood-based products) and the links to climate policy; and
- an economic analysis addressing the potential positive and negative effects on the consumer, for example, resulting from potential fuel switching, the availability of smokeless fuels to supply an all-island market and job creation opportunities in the manufacture and supply of smokeless fuels.

A final report is expected to be presented to the North South Ministerial Council in May 2015. It should be noted that no decision has been made at this point regarding a nation-wide ban on the sale of smoky coal.

Local Authority Housing Data

588. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the large number of vacant local authority houses which have been lying idle in south Kildare Athy-Monasterevin area for upwards of six months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4995/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Under Section 58 of the Housing Act 1966, Kildare County Council as housing authority is responsible for the management and maintenance of the local authority social housing stock for the area concerned. My Department assists local authorities in developing and maintaining their housing stock through various funding programmes.

The effective management of vacant and boarded up social housing units is a key area for local authorities in making effective use of their existing social housing stock and for achieving best practice and value for money in housing management. To this end, my Department in 2014 funded a planned programme of returning vacant and boarded up properties to productive use, under which over 2,300 units were remediated nationally at a cost of €26.1 million. Kildare County Council received funding in excess of €500,000 under this programme and returned 49 vacant units back into productive use throughout the county, including 13 units in the Athy area.

For 2015, I will provide further support to local authorities to target 1,000 such units. My Department has recently requested all local authorities, including Kildare County Council, to submit a list of vacant properties for consideration for 2015 funding.

In addition, Kildare County Council also received funding approval of €833,000 under my Department's 2014 Local Authority Construction and Acquisition Programme to purchase and refurbish 10 derelict properties in the Athy area and I understand that work on this project should be concluded in 2015.

Private Rented Accommodation Standards

589. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to introduce legislation to rescind the legislation of the former Minister, John Gormley, banning bedsits, as the Act in question has been a significant contributory factor to the current homeless crisis. [5022/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): Regulations 6, 7 and 8 of the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2008 came into effect for all residential rented accommodation on 1 February 2013. The purpose of Regulation 6 is to ensure that each rental property has exclusive access to its own sanitary facilities and that those facilities are contained within the dwelling unit. Regulation 7 relates to effective heating which can be independently managed by the tenant, while Regulation 8 provides for sole access to adequate facilities for the hygienic storage, preparation and cooking of food.

The 2008 Regulations came into effect generally on 1 February 2009 but allowed a four year phasing-in period to facilitate any improvement works that needed to be carried out in respect of Regulations 6, 7 and 8. Responsibility for their enforcement rests with the local authorities, funded from part of the proceeds of tenancy registration fees collected by the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB). Since 2005, over 149,000 inspections have been carried out by local authorities on properties in the sector.

Census 2011 indicated that there were approximately 4,500 bed-sits across the country – the majority of which are found in Dublin – accounting for 1% of households in the private rented sector. A recent report from Dublin City Council found that the majority of dwellings selected for inspection (which were pre-1963 multi-unit buildings and more likely to be in this category of accommodation) were non-compliant with the regulations on initial inspection.

These inspections were part of an intensified inspection programme funded by my De-

partment that commenced in 2012 and is due to run until March 2015. It specifically targeted concentrations of rented properties which were deemed to be at risk of non-compliance with the legislation. Up to October 2014, 66% of the non-compliant properties had been brought into compliance. Enforcement action continues against the remainder, including legal action in certain cases.

The purpose of the regulations is to provide a basic standard for decent, safe and secure accommodation and I have no plans to rescind the legislation.

Semi-State Bodies Remuneration

590. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a list of all bonus payments to chief executives of commercial semi-State agencies paid in each year from 2011 to 2014 under the remit of his Department; if bonuses were withheld by commercial semi-States during the period; the reasons for withholding of bonuses; the current policy regarding the payment of bonuses in the commercial semi-State sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5201/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Irish Water is the only commercial semi-state Company under the aegis of my Department. The Water Services Act 2013 provided for the establishment of Irish Water as a subsidiary of Bord Gáis Éireann to be formed and registered under the Companies Act. The Managing Director of Irish Water was appointed by the Board of Bord Gáis Éireann, and his remuneration was approved by my predecessor as Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and following consultation with the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. The remuneration of the Managing Director does not provide for a performance related pay award.

Inland Fisheries Stocks

591. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of sea trout and salmon recorded as being caught on the River Maine and Brown Flesk for the year from January to December 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4442/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh): I have been advised by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) that the return of log books by anglers and the process of recording individual catch returns on the database for rivers around the country is ongoing, as is normal at this time each year. Consequently the information sought is not currently available. IFI expect to finalise this process in the next four to five weeks and I have requested that IFI contact the Deputy directly with the information when it is available.

Energy Policy

592. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will report on the review of energy options for the State with the inclusion of nuclear power. [4383/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): I

refer to the reply to Question No 7 of 29 January 2014. The position is unchanged.

Renewable Energy Generation

593. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if his attention has been drawn to the Pathways to Power report January 2015 compiled by the WWF and international marine consultants DNV GL on a fully renewable energy system in Scotland by 2030; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4384/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): I am aware of the report to which the Deputy refers regarding renewable energy in Scotland. Ireland also has ambitious renewable energy targets. Our 2020 target is to have 16% of our energy from renewable sources through meeting 40% of electricity demand, 10% of our transport and 12% of our heat from renewable sources. In 2013, 7.8% of Ireland's overall energy requirement was met by renewable energy, made up of 20.9% of electricity demand, 5.7% of heat demand and 2.8% of transport demand. The overarching objective of the Government's energy policy is to ensure secure, sustainable supplies of competitively priced energy to all consumers.

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 2,200MW. It is estimated that a total of between 3,500MW and 4,000MW 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 EU level of at least 27% is set for improving energy efficiency 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, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by the year 2050.

Broadcasting Sector Regulation

594. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide a definition of public service broadcasting as it applies to the distribution of funds from the television licence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4392/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): Part 7 of the Broadcasting Act 2009 provides for public service broadcasting in Ireland and the provisions relating to the public service broadcasting corporations, RTÉ and TG4, including

their principal objects. These objects provide the companies' statutory mandates and encapsulate national policy in terms of public service broadcasting. They include the specific objective of providing national, free-to-air public service broadcasting services, as well as the provision of a broad range of other additional services that are seen as fundamental to the role of the public service broadcaster. In their pursuit of these objects, the provisions in the Act subject the public service broadcasting corporations to a range of additional requirements.

These statutory objects and requirements clearly set the State-owned public service broadcasters apart from their commercial counterparts who, while bringing choice and competition to the market, are privately owned and funded companies that have entered the market on the basis of a commercial proposition.

In relation to the funding of the public service broadcasters RTÉ and TG4, this is met through a mix of licence fee revenues, Exchequer grant-in-aid and commercial revenues obtained largely from advertising.

The rationale for providing State funding for Public Service Broadcasting is to provide an independent and reliable income flow that allows these corporations to attain their public service objects, while ensuring they can maintain editorial independence. This is especially important in the context of news and current affairs.

A proportion of the television licence fee monies is available to both public and independent broadcasters through the Broadcasting Funding Scheme. The purpose of this Scheme is to encourage the inclusion of additional programming of a particular character in broadcasters programme schedules. The Scheme is open to independent producers and all 'free to air' broadcasters. It is funded by way of a payment of 7% of net licence fee receipts, which is paid to the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) in respect of this Scheme. This amount was increased from 5% to 7% under the Broadcasting Act 2009.

Television Licence Fee Collection

595. **Deputy Brian Walsh** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of persons currently employed in the role of television licence inspector in each county; and the total number of prosecutions for the non-payment of television licence fees in each county in 2014. [4435/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): As per Section 145 of the Broadcasting Act 2009, An Post is empowered to issue, on payment of the appropriate fee, licences for television sets. The day to day administration of licence issuing and inspection is a matter for An Post. I have asked An Post to follow up directly with the Deputy in relation to the matters raised.

Departmental Contracts Data

596. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide, in tabular form, for the years 2007 to 2010, the total photography costs in his Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4489/15]

597. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and

Natural Resources if he will provide, in tabular form, for the years 1997 to 2007, the total photography costs in his Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4505/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 596 and 597 together.

My Department was established in its current configuration in June 2007. The information requested by the Deputy in respect of the period June 2007 to end-2010 is set out in the following table. The additional information requested by the Deputy is not available in my Department.

Company	Date	Cost	Totals
-	-	-	-
Maxwell Photography	15/06/2007	€817.48	-
Maxwell Photography	26/06/2007	€291.41	-
Maxwell Photography	03/07/2007	€533.73	-
Maxwell Photography	05/07/2007	€533.73	-
Maxwell Photography	13/07/2007	€732.36	-
Maxwell Photography	15/07/2007	€677.60	-
Maxwell Photography	06/08/2007	€633.90	-
Maxwell Photography	06/08/2007	€141.88	-
Maxwell Photography	13/08/2007	€90.80	-
Maxwell Photography	19/09/2007	€482.38	-
Maxwell Photography	26/09/2007	€113.50	-
Maxwell Photography	02/10/2007	€319.79	-
Maxwell Photography	17/10/2007	€283.75	-
Maxwell Photography	26/10/2007	€263.04	-
Maxwell Photography	26/10/2007	€206.29	-
Maxwell Photography	31/10/2007	€554.45	-
Maxwell Photography	23/11/2007	€206.29	-
Maxwell Photography	30/11/2007	€234.66	-
Maxwell Photography	12/12/2007	€518.41	-
Maxwell Photography	13/12/2007	€170.00	-
Total 2007	-	-	€7,805.45
Maxwell Photography	10/01/2008	€654.90	-
Maxwell Photography	10/01/2008	€626.52	-
Maxwell Photography	11/01/2008	€490.04	-
Maxwell Photography	18/01/2008	€845.86	-
Maxwell Photography	24/01/2008	€582.82	-
Maxwell Photography	30/01/2008	€90.80	-
Maxwell Photography	01/02/2008	€654.90	-
Maxwell Photography	08/02/2008	€582.82	-
Maxwell Photography	15/02/2008	€206.29	-
Maxwell Photography	27/02/2008	€526.07	-
Maxwell Photography	29/02/2008	€533.73	-

Company	Date	Cost	Totals
Maxwell Photography	15/09/2008	€962.25	-
Maxwell Photography	19/09/2008	€90.75	-
Maxwell Photography	01/10/2008	€461.92	-
Maxwell Photography	20/10/2008	€258.34	-
Maxwell Photography	06/11/2008	€1,105.34	-
Maxwell Photography	26/11/2008	€90.75	-
Maxwell Photography	26/11/2008	€560.84	-
Total for 2008	-	-	€9,324.94
Maxwell Photography	22/01/2009	€949.83	-
Maxwell Photography	08/02/2009	€623.90	-
Maxwell Photography	16/02/2009	€297.98	-
1 Image Photography	27/03/2009	€566.43	-
Maxwell Photography	03/04/2009	€913.68	-
Maxwell Photography	20/04/2009	€623.90	-
Maxwell Photography	08/05/2009	€715.03	-
Maxwell Photography	12/05/2009	€30.38	-
Maxwell Photography	15/05/2009	€532.78	-
Ken Finegan News pics	18/05/2009	€204.30	-
Maxwell Photography	18/05/2009	€212.62	-
Mac Innes Photography Limited	21/05/2009	€158.56	-
Finbarr O'Rourke Photographic	18/06/2009	€522.45	-
Maxwell Photography	25/06/2009	€879.66	-
Maxwell Photography	03/07/2009	€151.88	-
Maxwell Photography	20/07/2009	€715.03	-
Maxwell Photography	21/07/2009	€502.40	-
Jason Clarke Photography	10/08/2009	€182.25	-
Jason Clarke Photography	19/08/2009	€486.00	-
Maxwell Photography	16/10/2009	€623.90	-
Jason Clarke Photography	22/10/2009	€524.88	-
Maxwell Photography	23/11/2009	€30.38	-
Maxwell Photography	23/11/2009	€311.95	-
Total for 2009	-	-	€10,760.17
Fennell Photography	31/03/2010	€185.13	-
Fennell Photography	31/03/2010	€185.16	-
Jason Clarke photography	22/04/2010	€484.00	-
Maxwell Photography	12/05/2010	€121.00	-
Maxwell Photography	15/06/2010	€60.50	-
Jason Clarke Photography	16/06/2010	€484.00	-
Provision Limited	17/06/2010	€964.75	-
Jason Clarke photography	15/07/2010	€484.00	-
Jason Clarke photography	23/09/2010	€484.00	-
Jason Clarke photography	04/10/2010	€484.00	-

Company	Date	Cost	Totals
Maxwell Photography	02/11/2010	€526.35	-
Fennel photography	02/11/2010	€61.71	-
Maxwell Photography	03/11/2010	€526.35	-
Maxwell Photography	04/11/2010	€387.50	-
Jason Clarke photography	02/12/2010	€484.00	-
Total for 2010	-	-	€5,922.45
Total 2007 - 2010	-	-	€33,813.01

Departmental Contracts Data

598. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide, in tabular form, a list of all external public relations firms hired by his Department and associated costs incurred from 2007 to 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4539/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): My Departmental remit includes complex policy areas, oversight of State regulation and service provision across key strategic services such as energy and public broadcasting, and regulation of sectors such as mining and hydrocarbon exploration. Given the technical complexity, economic significance and community interest in these areas, there is a requirement to disseminate information and to address specific issues as they arise.

The Department, therefore, necessarily incurs some expenditure on public relations from time to time. In procuring these services, my Department always seeks to ensure value for money and to keep expenditure to the minimum necessary.

The information which the Deputy requested is outlined in the following table:

Amount spent on public relations

Company	2007	2008	2009	2010
Murray Consultants	-	-	-	€12,206
Q4 PR Limited	-	€98,259	-	-
TOTAL	-	€98,259	-	€12,206

Broadband Service Provision

599. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans for extending high quality broadband to an area (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4646/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) 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. This consultation will close on the 12th February next. The map can be accessed at www.broadband.gov.ie. The areas marked BLUE represent those areas that will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016. The AMBER areas show the target areas for the State intervention. This includes Ardaneanig, Co Kerry.

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 including County Kerry.

It is anticipated that speeds of at least 30Mbps will be also delivered through the Government's intervention and the network will be designed to cater for future increased demand from consumers and business.

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.

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. I anticipate that the first homes and businesses will be connected in 2016 and connections will continue thereafter, with the intention of having all premises connected within a 5 year period.

This complex and ambitious project is a key priority for Government. It aims to conclusively address current connectivity challenges in Ireland.

North-South Interconnector

600. **Deputy Seán Conlan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the reason EirGrid has not consulted the communities affected by the North-South interconnector regarding specific underground route options. [4660/15]

601. **Deputy Seán Conlan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will direct EirGrid to ensure that specific underground route options have been determined and that the communities of counties Monaghan, Cavan and Meath have been consulted before EirGrid makes any fresh application to An Bord Pleanála in respect of the North-South interconnector. [4661/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 600 and 601 together.

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, including the North South (N/S) transmission line project.

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 N/S project and the Grid West and Grid Link projects, 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). I understand that EirGrid, prior to submitting its planning application, will re-engage with communities in Meath, Cavan and Monaghan. I am advised that this will involve opening offices in Navan, Kingscourt and Carrickmacross and that EirGrid also intend to appoint dedicated community liaison officers to ensure all interested stakeholders are engaged with fully.

North-South Interconnector

602. **Deputy Seán Conlan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if the expert panel in reaching their decision on 1 July 2014 were aware of the existence of the Tobin report which was published on his Department's website on 3 July 2014. [4662/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): An Independent Expert Panel (IEP) was established in January 2014 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 (GL) and Grid West (GW) projects. On 2 May 2014, the IEP finalised the Terms of Reference for the studies and published the Terms of Reference on 7 May 2014.

While the North South Transmission Line project (N/S) is outside of the IEP's Terms of Reference, the IEP did agree, on foot of a request by my predecessor, to provide an opinion on the compatibility of the methodologies to be employed on the GL and GW projects with what has already been done on the N/S project up to and including 2 May 2014, being the date that the Panel decided to examine the N/S project.

Having considered and discussed all of the material, the Panel issued a statement on 1 July 2014, indicating its unanimous opinion that, in all material respects, what had already been done on the N/S project is compatible with the methodologies now being employed on the GW and GL projects. While the Panel acknowledged that no two grid infrastructure projects are identical, and that some non-comparabilities are likely to arise when assessing the potential environmental impacts, technical efficacy and cost factors, the Panel was of the opinion that no material differences in the methodologies arise.

It is important to note that the Tobin report referred to in the Question relates specifically to the GW project and is one of several pieces of analysis undertaken at the request of the IEP. In

other words, the Tobin report was undertaken within the methodologies being employed on the GW project in accordance with Terms of Reference set by the IEP.

Alternative Energy Projects

603. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if his Department has considered the use of anaerobic digestion technology as an energy source here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4774/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): Biogas, which is produced by anaerobic digestion, can be utilised to generate electricity, heat or as a transport fuel. In addition, biomethane, produced by removing impurities from biogas, can be used as a substitute for natural gas and can be injected directly into the gas grid.

Electricity and combined heat and power produced from biogas is already supported under the REFIT schemes and biogas and biomethane, when used as a transport fuel, can be used to meet the obligations set under the Biofuel Obligation Scheme.

Academic and industry research suggests that there is a potentially significant role for biogas and biomethane in the heat and transport sectors. However, given the stage of technology development and cost, more detailed economic analysis of the supply chains, from production through to distribution and use, would be helpful to guide future policy. In this regard, the draft Bioenergy Plan proposes that the Bioenergy Steering Group, which has been established to co-ordinate the implementation of the draft Plan, would consider the matter further.

Commission for Energy Regulation

604. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in view of recent strong criticism of the performance of the Commission for Energy Regulation in relation to CER's failure to investigate retail electricity prices for consumers; his views on a fundamental reform of the governing legislation and operating structure of the Commission. [4893/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) is Ireland's independent energy regulator. The CER was established in 1999 and has a wide range of economic, customer protection and safety responsibilities in the energy sector. The CER is also Ireland's economic regulator of the public water and wastewater sector. While the CER is entirely independent in the execution of its statutory duties, I am satisfied that it carries out its statutory duties to the highest standard.

The Green Paper on Energy Policy in Ireland, published in May 2014, sought views on the conduct of a review of the regulatory framework. The responses to that consultation are being considered and will be taken into account in developing our future energy policy. The White Paper on Energy Policy will be published in September and will include a commitment to review the regulatory framework and the CER mandate.

I am acutely aware of the financial challenges faced by families and businesses from high energy prices. While electricity and gas markets are commercial, liberalised, and competitive, and operate within national and European regulatory regimes, I intend to meet with the CER later this week to discuss recent developments.

The CER was assigned the function of market monitoring under the European Commu-

nities (Internal Market in Electricity) Regulation 2010 (S.I. 450 of 2010) under which they are charged with advising me, *inter alia*, on rates of customer switching, disconnection rates, customer complaints and whether the development and operation of competition in the supply of electricity is benefiting final customers. As part of the CER's function under those Regulations, I intend to get its advice on whether customers are benefiting from competition and on the perceived slowness with which energy suppliers have passed wholesale price reductions on to consumers. I will also be seeking CER's advice as to what can be done to address the high proportion of customers that have never switched suppliers.

I welcome the recent announcement of major suppliers to reduce domestic gas and electricity prices and I am encouraging other suppliers to pass savings on to their customers. As with any competitive market, it is hugely important that consumers would shop around to ensure that they get the best price and I would encourage all consumers to either switch supplier or to contact their current supplier to ensure that the best available deal is being provided.

Energy Regulation

605. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the role the Commission on Energy Regulation has in the regulation of oil, petrol and diesel prices in the Irish economy; and his views that the pricing of this crucial area of Ireland's energy supply should be regulated in the interests of Irish households and small businesses. [4894/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The Commission for Energy Regulation's (CER) primary economic responsibilities in energy are to regulate the Irish electricity and natural gas sectors. There is free entry to the Irish oil market, no price control and it is Government policy to encourage price competition and consumer choice. As the Irish oil sector is completely privatised, liberalised and deregulated, the CER has no role in the oil market.

Oil is consumed in two sectors of the economy - in transport and heating. The amount of oil used in the electricity sector is negligible at less than 1%. In terms of gasoline and diesel prices at the pump and home heating prices, the Consumer and Competition Commission (under the aegis of the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation) has a role in ensuring that the market is functioning correctly and that consumers are not being disadvantaged.

Previous investigations and surveys into oil prices, including home heating oil, have been undertaken by the National Consumer Agency (now the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission), and these are available at www.ccpa.ie. The research indicates that the price paid by consumers is largely determined by taxation levels, the internationally traded price of crude oil and the consequent price at which refined product is traded in Europe, along with the level of competition in the retail market.

It is a general Government policy to avoid excessive regulatory burden and allow market forces and competition to determine price insofar as possible. Regulatory intervention in the oil market could only be justified if investigations by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission indicated that consumers were being unfairly treated by oil companies. Notwithstanding that, in my forthcoming consultation on energy affordability, I intend to consult with the public on whether the oil market in Ireland should be regulated by the Commission for Energy Regulation.

Broadband Service Provision

606. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the progress to date in the identification of areas within the constituency of Louth where commercial operators will not be providing broadband; the actions that will be taken by his Department to address this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4935/15]

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 national high-speed coverage map published on the 24th November last shows clearly those areas of the country where public investment will be required. On the same day I also published a public consultation on the mapping process. This consultation which will close on the 12th February next aims to ensure the accuracy of the map and to establish definitively where the State will need to intervene.

The map, which includes lists of every townland on a county-by-county basis, can be accessed at www.broadband.gov.ie. The areas on the map marked Blue will all have access to high speed broadband services of at least 30Mbps from the commercial sector by end of 2016. The areas marked Amber will require the intervention of the State and includes 16 townlands in County Louth.

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 is anticipated that speeds of at least 30Mbps will be also delivered through the Government's intervention and the network will be designed to cater for future increased demand from consumers and business.

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 amongst other things the optimum approach to enable high speed broadband services to be delivered to the premises identified on the Map.

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. It is expected that the physical build of this network will commence from 2016. I am keen to see the implementation begin as quickly as possible and completed at the earliest opportunity.

This complex and ambitious project is a key priority for Government. It aims to conclusively address current connectivity challenges in Ireland.

Energy Prices

607. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if an economic division exists in his Department; if so, the extent to which comparisons continue to be made between energy costs here and those in adjoining jurisdic-

tions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5004/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): My Department has an economic unit which is responsible for the provision of economic analysis across the Department.

Electricity price statistics for Ireland and EU Member States are publicly available. SEAI publishes biannual reports on electricity and gas prices in Ireland. The reports analyse electricity and natural gas price data, as published by Eurostat and collected for Ireland and other European countries under the methodology for the EU Gas and Electricity Price Transparency Directive 90/377/EEC as amended by Council Decision 2007/394/EC. Since 2008, these comparable data for all EU Member States are published every six months on the Eurostat website.

The most recent SEAI biannual price report was published in December 2014 and contains electricity and gas price statistics for the period January to June 2014. The reports present detailed information, analysis and commentary on Ireland's comparative electricity and gas prices and trends in these prices over time, for both EU 28 and Eurozone Member States.

These electricity and gas price reports, going back to 2008, are available on the SEAI website at the following link: http://www.seai.ie/Publications/Statistics_Publications/.

Insofar as oil is concerned, the European Commission maintains a Statistics and Market Observatory, which publishes a weekly Oil Bulletin with consumer prices of petroleum products in EU Member States, including Ireland. The petroleum products reported include gasoline, diesel, gasoil and fuel oil. The Oil Bulletin is designed to improve transparency and strengthen the internal market. It contains tables with consumer prices in all 28 Member States prices, as well as separate euro-area and non-euro area tables and information on prices with and without taxes. It is available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/statistics/weekly-oil-bulletin>.

Broadband Service Provision

608. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide, in tabular form, the number of areas in counties Longford and Westmeath that will require State intervention under the national broadband plan; if work has commenced in providing fibre broadband to these areas; the work that has been undertaken to date in these areas; when fibre broadband is scheduled to be operational in these areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5021/15]

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 national high-speed coverage map which I published on the 24th November last shows clearly those areas of the country where public investment will be required. On the same day I also published a public consultation on the mapping process. This consultation will close on the 12th February next. This consultation process aims to ensure the accuracy of the map and to establish where the State will need to intervene. It will further inform the Government's proposed intervention strategy.

The map and county by county breakdown, which includes lists of every townland on a county-by-county basis, can be accessed at www.broadband.gov.ie. The areas on the map marked Blue will all have access to high speed broadband services of at least 30Mbps from the commercial sector by end of 2016. The areas marked Amber will require the intervention of the

State. It is anticipated that speeds of at least 30Mbps will be also delivered through the Government's intervention and the network will be designed to cater for future increased demand from consumers and business.

The map allows all member 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 of 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 including Counties Longford and Westmeath.

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 inter alia, the optimum approach to enable high speed broadband services to be delivered to the premises identified on the Map. 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. It is expected that the physical build of this network will commence from 2016. I am keen to see the implementation begin as quickly as possible and completed at the earliest opportunity.

This complex and ambitious project is a key priority for Government. It aims to conclusively address current connectivity challenges in Ireland.

Semi-State Bodies Remuneration

609. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide a list of all bonus payments made to chief executives of commercial semi-State agencies under the remit of his Department in each year from 2011 to 2014; if bonuses were withheld by commercial semi-States during the period; the reasons for withholding of bonuses; the current policy regarding the payment of bonuses in the commercial semi-State sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5200/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): All directions issued by the Government in relation to remuneration of CEOs in Semi State Companies have been brought to the attention of the relevant State Companies. While the information sought by the Deputy regarding payments made to CEOs in Semi State Companies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each company, I will ask the bodies to provide this information directly to the Deputy.

Roads Maintenance

610. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be provided in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4805/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities (in this case Kerry County Council) 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.

If this is a road not taken in charge by Kerry County Council, the maintenance and improvement of such a road, is in the first instance, a matter for the relevant landowner. The Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) does provide for funding for such roads and laneways. However, 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 is 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.

Kerry County Council is being allocated €12.8m in funding by my Department as part of the 2015 regional and local road grant allocations.

It is also important to reiterate that the role of Exchequer grants for regional and local roads is to supplement Councils in their own resources spending in this area.

National Car Test

611. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the national car test cannot be facilitated at present in an area (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4873/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Under the Road Safety Authority Act 2006 (Conferral of Functions) Order 2006 (S.I. No. 477 of 2006), the Road Safety Authority (RSA) has responsibility for the delivery of the National Car Test. The RSA has overall responsibility for the operation, oversight, development, quality assurance and delivery of vehicle testing arrangements. Therefore, I have referred the Deputy's Question to the RSA for direct reply. Please advise my Office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Motor Insurance Coverage

612. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the rising rates of car insurance premiums due to the increase in the number of road traffic collisions, fatalities and injury claims; and if he will report on the interventions that will be put in place to address the urgent road safety issue, which is having a knock-on effect on citizens through huge hikes in car insurance premiums. [4884/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have no role in the regulation of motor insurance. That role falls to the Central Bank of Ireland as the financial services regulator.

Motor insurance is a private matter between the insurer and the insured and the cost varies according to the provider depending on how they insurer perceives the risk the applicant presents.

I note that, based on Central Statistic Office figures, there has been an increase in the cost of motor insurance in the 2013-2014 period. However, I am confident that the implementation of the Actions in the Road Safety Strategy will, over time, lead to a reduction in road traffic collisions, fatalities and injuries which will be of assistance in reducing the cost of motor insurance.

Roadworthiness Testing

613. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the owner of a vehicle (details supplied) has been asked to present for a DOE test only a few months after their previous test, as the vehicle was never off the road; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4929/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The operation and management of the Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness testing is statutorily, a function of the Road Safety Authority. I have forwarded the Deputy's Question to the RSA for direct reply. If he has not received a response within the next ten days, he should contact my office.

Aer Lingus Sale

614. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views confirming that the current 25.1% State shareholding in Aer Lingus prevents the airline from disposing of any of the Heathrow slots without the Government's agreement; the way these slots will be protected in the context of the Government disposing of its 25.1% stake; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4688/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to my response to priority question 124 in which I addressed this issue.

Road Projects Status

615. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will retain and reallocate the funding for the N86 Tralee to Dingle road in County Kerry following the resolution of the current impasse on the vital continuation of improvements as Kerry County Council has justified the economic need for this development and is pursuing the process to ensure the further approval to construct this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4320/15]

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 such as the N86 is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Road Projects

616. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of plans for increasing the M7 to three lanes at Naas, County Kildare; his views that such an investment would improve the value of the National Asset Management Agency's site at Millennium Park, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4325/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects such as the Naas Bypass widening is a matter in the first instance for the NRA in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Owing to the national financial position, there have been very large reductions in roads expenditure in recent years. The reality is that the available funds do not match the amount of work that needs to be done to maintain existing road infrastructure or address demands for new road improvement projects. Funding in 2008 was €2.3 billion while funding this year is around €730 million for the national, regional and local road network. Unfortunately, the current financial realities are such that the budgets proposed for my Department for 2016 and 2017 indicate that capital funding will continue to be very tight, and my ability to progress new projects and PPPs is limited.

I acknowledge it is important to restore over time capital funding for the transport sector to ensure that infrastructure is maintained but, as of now, I am not in a position to give a commitment in regard to funding of the projects in question, although I acknowledge their national and local importance.

Taxi Regulations

617. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a report on the number of taxi licence holders who have returned the S15 form, which relates to the inheritance of a taxi licence in the event of the death of the licence holder, to the National Transport Authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4380/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including the processing of the S15 form relating to the death of a licence holder, 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 10 working days.

Road Projects

618. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the National Roads Authority has received a traffic management plan from Meath County Council for Slane; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4397/15]

619. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the National Roads Authority has submitted a report to him regarding the Slane bypass; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4398/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 618 and 619 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for the NRA in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Noting this I have referred the Deputy's question regarding a traffic management plan for Slane to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days. I can confirm that I have not received a report from the NRA regard-

ing the Slane Bypass.

Aviation Policy

620. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the finalisation of the national aviation policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4445/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A new National Aviation Policy is currently being finalised. This will address all aspects of aviation policy from safety, security and economic regulation to airline and airports policy. I intend to publish the Policy shortly.

Public Service Obligation Services

621. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost to the Exchequer of the PSO route between County Kerry and Dublin for 2012, 2013 and 2014. [4446/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Details of the total subvention paid in respect of the PSO route between Kerry and Dublin for the years 2012-2014 are as follows:

Year	Subvention - €
2012	3,917,964
2013	4,021,261
2014	4,061,373

Departmental Expenditure

622. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide, in tabular form, for the years 2007 to 2010 the total photography costs in his Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4501/15]

623. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide, in tabular form, for the years 1997 to 2007 the total photography costs relating to his Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4517/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 622 and 623 together.

Details of photography costs incurred by the Department since 2008 are published on its website <http://dtas.ie/corporate/english/photography-costs>.

Details prior to 2008 are not readily available or comparable due to a number of changes in Departmental functions and structures since 1997.

It is Department policy that photography costs are kept to a minimum and services are provided in-house by staff where possible.

Public Relations Contracts Data

624. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide, in tabular form, a list of all external public relations firms hired by his Department and associated costs incurred from 2007 to 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4551/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Details of expenditure on external services, including public relations, are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.dttas.ie/corporate/English/expenditure-external-services>

. Rail Services

625. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding Iarnród Éireann's plans to improve audio announcements on the DART; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4557/15]

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.

Sports Capital Programme Data

626. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide, in tabular form, the number of all weather pitches that have received funding over the past five years from the sports capital grant programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4561/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): The information sought by the Deputy is not available and to compile it would require a disproportionate amount of time. Details of all allocations under the Sports capital programme are available on the Department's website www.dttas.ie.

Sports Capital Programme Administration

627. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the points system used in deciding on sports capital grants schemes and the placing on the list of successful and unsuccessful applicants; the rationale behind this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4562/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): All applications received under the 2014 Sports Capital Programme were assessed by officials in the Department. Every application was assessed by one official and reviewed by another official.

Applications were first checked to ensure eligibility and eligible applications were then initially scored by officials against five criteria:

- 1 Likelihood of increasing participation and/or improving performance and sharing of facilities
- 2 Level of socio-economic disadvantage in the area
- 3 Technical merits of the project

4 Level of own funding available

5 Level of Sports Capital Programme funding received in the past.

These criteria were designed to give higher scores to applications that will increase participation, where facilities will be shared, that were from designated disadvantaged areas, that had not received substantial funding in the past and that were ready to be progressed as soon as possible.

In deciding the final allocations of funding to projects within each county Minister Varadkar and I had regard to a number of factors, including:

- The performance of each application during the assessment process;
- Ensuring a geographical spread of projects within each county;
- Ensuring an appropriate spread of projects between rural and urban areas within each county; and
- Ensuring that there was a spread of projects among different sports.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

628. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the frequency that the sports capital grant applicants are sanctioned for moneys that have been returned to his Department by groups who are unable to fulfil their obligations in carrying out their developments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4563/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): As grants are only paid to applicants on submission of paid invoices for the work involved, the question of money being returned in the circumstances described by the Deputy would not normally arise. A proportion of the grants allocated to applicants are never drawn down because the proposed work does not proceed. However, this factor is allowed for when the Department is deciding what total level of grants can be allocated within the available multi-annual funding.

Traffic Management

629. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a breakdown of heavy goods vehicle and non-heavy goods vehicle traffic in respect of each of the following toll roads for the years 2010-2014 inclusive: M50 barrier-free-toll, M1 Gormanston - Monasterboice, M3 Clonee - Kells, M4 Kilcock - Enfield - Kinnegad, M7 - M8 Portlaoise - Castletown-Portlaoise - Cullahill, N6 Galway - Ballinasloe, N8 Rathcormac - Fermoy bypass, Limerick Tunnel and East Link Bridge, Dublin Port Tunnel. [4603/15]

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 operation of individual road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

I will, therefore, refer 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.

Rail Services

630. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the Irish Rail proposal to connect Dublin Airport to Cork and Galway by rail; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4736/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for the implementation and development of infrastructure projects in the Greater Dublin Area. Under this remit the NTA has commissioned the Fingal/North Dublin Transport Study to examine all existing proposals (heavy rail, metro, Luas extensions) as well as other options for a rail-based transport solution to meet the needs of the Swords/Dublin Airport to City Centre corridor in the long term.

In relation to the recent comments from the CEO of Iarnród Éireann regarding a new rail link to Dublin airport, I have stated that of the six options currently under consideration by the NTA, two of these are heavy rail links. In addition, I have acknowledged that it is right that Iarnród Éireann should plan for the future.

However, I have also noted that their proposal is looking beyond the timeframe of the current reviews. I have not yet made a decision regarding a link between the city centre and Dublin airport, yet alone beyond that timeframe.

Public Transport Provision

631. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update regarding proposals to provide a new public transport connection between Dublin Airport and Dublin city centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4737/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Fingal/North Dublin study currently underway is an independent study commissioned by the National Transport Authority (NTA) to identify the optimum long term public transport solution to the meet the needs of the corridor. Phase One of the Study was published on 8th December and six short-listed project options were identified for further detailed evaluation. A public consultation process was also launched at that time. Under the next stage, the six shortlisted projects will be subject to further analysis assessing cost, engineering, environmental and usage forecasts. This will form the basis for the selection of the recommended preferred option.

The NTA has indicated that they expect to have the output of this next phase of the Study available to me at the end of March. That output will then require careful consideration in tandem with other analyses being undertaken, including the updating of a business case for the DART Underground project and the work being carried out in the preparation of a draft Transport Strategy for the GDA. I anticipate that I will finalise this review by mid-year, in conjunction with the development of the transport strategy for the region.

Departmental Agencies Staff Data

632. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide, in tabular form, the details of agency staff costs incurred by his Department or its aegis in 2012, 2013 and 2014, including the breakdown of the staff roles involved and the area within his Department's aegis where they are contracted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4744/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Details of agency staff supplied to my Department are contained in the following tables.

Sport Capital Division

Year	Amount	Agency	Service provided
2012	€4,189	IRE Recruitment Services	Data input for the Sports Capital programme

Finance division

Year	Amount	Agency	Service provided
2012	185,000	Hays Recruitment	Accountant services for Finance Division
2013	188,000	Hays Recruitment	Accountant services for Finance Division
2014	196,000	Hays Recruitment	Accountant services for Finance Division

In addition to the employment agency staff above, the Department also has a number of contractors engaged.

The cost of agency staff in State Agencies is a matter for the agencies themselves. I will forward the Question to the agencies under the remit of my Department for direct reply to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply within 10 working days please contact my private office.

Road Projects

633. **Deputy Tom Barry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to reactivate the M20 Cork-Limerick motorway project; and if there is work being done on this project at present. [4767/15]

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 is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Because of the national financial position, there have been very large reductions in roads expenditure over the past number of years. The reality is that the available funds do not match the amount of work which could be undertaken. For this reason it has not been possible to progress a range of worthwhile projects and the main focus has to be on the maintenance and repair of roads and this will remain the position in the coming years. The scope for progressing new major road improvement projects will be very much dependent on the availability of funding in the future as the economy recovers further.

In 2011 my predecessor indicated to the NRA that it should withdraw its application to An Bord Pleanála for the M20 Cork to Limerick route. I understand Minister Varadkar was concerned that to proceed any further with the scheme to build the M20 would have exposed the NRA to significant costs arising from a consequent requirement to purchase the CPO'd land within a limited timeframe. This would have had to be done without the reasonable prospect of proceeding to the construction stage quickly.

Given continuing budget constraints and the need to focus on road maintenance and renewal, I do not currently plan to review the decision.

Public Transport Provision

634. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the tendering out process of Dublin Bus orbital routes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4364/15]

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.

Sports Capital Programme Eligibility

635. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the sports grant scheme is available to a scout troop; if not, the equivalent capital grant system that is in place to assist the work of a local troop with capital projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4827/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): Under the Sports Capital Programme funding is available for projects that are sporting in nature. In making an application, any organisation would need to make clear the sporting content of their proposed project. While some SCP applications from scout troops have been successful in receiving funding, other applications from scout troops have been considered to have little or no sporting content.

Tourism Promotion

636. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason CIE Tours International is selling tours to the UK from the US; the way the company is managing its foreign exchange risk if it is accepting bookings in US dollars and is paying suppliers in UK sterling; if this is a profitable business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4846/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The issue raised is a matter for Córas Iompair Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to CIÉ for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Air Navigation Orders

637. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the criteria or conditions on which munitions permits are granted to civilian aircraft carrying foreign troops under Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973. [4904/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The primary purpose of the regulations in the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973 is the safety of the aircraft and the persons on board. The regulations govern the carriage of munitions or dangerous goods, not the carriage of persons on board.

Before granting any permit, my Department consults with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in relation to foreign policy issues, the Department of Justice and Equality in relation to security issues and the Irish Aviation Authority, where necessary, in relation to aviation safety issues. A copy of each application is also forwarded to the Department of Defence

for information.

Road Improvement Schemes

638. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the condition of the surface of a street (details supplied) in County Kerry will be improved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4924/15]

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 is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects, including the surface of the N86 through Annascaul, Co. Kerry is a matter in the first instance for the NRA in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Safety

639. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the timeframe involved for the consultation process regarding the requirements for testing classic and vintage vehicles; his views on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4926/15]

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.

As part of its review of this issue, the RSA conducted a public consultation process which ran for 4 weeks from 15 October to 14 November 2014 and attracted in the region of 2,000 submissions.

My Department recently received the RSA's review findings and proposals and these will be examined by my officials with a view to submitting recommendations to me which I will then consider.

Sports Events

640. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he continues to liaise with the various national and international sporting bodies with a view to attracting events like the Rugby World Cup to this country on an all-island basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5005/15]

641. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he continues to make contact with various promoters in the sporting sector worldwide with a view to encouraging location of major events here with obvious economic benefit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5006/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 640 and 641 together.

The hosting of major sports events can deliver additional international visits and helps to put Ireland onto travel itineraries as a holiday destination. The hosting last year of the Giro D'Italia on an all-island basis showed that the island of Ireland can successfully host such events and the FAI and Dublin City Council also recently won their bid to host part of the UEFA Euro 2020 tournament at the Aviva stadium.

Accordingly, I am supportive of the ongoing efforts of the Tourism Agencies and the National Governing Bodies of Sport, where appropriate in conjunction with their colleagues in Northern Ireland, to attract international events, subject, of course, to an assessment of the costs/benefits involved.

As the Deputy is aware, the Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, recently announced our support for the preparation of a joint bid for the Rugby World Cup by the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU). The IRFU, with support of both Governments, has commenced work on compiling the bid. An Overview Group will be appointed in the near future to oversee progress and guide the bid preparation.

Aer Lingus Sale

642. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he continues to recognise the pivotal importance of the need to ensure continued and reliable air service in and out of this island nation in the context of any ongoing discussions in respect of the future of Aer Lingus; if he continues to accept the need to provide for future connectivity requirements in this context; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5007/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The travelling public and the economy as a whole have benefitted greatly from the very good competition and connectivity that is currently provided in the market for air services in and out of Ireland. Maintaining competition and connectivity are key issues for the Government and will be given careful attention in any consideration of the future of the State's shareholding in Aer Lingus.

Transport Infrastructure

643. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which road, rail, air and sea transport facilities continue to be measured in the context of overall integration with particular reference to a maximisation of efficiency and availability of services throughout the country thereby maximising the economic benefit to the economy in general; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5008/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department and I constantly monitor our national transport facilities to ensure that, given the resources available, they are achieving their greatest potential. An integrated and co-ordinated transport system is an important consideration when it comes to future decisions on transport investment. In making decisions as to future expenditure, my Department has been active to ensure that a co-ordinated approach is taken and that we do not look at land, maritime or aviation transport in isolation from each other.

A new Statement of Strategy for my Department will be published shortly. The Strategy will set out the actions being taken or planned to deliver an integrated transport network across all transport modes. The strategy will also set out performance indicators to measure the achievements of these actions.

Public Transport Provision

644. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which community rail services are available to the majority of towns and villages throughout the country, the residents of which might expect to commute to larger centres with obvious greater job opportunities on a daily basis; if the existing services are adequately tailored to meet their needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5009/15]

645. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which rail and bus services in County Kildare are co-ordinated in such a way as to meet in full the requirements of the commuters in the various towns and villages throughout the county; the extent to which his Department continues to be appraised in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5010/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 644 and 645 together.

I refer the Deputy to my reply to Priority Question No.127 and Oral Question 130 which I answered earlier.

I have also referred the Deputy's question to the National Transport Authority (NTA) for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Road Projects Status

646. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he expects to be in a position to provide the necessary funding for the commencement of works in respect of the upgrade of the Naas Newbridge bypass, Newhall interchange, Sallins bypass and Osberstown interchange; if he has received the requisite documentation from Kildare County Council or the National Roads Authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5011/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding regarding the national roads programme. The construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads, such as the Naas Bypass widening, is a matter for the National Roads Authority under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007, in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. The assessment and prioritisation of individual national road projects is a matter for the NRA within its capital budget and in accordance with section 19 of the Roads Act.

With regard to the Osberstown interchange and the Sallins bypass the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources, supplemented by State road grants. The selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is, therefore, a matter for the local authority.

Owing to the national financial position, there have been very large reductions in roads expenditure in recent years. The reality is that the available funds do not match the amount of work that needs to be done to maintain existing road infrastructure or address demands for new road improvement projects. Funding in 2008 was €2.3 billion while funding this year is around €730 million for the national, regional and local road network. Unfortunately, the current financial realities are such that the budgets proposed for my Department for 2016 and 2017 indicate that capital funding will continue to be very tight, and my ability to progress new projects and PPPs is limited.

I acknowledge it is important to restore over time capital funding for the transport sector to ensure that infrastructure is maintained but, as of now, I am not in a position to give a commitment in regard to funding of the projects in question, although I acknowledge their national and local importance.

Tourism Employment

647. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he expects employment in the tourism sector to increase worldwide in the future; the likely economic benefit to this country arising therefrom; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5012/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In Ireland, the most recent CSO figures show that employment in the key accommodation and food services sector has increased by over 18,000 between the third quarter of 2011 and the third quarter of 2014. Overall employment in the tourism sector is estimated to be in the region of 200,000 jobs.

A new Tourism Policy Statement entitled “People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025” was presented to Cabinet by me on 14th January last and was approved by the Government. The Policy Statement, which will be published shortly, includes a goal to increase employment in the tourism sector by 50,000 jobs between now and 2025.

Figures published by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation indicate that there were 1.138 billion international tourist arrivals in 2014, and the UNWTO predicts that this will increase to 1.8 billion by 2030. The UNWTO also estimates that 1 in every 11 jobs worldwide is supported by travel and tourism.

While the focus of Tourism Ireland’s overseas marketing activity will continue to be on the consumer segments that are most likely to visit Ireland, obviously the economic situation in Ireland’s key overseas tourism markets will always be a significant factor in our own tourism performance. It is reasonable to expect that growth in employment will reflect overall improved economic performance and hence an increase in outward tourism from any particular country.

Regional Airports

648. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is satisfied that adequate focus remains on the need to ensure the future of regional airports in the context of a modern economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5013/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As reflected in the Draft National Aviation Policy for Ireland, currently being finalised in my Department, the importance of regional airports currently lies with the level of international connectivity that they bring to a region for tourism and business. That connectivity is seen as being a significant contributory factor underpinning Ireland’s economic recovery and sustainable development into the future.

As a result, Exchequer supports for the four regional airports (Donegal, IWA Knock, Kerry and Waterford), where appropriate and in accordance with the 2014 EU Guidelines on State aid to airports and airlines, will continue under the Regional Airports Programme 2015 – 2019. The draft Programme is currently with the EU Commission for approval. Following approval, the Programme should provide a level of certainty around support over a multi-annual period, where regional airports can provide a business plan leading to stand-alone commercial viability within a 10-year period. It is envisaged that future funding will ultimately be provided from a mix of local authority, local business and Exchequer sources.

Tourism Promotion

649. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which Ireland is marketed abroad as a business conference centre and having particular regard to the economic need of all the regions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5014/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The issues raised by the Deputy are operational matters for Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. I have referred the Deputy's Question to the tourism agencies for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Regional Airports

650. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which he sees opportunities to advance the possible development of air transport hubs around some of our regional airports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5015/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I understand that the Deputy is referring to development plans to increase passenger numbers at the four regional airports of Donegal, Kerry, IWA Knock and Waterford. Any plans to increase services or to introduce new routes are entirely commercial in nature and are a matter for the board and management of the individual airports. I believe that there are opportunities, particularly in the context of growing inbound passengers, and would encourage the airports to use them for the benefit of both the business and tourism sectors in their regions.

In recognition of the contribution that these airports make to balanced regional development, particularly having regard to our economic recovery, the Government has decided to continue providing Exchequer support under a new Regional Airports Programme 2015 - 2019 which is currently with the European Commission for approval.

Road Safety

651. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which well-known and identifiable accident black spots remain an issue throughout the country; the extent to which efforts are being made to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5016/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Local authorities are responsible for mapping and collating available collision data on regional and local roads. Where analysis shows that engineering measures may assist in reducing the collision risk at a particular location then any local authority which is not fully self funding in terms of roads (under the new Local Property Tax regime) may apply to my Department for funding under the Low Cost Safety programme. Each year monies are made available to local authorities for such works with priority given to works that are considered to be most effective in reducing collisions.

Collision data for national roads is mapped and collated by the NRA. Accordingly I am forwarding your query to the NRA for direct reply in respect of national roads. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Inland Waterways Development

652. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in view of the proposed Waterways Ireland canal by-laws, when she will make a final decision

on the proposed new by-laws; if she will ensure that such proposals are not overly restrictive and punitive for users of the waterways and that user concerns and their submissions are taken cognisance of in her final decision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4481/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Waterways Ireland proposes to make new bye-laws which are intended to enhance its ability to manage the canals for the benefit of all canal users. There are over 14,000 registered boat owners on the seven waterways managed by Waterways Ireland. These seven waterways make a vital contribution to tourism, attracting visitors from around Ireland and from abroad.

The proposed new bye-laws are intended to enhance the ability of Waterways Ireland to manage the Royal and Grand Canals and the Barrow Navigation for the benefit of all canal users. Investment by Waterways Ireland in these waterways has made them more attractive for boat owners and is helping to develop them as a vibrant recreational and tourist amenity for all waterway users. In this context, it is now necessary to update the bye-laws to ensure that the rules governing use of the waterways are fit for purpose and best meet the needs of all waterway users.

I am aware that concerns have been raised regarding certain aspects of the proposed bye-laws. Waterways Ireland undertook a public consultation process in relation to the proposed bye-laws in 2014. I am advised that the main stakeholders, including the Inland Waterway Association of Ireland, the Heritage Boat Association, the Royal Canal Amenity Group and the Irish Boat Rental Association, were contacted individually and invited to meet with the Chief Executive and the senior management team of Waterways Ireland prior to submitting their views. The current permit holders on the three waterways, including traditional canal users and canal dwellers, received individual written notices and were given the opportunity to make their views known.

I understand that over 2,000 submissions were made in the course of the public consultation process and that Waterways Ireland has concluded its analysis of the submissions received. A summary of the consultation process and of the submissions received is available on the Waterways Ireland website at <http://www.waterwaysireland.org/public-consultation>.

My officials are currently liaising with Waterways Ireland with a view to finalising draft bye-laws which will be referred to me, as Minister, with recommendations for consideration and final decision. It is my intention to afford interested Deputies and Senators an opportunity to discuss the proposals with me prior to making a final decision on the draft bye-laws.

Departmental Expenditure

653. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide, in tabular form, for the years 2007 to 2010 the total photography costs in her Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4487/15]

654. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide, in tabular form, for the years 1997 to 2007 the total photography costs in her Department, including a list of which photographers were booked, the photographers used and breakdown of costs associated with each occasion that a photographer was used; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4503/15]

655. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if

she will provide, in tabular form, a list of all external public relations firms hired by her Department and associated costs incurred from 2007 to 2010; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4537/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 653 to 655, inclusive, together.

As my Department was established on 2nd June 2011, the information sought by the Deputy is not available for the earlier periods in question.

Special Protection Areas Designation

656. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to the plight of farmers whose lands have been designated as special protection areas for the hen harrier; her views that this designation renders these lands worthless, in areas of rural Ireland where people can least afford these restrictions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4571/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am aware of the concerns of farmers about the designation of Special Protection Areas for Hen Harrier and I have met with representatives of farmers to discuss these matters.

In relation to land value, farmers are able to draw down financial supports under the Basic Payment Scheme on farmed land in these SPAs and I understand that they will also be afforded priority entrance to the new GLAS Scheme, in which Hen Harrier is a Priority Environmental Asset.

An Inter-Departmental Steering Group has been established to draw up a Threat Response Plan for the Hen Harrier. This Steering Group is examining all of the issues at hand, including forestry consents, planning permissions for wind farms, and financial supports for farmers under Pillar 1 and Pillar 2, with a view to determining the appropriate course of further action.

Commemorative Events

657. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the studies available within her Department to identify Famine graves as they are dispersed across the country; if a register of these graves exists; if local authorities maintain any records in relation to Famine graves; her plans to mark any as yet unmarked Famine plots; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4594/15]

658. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will designate a specific day, for example the second Sunday of May, in each year as the national Famine commemoration day; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4595/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 657 and 658 together.

As Chair of the National Famine Commemoration Committee, I am responsible for ensuring that appropriate arrangements are in place to commemorate the Great Irish Famine. While there has been a degree of continuity in the format and scheduling of the National Famine Commemoration ceremony, the date of the ceremony, as well as the artistic and cultural elements, may change from year to year. In 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013 and 2014, it proved possible to sched-

ule the Commemoration on the second Sunday in May. However, it has not been considered desirable to fix the same date each year, given the circumstances that may arise regarding the arrangements, including the choice of site and the availability of the lead person to officiate at the ceremony in any particular year.

With regard to famine graves, consideration is being given to arrangements to identify such graves and to place plaques at sites that have significant links to the Great Irish Famine, including unmarked graves, as well as docklands and workhouse sites. An authentication and verification process would be required to ensure that only nominated sites with authentic links to that period of history are marked. This will include consultation with local authorities but, of course, any records held by local authorities would be a matter for the authorities themselves.

Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme Payments

659. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when a person (details supplied) in County Longford will be issued with a compensation payment under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4611/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): An application for compensation under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme has been received by my Department from the individual referred to in the Deputy's Question. I am advised that a payment of €1,500 in respect of Year 1 of 15 (2012), a payment of €1,518 in respect of Year 2 of 15 (2013) and a payment of €1,521 in respect of Year 3 of 15 (2014) have been made to this applicant. In addition, a once-off payment of €500 has been made to the applicant in respect of the signing of a legal agreement under this scheme. The assessment of applicants for payment in respect of 2015 will begin shortly in my Department.

State Properties

660. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht further to Parliamentary Question No. 257 of 15 January 2015, if any property is owned by Údarás na Gaeltachta in the location; if so, if the details of the purchase and maintenance costs of any such property, including greenfield sites, will be provided; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4618/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): I understand from Údarás na Gaeltachta that the organisation owns one site of approximately 2.9 acres in An Clochán, Co. Kerry which was purchased in May 1981. The purchase price was £8,200 (approximately €10,412). Údarás has confirmed that there have not been any maintenance costs with regard to the site.

Departmental Funding

661. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the funding she plans to provide to counties Longford and Westmeath for the preservation of protected structures; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4623/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department is currently considering the funding available for the protection and conservation of

the built heritage in 2015 in the context of its overall allocation and I will publish details of funding schemes for 2015 as soon as these are finalised.

As the Deputy can appreciate, the scope for funding for the conservation of the built heritage is currently constrained by the significant reduction in the public finances. Nonetheless, I keep the competing priorities regarding the preservation and enhancement of the national heritage under on-going review having regard to the resources available to my Department. Funding for the protection of built heritage will continue to be provided by my Department in 2015 via a number of schemes, which will be either directly administered or delivered through local authorities, such as Longford and Westmeath County Councils, or through the Heritage Council. It is primarily a matter for the Heritage Council to decide how its funding should be allocated across the range of research, education and conservation programmes it supports in 2015 and future years having regard to competing priorities for limited resources.

National Monuments

662. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the position regarding the proposal to purchase the Moat of Granard (details supplied); when this project will proceed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4624/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question No. 638 of 30 September 2014. My Department and Longford County Council have agreed to a joint approach to the potential acquisition of this national monument for the State. My Department has requested the Office of Public Works to enter negotiations with the landowner to establish if agreement could be reached on the proposal. These negotiations must, however, be conducted within the confines of the Office of Public Works' site valuation and the limited capital funding available to my Department and the Council for the proposed acquisition.

Hedge Cutting Season

663. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on extending the hedge cutting season from 1 March 2015 to 15 March 2015 as much of the ground was impassable during the recent wet weather; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4809/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Section 40 of the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2012 prohibits the cutting, grubbing, burning or destruction of vegetation, with certain strict exemptions, from 1 March to 31 August during the nesting and breeding season for birds and wildlife. Vegetation such as hedgerows and scrub is important as wildlife habitat and needs to be managed in the interests of both farming and biodiversity. Accordingly, a review of the current legislation was initiated to ensure that it remains both effective and balanced.

Stakeholders had been seeking an opportunity to input their views on the operation of section 40 of the Acts and I announced, last year, a consultation process which provided that opportunity with a deadline for the receipt of submissions by 9 January 2015.

All submissions received by this deadline are to be considered as part of any future decision in relation to the operation of section 40 of the Acts and any change to the section would require amending legislation. Therefore, without prejudging the outcome of the review, it would not be

possible, in the timeframe available, to amend this section before 1 March 2015.

Special Areas of Conservation Management

664. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide a copy of any appropriate assessment and opinion issued by the National Parks and Wildlife Service on the plan to dredge the Akeragh River mouth, County Kerry, and remove the sand from the designated dune/beach complex; or if same is not available the reason this Natura 2000 site damage has not been halted by NPWS staff. [4830/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that the works referred to in the Deputy's Question have been undertaken by Kerry County Council within the Akeragh, Banna and Barrow Harbour candidate special area of conservation and within the Tralee Bay Complex special protection area. Under regulation 27(2) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, any public authority having or exercising functions, including consent functions, which may have implications for or effects on nature conservation is required to exercise those functions in compliance with and, as appropriate, so as to secure compliance with, the requirements of the EU Habitats Directive, the EU Birds Directive and the 2011 Regulations.

Regulation 42(1-2) of the 2011 Regulations sets out the requirement for any public authority to carry out a screening for appropriate assessment of any plan or project that the authority wishes to undertake and which is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site as a candidate special area of conservation or special protection area. This screening, in view of the best scientific knowledge and of the conservation objectives of the site, should assess if the plan or project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, is likely to have a significant effect on the site.

My Department has previously engaged with the local authority in relation to works on the site and a further meeting has been scheduled.

On my behalf, my Department has also recently written to Kerry County Council, in accordance with the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, in relation to this matter.

Arts Plan

665. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans for amending, or revisiting the Arts Act 2003; if she will review its operation in consultation with the arts community; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4850/15]

666. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will examine the way the French, Danish or Scottish models in terms of the way they promote and foster the arts in those countries, and specifically, the way they support individual artists; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4851/15]

667. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her Department's policy on supporting the arts in rural areas; her plans to improve this support and provide more resources to artists in rural areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4852/15]

668. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her

views on ways to improve the link between local authorities and the arts and provide local authorities more of a say in the development of national policy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4853/15]

671. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans for reform of the arts sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4856/15]

672. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on the role of the arts in the health service; if she will provide an update on the experience of same to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4857/15]

674. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide a report on the role of the Arts Council; her views on the sustainability of same; the changes that have been made to the Arts Council since 2008; the reaction artists have had to any such changes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4859/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 665 to 668, inclusive, and 671, 672 and 674 together.

My Department is committed to implementing the priorities set out in the Programme for Government and the Statement of Government Priorities 2014 – 2016, published by the Taoiseach and Tánaiste on 11 July 2014. This forms the underlying basis of the work of my Department for the remainder of this Government's term of office. The Government's policy on the arts is to promote and strengthen the arts in all its forms, to increase access to and participation in the arts, and to make the arts an integral and valued part of our national life.

Primary responsibility for the promotion of the arts at all levels throughout the country is devolved to the Arts Council. The Arts Council is the main channel of State current expenditure on the arts and it will receive almost €59 million in 2015. Although the Council is funded by my Department, it is statutorily independent in its funding decisions as provided by the Arts Act 2003. I believe that the Arts Council serves the arts and this country well and the Council has my full confidence. I do not envisage any fundamental change in the institutional arrangements which encompass the arm's length approach of Arts Council distribution of Exchequer funding to the arts. Expertise on the arts resides in the Arts Council and it is therefore best placed to identify and fund excellence in the arts. I have, therefore, no plans to review the Arts Act.

I understand that the Arts Council is examining new, more informative and transparent ways of presenting information on the combined local authority and Arts Council funding of the arts. The Council's revamped website gives details of all funding distributed to local authorities and to arts organisations in each local authority area.

In November 2014, I met with local authority arts officers to discuss their concerns and their ideas for the future. Following on from that, I am looking for ways which would improve communication and linkages between the arts officers and other stakeholder bodies.

I am also committed to ensuring the delivery of the country's first ever national cultural policy – Culture 2025- which will set out the high level aims and policies of the Government in the period up until 2025. I will shortly be initiating a wide-scale consultation process to ensure that all stakeholders and members of the public can make their views known.

Artsandhealth.ie is an independent, national arts and health website developed by the Waterford Healing Arts Trust and Create. The website providing a focal point and resource for the field of arts and health in Ireland via resource documents, project case studies, a directory of contacts, perspectives on a range of issues and current news.

The Deputy may be interested to know that following publication of Inspiring Prospects - Arts Council Strategic Review in June 2014, the Arts Council is now embarking on a process to develop a new strategy for the arts in 2015 which includes approaches around purposeful engagement with members of the public. Further details are available on the Arts Council website.

Arts Funding

669. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if, in view of improving budgetary conditions, she will increase funding to the arts in the coming years; if there is long-term plan to do so; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4854/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the allocation to the Arts Council in 2015, as set out in the recently published Revised Estimates Volume, was €58.893 million, an increase on the provisional outturn of €56.668 million for 2014. Allocations to the Council in 2016 and beyond will be determined by the emerging budgetary situation and estimates processes at the time. However, as I have done consistently since my appointment as Minister, I will continue to make the argument that the arts must benefit as the economy continues to improve.

Arts in Education Charter

670. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will review the arts and education charter as artists have suggested it is weak and under used; her views on strengthening the role of the artists in such a charter; if she will conduct such a review in consultation with the arts community; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4855/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Arts in Education Charter was launched in January 2013 and both the Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Jan O'Sullivan, and I are very committed to its implementation. A High Level Implementation Group, chaired by Professor John Coolahan, Professor Emeritus at NUI Maynooth, was established to oversee the implementation of the Arts in Education Charter. The Group meets regularly and, to date, has presented three progress reports in accordance with the Charter.

Arts-in-education involves skilled, professional artists of all disciplines working for and with schools in the making, receiving and interpreting of a wider range of arts experiences. Accordingly, the Group has been proactive in meeting many organisations from both the arts and education sectors. The process of holding meetings with stakeholders, as well as receiving submissions from key agencies, is in accordance with the provisions under Dialogue and Partnership in the Charter and is ongoing. In addition, progress is being made by the Group on a number of initiatives, including increasing the number of artists in residence in colleges of education and developing a portal as a key communications and information channel for both the education and arts sectors.

Questions Nos. 671 and 672 answered with Question No. 665.

Arts Promotion

673. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on the role of Culture Ireland promoting the arts internationally; her further views on the sustainability of Culture Ireland; the changes that have been made to the role of Culture Ireland since 2008; the reaction Irish artists here and abroad have had to any such changes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4858/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Culture Ireland Division of my Department promotes Irish arts worldwide, creating and supporting opportunities for Irish artists and companies to present and promote their work at strategic international festivals and venues. I am satisfied that this promotional work continues to make a significant impact through Culture Ireland's regular grant rounds and showcase programme. Since its establishment in 2005, Culture Ireland has promoted and supported over 7,500 Irish cultural projects and events worldwide, ranging across music, theatre, dance, literature, film, visual art and architecture. This support has created significant goodwill and influence for Ireland and has helped to contribute to the strength of Ireland's reputation for creative excellence.

In line with a critical review of Culture Ireland undertaken as part of the Public Service Reform Plan in 2012, the functions of Culture Ireland were fully merged into my Department and an Expert Advisory Committee was established to oversee the programme, with representation from a range of bodies with a shared interest in Ireland's international promotion, including the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Tourism Ireland, the IDA and the Ireland Funds, as well as representation from the arts community. The Expert Advisory Committee works with my Department to ensure that the Culture Ireland Programme continues to promote Ireland's artists and gain further opportunities for them worldwide, while maximising the potential of Ireland's creative talent as a motivator for business and tourism interests for Ireland.

Culture Ireland continues to provide critical financial support for Irish artists for events and activities abroad. For many individual artists and companies, it is their international work which helps make a life in the arts sustainable. International presenters also value the support of Culture Ireland, both in terms of showcasing and introduction to new Irish talent, as well as in providing financial support to assist artists' travel.

In 2014, Culture Ireland supported over 300 events, which reached audiences of over 3 million and a further 6 million television viewers. During last year also, Culture Ireland focused on a number of special initiatives, including in particular the hugely successful *Ceiliuradh* concert in the Royal Albert Hall, which formed part of the State visit by President Higgins to Great Britain. This role in delivering high profile international programmes is a key element of the work of Culture Ireland.

In 2015, I have maintained the level of Culture Ireland's funding, which is a measure of the importance I place on its work, and I am confident that it will continue to operate effectively on the international promotion of Irish arts into the future.

Question No. 674 answered with Question No. 665.

Arts Funding

675. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the sources of funding available to a festival (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4919/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Government's policy on the arts is to promote and strengthen the arts in all its forms, to increase

access to and participation in the arts, and to make the arts an integral and valued part of our national life. Primary responsibility for the promotion and support of the arts at all levels throughout the country is devolved to the Arts Council. The Council, although funded by my Department, is statutorily independent in its day-to-day operations, and specifically in its funding decisions. Information of funding available to festivals, including that from the Arts Council's Festival and Events Scheme, is provided at <http://www.artscouncil.ie/available-funding/>. I understand that festivals are also supported by my colleague, Mr Paschal Donohoe, TD, Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, through Fáilte Ireland. Further information in this regard is available at www.failteireland.ie.

Support may also be provided by the local authority through its arts office. Further information is available on the website of Kerry Council County at <http://www.kerrycoco.ie/en/allservices/arts/forms/thefile,6703,en.pdf>.

Cultural Policy

676. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the way the name for the new centre at Teach an Phiarsigh in Ros Muc, Connemara, County Galway, was chosen; and if it would be more appropriate to have a name which reflects the historical links of the new centre. [4999/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): The development of a visitor centre at Teach an Phiarsaigh is being progressed by a steering group comprising a number of key stakeholders, including Údarás na Gaeltachta, Galway County Council, the Office of Public Works, Fáilte Ireland and my own Department. While the working title for the project to date has been Cultúrlann Chonamara at Teach an Phiarsaigh, an official name has not yet been chosen for the proposed centre. I can assure the Deputy that full consideration will be given in due course to all relevant factors in choosing an appropriate name for the building. Clearly, the Government's decision to include it as one of the flagship capital developments for the 2016 Commemorations will be important in this regard. The management by the OPW of the national monument at Teach an Phiarsaigh and the presentation of different aspects of Pearse's history and legacy will also be of importance in choosing an appropriate name for the centre.