

## Written Answers.

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**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 9, inclusive, answered orally.*

### **Community Employment Schemes Places**

10. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her plans on increasing the numbers on the RSS, Tús, community employment and CSP schemes this year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4712/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Department of Social Protection plans to spend over €1 billion on supports for jobseekers under various community, activation and education schemes in 2015. Looking at individual schemes, I am pleased to confirm for the Deputy that:

- The number of participants on the rural social scheme (RSS) is expected to remain at around 2,600 in 2015 at a cost of some €45 million;
- The projections for Tús - the community work placement initiative - are that at least 7,500 jobseekers will be maintained on the scheme during 2015 at a cost of some €113 million; and
- The community services programme (CSP) has an allocation of over €45 million in 2015 which will enable employment levels to be maintained at around 2,800, as was the case in recent years.

The Deputy should also note that it is planned to engage 25,300 jobseekers in community employment (CE) in 2015, with a budget of €373m. This includes the additional 2,000 places approved in 2014. In addition, it is expected that Gateway - the work placement initiative with county and city councils - will reach the 3,000 level towards the middle of this year. Finally, the number of places available to support employers under the JobsPlus initiative is doubled to 6,000 jobs.

An important initiative - the back to work family dividend - was announced in Budget 2015. It is designed to incentivise jobseekers, lone parents and employment programme participants who have children to take up full time employment or self-employment. If a person qualifies for the scheme they will get a weekly payment for up to 2 years - the equivalent of any Increases for Qualified Children that were being paid (up to a maximum of 4 children) for the first year in employment. Half that amount will be paid weekly for the second year.

The allocation for 2015 ensures that new initiatives, like back to work family dividend, can be introduced while fully maintaining schemes such as the RSS, Tús, the CSP and CE.

## **One-Parent Family Payments**

11. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the rationale behind the upcoming changes to the one-parent family payment which will see single parents, often looking after a disabled child or parent, losing up to €86 per week; the additional income supports that will be available to these parents who are unable to work because they are full-time carers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4969/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** There are currently 69,884 lone parents being supported by the one-parent family payment (OFP) scheme at an estimated cost to my Department of approximately €607 million in 2015. When introducing the OFP scheme age change reforms in 2012, a special provision was included for recipients who are claiming the domiciliary care allowance (DCA) payment for a disabled child aged under 16 years. This special provision ensures that lone parents who care for a disabled child will continue to receive support until that child reaches the age of 16 years and can apply for the disability allowance (DA) in their own right. As a result of this provision 1,650 lone parents will not be affected by the next phase of the OFP age reforms, which is due to take effect in July.

It is expected that on foot of the final phase of OFP age reforms, another cohort of OFP recipients who are in receipt of the half-rate carer's allowance, as they are caring for another person (i.e. an adult or a child aged 16 years or over), may be affected by the July changes.

I am therefore working with my officials in examining the position of these lone parents and the potential impact of the July change. I hope to conclude our deliberations on this aspect of the change in the coming weeks.

In this regard, Deputies will recall that before Christmas, I reviewed the reduction to the income disregard for lone parents due to be introduced last January and in January 2016. In order to maintain the existing incentive for employment, I brought forward provisions to maintain the level of disregard at 2014 levels.

## **Household Benefits Scheme**

12. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will restore the fee electricity and gas units, the fuel allowance and the length of the heating period to the level obtaining in 2012; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4985/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Department will spend approximately €227 million this year on the household benefits package for approximately 415,000 customers. It will also spend more than €195 million on the fuel allowance. The fuel allowance of €20 is paid for 26 weeks from October to April. There have been no reductions in the fuel allowance since 2012. The electricity and gas allowance is currently €35 per month. There have been no reductions to the electricity and gas allowance in recent budgets. In 2013, I aligned the electricity and gas allowance with the cheapest available market rate for 1,800 units of electricity. Previously the rate had been based on the price of one supplier. This provided a saving to the Department but allowed customers to obtain savings by switching to cheaper companies. Customers can now switch companies without the loss of any credit that may have built up, which was not possible under the old system.

The overall concern of the Government in Budget 2015 and previous Budgets has been to protect the primary social welfare rates. 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. Maintaining the rate of the State pension and other core payments is critical in protecting people from poverty. The savings generated in recent years by reductions in secondary benefits were essential to maintain core weekly payments. I have no plans at this time to increase the household benefits package. Any decision to increase the package would have budgetary consequences and would have to be considered in the context of budget negotiations. As the Deputy is aware, in Budget 2015, we partially restored the Christmas Bonus and increased the Living Alone Allowance.

### **Pension Provisions**

13. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the action she will take in relation to the situation for Tara Mines pensioners (details supplied); her views on amending section 50 of the Pensions Act 1990, as amended by section 35 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2012, in order to offer more protection to employees against unfair reductions in their pension entitlements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4983/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** I am aware that many pension schemes are encountering funding difficulties at this time. A number of changes have been made to the Pensions Act to help both the employers and the trustees of defined benefit pension schemes respond to funding difficulties. These changes provide for the sharing of the risk of scheme underfunding across all scheme members. The issue of how these changes might be applied is a matter for the trustees of a scheme. I hope that these measures will help in resolving the funding difficulties in the Tara Mines schemes. You will appreciate it that it would not be appropriate for me to engage with or comment on developments relating to a particular pension schemes as these are a matter for the management of the company and the trustees of the pension schemes.

The trustees of a defined benefit pension scheme are required under trust law to act in the best interests of all scheme members. I do not plan to bring forward amendments to this section of the Pensions Act at this time but I will continue to monitor the application of this section on an ongoing basis.

### **Youth Guarantee**

14. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on the SYNDICAT Confederation of European Trade Unions' report, the Youth Guarantee in Europe, and the contents of the country-specific section examining this State, in particular; the changes she will make to the Youth Guarantee to ensure that it does not perpetuate the growing crisis of precarious work; her views on SIPTU's assessment that the quality of the type of contract offered to young persons under the Youth Guarantee is not satisfactory, as well as the remuneration received and that the frequent use of internships increases the risk of job displacement. [4908/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Government's primary strategy to tackle youth unemployment is to create the environment for a strong economic recovery by promoting competitiveness and productivity. Economic recovery will underpin jobs growth and the availability of productive employment for young people. This strategy has been succeeding, with an increase of over 80,000 in employment over the last 2 years. This increase has not been in "precarious" or temporary jobs. While the proportion of Irish

workers who are on temporary contracts rose slightly during the recession, reaching 10.5% in 2011, it has since fallen back to the pre-recession level of 9.5%, and remains significantly below the EU average of 14.4%. Within this framework, the Youth Guarantee sets a medium-term objective of ensuring that young people receive an offer of employment within four months of becoming unemployed.

The main plank of the guarantee is assistance to young people in finding and securing sustainable jobs. For those who do not find employment, additional offers are provided for. Most such offers (over 70%) are in further education or training. Others are in community-based employment programmes such as CE, Gateway and Tús, or through the JobsPlus employment subsidy for private employment. Both the job-search assistance, and the range of programmes I have just mentioned, are the subject of favourable comment by SIPTU in the report quoted by the Deputy, which is largely positive about Ireland's implementation of the Youth Guarantee.

None of these programmes involve offers of employment on "unsatisfactory" contracts. Finally, the Youth Developmental Internship, First Steps, is an additional measure to provide youth with work experience. This will offer young jobseekers aged between 18 and 25 the opportunity to gain valuable work experience and training with the help of dedicated assistance from Department of Social Protection case officers. The target is to provide up to 1,500 work experience placements of six or nine months' duration for young jobseekers during 2015.

Yesterday, I launched a call seeking expressions of interest from organisations right across the private, public, voluntary and community sectors inviting them to participate as a sponsor in the First Steps programme. The objective is to provide participants with an opportunity to learn and develop basic work and social skills while on a placement in a real work situation in organisations in the private, public, voluntary and community sectors.

Each placement will last for six or nine months during which time the participants will spend four days per week with a host employer and will be expected to use the fifth day of each week to undertake other activities related to job-search.

Youth unemployment here has fallen from a crisis peak of 31% to about 23% now, and the number of young people who are long-term unemployed has fallen from 36,000 to *circa* 17,000.

### **Community Services Programme**

**15. Deputy David Stanton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 71 of 14 January 2015, the benefits for participants and communities of the community services programme funded by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4971/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** Funding of over €45m is being provided for the Community Services Programme (CSP) in 2015. This will support some 400 contracts that are in place with service providers nationally. The CSP is designed to address locally identified gaps in the provision of services to communities and to utilise the potential of community assets and resources that are already in place to support of delivery of services and to improve community well-being. Funding is provided to support the employment of staff to deliver the service. Unlike a number of other schemes and initiatives operated by the Department, there is no direct relationship with the employees of the contractors or service providers. Contractors must also demonstrate an ability to generate and maintain income from the services delivered. The objective of the Programme is to promote social and economic development through harnessing voluntary commitment and using the potential of

community assets. The benefits derive from services that are considered necessary and which would not otherwise be provided and which support the provision of real and positive employment opportunities.

Some 2,800 people are directly supported in employment through the CSP across the various not-for-profit organisations nationally, with an estimated 300-500 additional people supported indirectly from other activities of contractors funded from their own resources and income generation.

### **Rent Supplement Scheme Payments**

16. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she or her Department, in view of the homelessness crisis, have given consideration to the raising of rent supplement levels; her plans for legislation to prevent landlords from being able to refuse to accept rent allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4967/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** There are currently approximately 71,500 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €298 million for 2015. I am acutely aware of the difficulties people are experiencing in maintaining affordable rented accommodation in areas of high demand in the current market, including those in receipt of rent supplement in the Dublin area. The Department is finalising a review of the maximum rent limits and raising rent limits may not be the solution to the problem as it is likely to add to further rental inflation and could impact, not alone on rent supplement recipients, but also on many lower income workers, their families and students. I am keeping the matter under close review. The Department has put measures in place to ensure that the housing needs of rent supplement customers throughout the country who are at risk of homelessness are addressed by providing for increased flexibility within the administration of the scheme. The Interim Tenancy Sustainment Protocol introduced in the Dublin region during 2014, has provided support for over 340 families to date through providing increased rent supplement payments.

The fact that approximately 71,500 people are currently in receipt of rent supplement shows that a significant number of landlords are accommodating applicants of the scheme. The Department is aware that some leading property websites ask potential landlords to indicate whether they will accept rent supplement tenancies. It is the Department's expressed position that this practice should cease and the matter has been raised with the leading websites. Officials in the Department are also engaging with those in the Department of Justice and Equality in relation to this matter.

It open to any person who has been refused a private tenancy and who feels discriminated against on the basis of his or her gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Travelling community to refer a discrimination complaint to the Equality Tribunal under the Equal Status Acts.

### **Rent Supplement Scheme Payments**

17. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on whether the current maximum limit of €520 for a single person's rent allowance is adequate to obtain private rented accommodation, in view of the increases in rents and the issue regarding the lack of properties accepting rent allowance from potential tenants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4770/15]



**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** There are currently approximately 71,500 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €298 million for 2015. I am acutely aware of the difficulties people are experiencing in maintaining affordable rented accommodation in areas of high demand in the current market, including single persons in receipt of rent supplement in Dublin. The Department is finalising a review of the maximum rent limits and raising rent limits may not be the solution to the problem as it is likely to add to further rental inflation and could impact, not alone on rent supplement recipients, but also on lower income workers and students. I am keeping the matter under close review. The Department has measures in place to ensure that the housing needs of rent supplement customers at risk of homelessness are addressed by providing for increased flexibility within the administration of the rent supplement scheme. Notices circulated to Community Welfare Service staff reminding them of their discretionary power to award, on a case by case basis, a supplement for rental purposes in such circumstances in July and December 2014. A National Framework has also been developed to ensure that supports continue to be provided in a consistent manner. The Interim Tenancy Sustainment Protocol introduced in the Dublin region during 2014, has provided support for some 340 families to date. In addition, over 60 single persons were dealt with directly by Threshold and referred to the Department as appropriate.

The Department is aware that some leading property websites ask potential landlords to indicate whether they will accept rent supplement tenancies. It is the Department's expressed position that this practice should cease and the matter was raised with the leading websites. The Department is also engaging with the Department of Justice and Equality regarding this matter.

It is open to any person who has been refused a private tenancy and who feels discriminated against on the basis of the nine grounds set out in the equality legislation to refer a discrimination complaint to the Equality Tribunal under the Equal Status Acts.

### **Jobseeker's Allowance Payments**

18. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will review the policy of reduced jobseeker's allowance to those under 25 years of age in view of the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 16 who is living alone following the death of their sole guardian yet still has had a maximum of €100 applied to their jobseeker's allowance. [4976/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The rate in question does not arise out of consideration of benefit and privilege rules. Rather, adjusted rates for younger jobseeker's allowance recipients were first introduced in 2009. Budget 2014 further extended the adjusted rates of jobseeker's allowance to recipients under 26 years of age. This is a targeted measure aimed at protecting young people from welfare dependency. It aims to incentivise young jobseeker's allowance recipients to avail of education and training opportunities. If a jobseeker in receipt of the reduced jobseeker's allowance rate participates on an education or training programme they will receive a higher weekly payment of €160. There are no plans to change provision in this area. In the case of the person concerned the rate of payment of his jobseeker's allowance has been calculated correctly. Given his difficult personal circumstances, the request to backdate his claim has been approved. The arrears due to him are included in his payment dated 3 February 2015. In order to assist him in his efforts to seek employment, Departmental officers have liaised with both the person concerned himself and a local community activist who has been heavily involved in supporting him. An appointment with the Local Employment Services has been arranged for 19 February 2015 in this regard.

## **Social Welfare Schemes Expenditure**

19. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the proposed changes being considered in the administration of the RSS, Tús and community employment schemes; the cost of administration per participant for each of the three schemes; the cost of supervision per participant for each of the three schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4711/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Department will spend more than €1 billion in 2015 on work, training and education places in support of jobseekers getting back to work. The rural social scheme (RSS), Tús and community employment (CE) continue to play an important role in this regard and the Department is continuing to work with implementing and sponsor bodies to improve the delivery of the schemes. These improvements include:

- Ensuring that eligibility criteria across activation and other schemes is complementary and is in line with the policy objectives set out in Pathways to Work;
- Streamlining the way in which jobseekers can access schemes, including referrals from case officers where a work placements is deemed to be beneficial to a jobseeker in getting back to work or accessing training; and
- Allowing transfer between schemes to better meet the needs of particular jobseekers.

The delivery cost of RSS will be of the order of €2.3 m in implementing body costs and €4.7m in supervision and monitoring costs. Delivery costs of Tús will be of the order of €8.3m in implementing body costs and €15m in supervision, monitoring and participant development costs. The delivery costs for CE will be €56m for supervision and €13.5m for materials which covers the operating costs of the scheme. An additional cost of €6m is approved for the development of CE participants for employment.

The estimated costs of the schemes reflect a number of factors that are not directly comparable. For example, services delivered by implementing bodies for Tús include recruitment costs relating to the full turnover of participants numbers annually plus costs of supporting jobseekers requiring further development or training before placement. On the other hand, CE schemes have a significant training component with is not a part of Tús or the RSS, while the RSS has a higher level of input costs in terms of material costs, compliance and travel costs. The Department will arrange to provide the Deputy with detailed costs of each of the schemes shortly.

I want to reassure the Deputy that resources for the delivery of the schemes in 2015 will remain close to the 2014 levels.

## **Mortgage Interest Relief Application**

20. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will review cases whereby homeowners were refused mortgage relief on the basis that the mortgage was unsustainable or that a lending institution was unlikely to facilitate a restructuring of repayments in cases where this has subsequently been proven to be incorrect; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4974/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Government's strategy to assist those in mortgage difficulty is built around the following measures, as recommended in the 2011 Interdepartmental Mortgage Arrears Working Group (Keane Group), in

four main distinct areas:

- Lenders providing sustainable and durable resolution options to their borrower;
- A social housing response sponsored by local authorities;
- Comprehensive advice to borrowers; and
- Personal Insolvency Reform.

In the context of the overall strategy, the continued payment of mortgage interest supplement, the purpose of which was to provide short-term support to meet mortgage interest repayments, does little to assist recipients in improving the long term difficulty in addressing their mortgage problem. Discontinuation of entitlement to the mortgage interest supplement scheme came into effect for all new applicants from 1 January 2014. Customers availing of this support prior to 1st January 2014 have been able to retain entitlement to the scheme up to 1st January 2018. There are currently approximately 5,880 recipients.

It is expected that during the four year period, the existing customers will no longer require this support through sustainable solutions being put in place with their lenders, securing employment or exit strategies sponsored by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. I am satisfied that the most appropriate way in which customers experiencing mortgage difficulties can be supported is through engagement with their lender.

### **Child Benefit Payments**

21. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on recent IMF commentary on the issues surrounding child benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4913/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** Child Benefit is a universal payment made to families with children. It assists those families with cost associated with raising children. It is paid to almost 1.2 million children in over 600,000 families. The estimated expenditure in 2014 was €1.9 billion. I am aware that in its Concluding Statement of the 2015 Article IV Mission the IMF suggests that further means-testing of benefits, or taxation of universal benefits, could generate significant savings while ensuring those on lower incomes are protected. Child Benefit is of crucial importance to families, particularly middle-income families who would stand to lose money if a means tested or taxable system were introduced. Furthermore, means testing or taxing child benefit could raise significant legislative, operational, IT and incentive issues.

A crucial element of a strong and sustainable welfare system is the principle that everybody contributes, and that the system is there in turn to support those contributors at key stages in their lives. Child Benefit is one of the few universal payments in the welfare system in that regard, and its universality has an important role to play in maintaining the sustainability of the system.

We are committed to delivering a new deal on living standards to ensure that economic recovery is felt by low and middle income working families. Thus, Budget 2015 increased child benefit by €5 per month, at a cost of €72 million. Other measures supporting families include the introduction of the Back to Work Family Dividend and increased expenditure on school meals.



## **Child Poverty**

22. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the measures her Department has taken since the start of 2015, and the measures envisaged in the short and long-term, to deal with rising child poverty here in view of recent statistics from the Central Statistics Office. [4984/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The CSO SILC release for 2013 shows that 11.7 per cent of children were in consistent poverty, a slight but not statistically significant increase on the 2012 rate. On the other hand, the at-risk-of-poverty for children decreased from 18.8 per cent in 2012 to 17.9 per cent in 2013. A key driver in reducing income poverty among children is social transfers, which reduce the at-risk-of-poverty rate for children from 45.5% to 17.9%, thereby lifting a quarter of all children out of poverty. This equates to a poverty reduction effect of 60.7% in 2013, an increase on the 2012, when the poverty reduction effect was 50.1 per cent. Ireland is amongst the best performing member states in the EU in this regard. In Budget 2015, the Government committed a further €96 million for children, including an increase of €5 per month in child benefit. €72 million extra will be spent on child benefit in 2015 with €22 million provided for expenditure on the new Back to Work Family Dividend and an additional €2 million on the School Meals Programme.

Government policy around tackling poverty for children and families has recently been articulated in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The national policy framework for children & young people 2014-2020, which adopted a child-specific social target for poverty reduction aiming to lift 70,000 children out of poverty by 2020, equivalent to a reduction of two-thirds on the 2011 rate. To achieve this target the Government is implementing a multidimensional approach to tackling child poverty, building on the lifecycle approach in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, 2007-2016 and informed by the European Commission's Recommendation on 'Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage'.

A key way to tackle child poverty is to get parents back to work. Through Pathways to Work and the Action Plan on Jobs, the Government is putting people into real jobs. The Family Income Supplement and new Back to Work Family Dividend will support parents, especially those furthest from the labour market, to take up and remain in employment.

## **Civil Registration Legislation**

23. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 41 of 22 January 2015 regarding the commencement of the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014, the progress to date on the implementation plan to put into operation the provisions of the Act; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4972/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014 was enacted on 4 December 2014. The Act contains a wide range of provisions and these will be commenced on a step by step basis. The provisions of the Act will be put into operation on the basis of an implementation plan involving both procedural and system changes.

It is intended that this work will be progressed as quickly as possible in order that the various provisions of the Act can be commenced.

## **Jobseeker's Allowance Data**

24. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of jobseekers under 25 years of age in County Tipperary who to date have been offered and completed a personal progression plan as part of the Youth Guarantee; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4714/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** From 1 January 2014 to 12 January 2015, a total of 129 jobseekers in County Tipperary completed a Personal Progression Plan while under 25 years of age on the date of completion. The completion of a Personal Progression Plan is a unique feature of the activation and case management service within the INTREO model. This figure does not, therefore, include Jobseekers under 25 years of age who availed of employment supports outside the INTREO service model, for example, through the Local Employment Services.

### **Departmental Staff**

25. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she is satisfied that front-line clerical officers in social welfare offices are qualified to make emergency needs payments to the most vulnerable in society; the specific training given to staff who are responsible for making decisions to assist them in acting as community welfare officers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4771/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, the Department of Social Protection may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off and unforeseen expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. The Government has provided €27.9 million for the scheme in 2015. An ENP is a means tested payment payable at the discretion of the officers administering the scheme taking into account the requirements of the legislation and all the relevant circumstances of the case in order to ensure that the payments target those most in need of assistance.

Clerical officers do not make decisions in relation to applications for ENPs. The assessment of need and the decision on any such claim is reserved to a Designated Person, formerly referred to as Community Welfare Officer. In some offices, clerical officers provide administrative support to the Designated Person in the processing of applications for ENPs.

This administrative support would include:

- providing customers with information at reception or in response to telephone queries.
- providing customers with application packs to facilitate claim.
- preparation of applicant file.
- verification of applicant income on the Department's payment system.
- liaising with the Designated Person where the customer indicates an urgent response is required.

### **JobPath Implementation**

26. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the progress made in implementing JobPath; the contracts on the service provision that have been com-

pleted; the level of ongoing engagement between her Department and the service provider; the measurement criteria for the operation of JobPath in terms of achieving the stated aims and objectives; if JobPath will be available in all areas of the country; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4982/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** JobPath is a new programme of employment activation intended to support people, who are long-term unemployed (over 12 months) or most at risk of becoming long term unemployed, to secure and sustain full-time paid employment or self-employment. The Department is currently in the process of finalising contracts with the aim of commencing the programme in mid-2015. The Department is working closely with the companies on the development of the detailed operational procedures required to implement JobPath. The key objectives and measures of JobPath include increasing the number of JobPath clients moving into employment; increasing the duration of sustained periods of employment; reducing the average duration of unemployment and the level of JobPath client satisfaction with the service. When fully operational, JobPath will be available nationwide.

### **One-Parent Family Payments**

27. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will restore the income disregard for lone parents at work from €75 per week in 2015 to €146.50 per week, the level pertaining before budget 2012; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4987/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** Budget 2012 introduced a number of reforms to the one-parent family payment (OFP) scheme. These included the planned phased reduction of the OFP scheme earnings disregard from €146.50 per week to €60 per week between January, 2012, and January, 2016, respectively. The OFP scheme income disregard was last reduced from €110 per week to €90 per week on 1 January, 2014. As part of the measures introduced in the Social Welfare and Pensions (No. 2) Act, 2014, I got the agreement of Government that the planned reduction to €75 would not go ahead and the disregard has been maintained at €90 per week.

The further reductions to the income disregard that were scheduled to occur in January 2015, and in January, 2016, will now not take place. This will benefit approximately 28,000 working OFP recipients in 2015.

The cost of the retention of the OFP disregard at €90 per week is €8 million in 2015 and €10 million in later years. There are currently no plans to further alter these provisions

However, the introduction of the Back to Work Family Dividend as announced in Budget 2015 provides a further incentive for jobseekers and OFP recipients to avail of employment opportunities by allowing them to retain their increase for a qualified child when they leave welfare for employment or self-employment. The combination of the introduction of the Back to Work Family Dividend and the retention of the OFP earnings disregard at €90 per week are both positive and welcome as they improve the financial incentive for lone parents to avail of employment opportunities.

### **National Internship Scheme Data**

28. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views

on the use of JobBridge interns by companies which are running job clubs on behalf of her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4977/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Department funds the operation of 50 Job Clubs located around the State. These Job Clubs are operated by 46 independent contractors who are, in the main, not for profit Local Development Companies (LDCs) and community based organisations. As Job Club providers are private limited companies they are entitled to be treated like any other employer for the purposes of JobBridge. In that regard, like any employer organisation, the remit of staff in Job Clubs can extend to assisting and training of new recruits (including interns) as well as providing actual work experience. Regarding the appropriateness of JobBridge interns working in Job Clubs, the question of the suitability of any individual intern to undertake particular roles is a matter to be assessed, on a case by case basis, by Job Club management.

Department records show that only two Job Clubs have hosted JobBridge interns. Department management is satisfied that the use of interns did not give rise to any cause for concern in these instances. In addition, Departmental records show that all of these interns who completed an internship subsequently entered into paid employment. Accordingly the internships appear to have met their purpose in providing a bridge between unemployment and paid employment. Their use was therefore an appropriate activation intervention and is to be welcomed rather than criticised.

### **State Pensions Payments**

29. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will report on recent proposals for further cuts to the State pension; if she will report on proposed changes to the State pension; and the work that has been done on a proposed universal pension savings scheme. [4715/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** State pensions account for the single largest block of social welfare expenditure, and while expenditure on pensions is increasing because of demographic pressures, this is being successfully managed within the overall welfare budget. This year, the Department of Social Protection will spend an estimated €6.675 billion on pensions – 34.4% of all welfare expenditure and an increase of €168 million over 2014. The overall concern of the Government in recent budgets has been to protect the primary weekly social welfare rates where possible. Maintaining the rate of the State pension and other core payments is critical in protecting people from poverty. The Government has no plans to change this policy, and I have not been presented with proposals from any Minister to reduce the basic rate of the State pension. In fact, the Government increased payments for certain pensioners by increasing the rate of the Living Alone Allowance in Budget 2015 to €9.00. This increases the maximum personal rate of the State non-contributory pension for a qualified person living alone to €228 per week, and the maximum rate for the State contributory pension to €239.30, when both the basic pension and the allowance are taken into account. In addition I was pleased to restore a partial Christmas bonus last month, benefitting over 575,000 pensioners and 1.23 million welfare recipients in total. In relation to supplementary retirement income, the development of a system to progressively achieve universal supplementary pension coverage has been a stated goal of Irish pension policy for a number of years. The programme for Government and the recent 2014-2016 Statement of Priorities affirmed this commitment. In this regard, the Government has recently made a decision to proceed with work to develop a roadmap and timeline for the introduction of a new supplementary workplace retirement saving scheme. Development of this roadmap will be progressed by the establishment of a high

level Universal Retirement Savings Group (URSG). The URSG will consist of senior official representatives from key Government departments and those public bodies with a particular responsibility in the area. The group will engage with the various sectoral interests including those from the pensions industry, representatives of small, large and multinational employers, trade unions and consumer/interest group representatives. The broad role of the group will be to consider the constituent factors involved in constructing an efficient and effective universal retirement savings system. A recommendation will be brought to Government for consideration in the form of a roadmap and estimated timeline for introduction.

### **Local Employment Service**

30. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the fact that funding for the County Kildare local employment service network has dropped by over 60% in 2015 compared to 2014; if her attention has been drawn to the enormous impact this will have on the ability of persons to get back to work, at variance with her stated aims of moving persons off social welfare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4973/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** There has been no reduction in the level of funding allocated for the Local Employment Service (LES) for 2015 and there has been no reduction in the funding allocation of any individual LES. The LES in question was actually granted some additional funding to cover an increase in overheads in 2015. The Deputy may be referring to a change to the funding of support grants that are provided to jobseekers to assist them with certain minor costs involved in getting back to work but the level of such funding in 2015 remains unchanged. Up until 31 December 2014, the LES had access to two funds i.e. the Technical Support Grant Fund and the Mediator Fund. From 1 January 2015, the LES has access to a single fund (Mediator Fund) but the level of funding provided has been increased to an amount equivalent to the combined LES expenditure in 2014 from both funds. The Mediator Fund has been allocated across LES contractors on the basis of the number of clients with whom they are contracted to engage in 2015.

### **Rent Supplement Scheme Payments**

31. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will review the caps currently in place on the rent supplement scheme; if she will provide an update on the HAP scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4912/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** There are currently approximately 71,500 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €298 million for 2015. I am acutely aware of the difficulties people are experiencing in maintaining affordable rented accommodation in areas of high demand in the current market, including those in receipt of rent supplement. The Department is finalising a review of the maximum rent limits and raising rent limits may not be the solution to the problem as it is likely to add to further rental inflation and could impact, not alone on rent supplement recipients, but also on many lower income workers and students. I am keeping the matter under close review.

The Department has put measures in place to ensure that the housing needs of rent supplement customers throughout the country are addressed by providing for increased flexibility within the administration of the rent supplement scheme. Notices circulated to Community Welfare Service staff reminding them of their discretionary power to award, on a case by case



basis, a supplement for rental purposes in July and December 2014. A National Framework has also been developed to ensure that appropriate supports continue to be provided under the rent supplement scheme throughout the country in a consistent manner. The Interim Tenancy Sustainment Protocol introduced in the Dublin region during 2014 has recently been extended to Cork city.

Under the new Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) responsibility for recipients of rent supplement with a long-term housing need will transfer from this Department to housing authorities. HAP is currently being rolled out to selected housing authorities and there are some 706 HAP recipients, of which 242 are in the Limerick area. The Department continues to support the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, and housing authorities to ensure the success of the HAP scheme.

### **One-Parent Family Payments**

32. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will reverse the planned changes to one-parent family payments due to be implemented in July 2015. [4772/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** There are currently 69,884 lone parents being supported by the one-parent family payment (OFP) scheme at an estimated cost to my Department of approximately €607 million in 2015. The purpose of the phased OFP scheme age change reforms that were introduced in the Social Welfare and Pensions Act, 2012, is to reduce long-term social welfare dependency and poverty among lone parents and to ensure that they have improved access to the Department's range of education, training, and employment support programmes in order to assist them in securing employment. The final phase of the OFP scheme age change reforms will take place on 2 July, 2015, when the maximum age limit of the youngest child at which an OFP recipient's payment ceases will be reduced to 7 years for all recipients. It is anticipated that approximately 30,200 OFP recipients will transition out of the OFP scheme on that day. These customers will be supported by my Department to transition to an alternative income support payment – as appropriate.

The introduction of the Back to Work Family Dividend as announced in Budget 2015 provides a further incentive for jobseekers and OFP recipients to avail of employment opportunities by allowing them to retain their increase for a qualified child when they leave welfare for employment or self-employment. It is estimated that approximately 9,600 lone parents who transition off their OFP payment will transfer to the family income supplement and as such will qualify for the Back to Work Family Dividend.

There are no plans to review the OFP age reforms.

### **Social Welfare Appeals**

33. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on the way her Department is addressing the high number of incorrect decisions at first instance by Department officials which have led to the high rate of 55% overturned on appeal. [4710/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** Decisions on social welfare schemes are made by Deciding Officers (DOs) and Designated Persons (DPs). They determine entitlement in accordance with the Social Welfare Consolidation Act, 2005 (as amended) and regulations. DOs/DPs will assist customers in making their applications but, as

a matter of law, the burden of providing evidence to support a claim rests with customers. It is worth pointing out that the Department makes decisions on over two million claims across a range of schemes each year and DOs/DPs are very conscious of their obligations to customers and every effort is made to ensure people receive the entitlements due to them.

A customer who is not happy with the initial decision is entitled to seek either an internal review or to appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO) and are advised of this.

Of the 38,421 appeals finalised by the SWAO in 2013, 55% (21,139) had a favourable outcome for the appellant in that the appeals were either allowed in full or in part or resolved by way of a revised decision by a Deciding Officer in favour of the appellant. However, this does not necessarily mean that the initial decision was incorrect. It is important to note that it is often the case that when customers appeal a decision, they submit new information, or new information comes to light at the oral appeal hearing. In particular, where a scheme involves illness, disability or caring conditions, there is often a second medical assessment submitted. These new facts often allow the Department to make a more favourable decision. In fact, 21% (8,062) of the appeals finalised by the SWAO in 2013 were finalised as a result of revised decisions being made by DOs or DPs in the Department and those cases then did not fall to be heard by an Appeals Officer.

The Department's Fraud and Error surveys show a low level of departmental error most recently 0.04% and 0.01% in Widows and Jobseeker's Allowance scheme surveys. There were no errors identified in the Child Benefit survey.

Measures to minimise incorrect decisions in the first place include management checks at local level and ongoing improvement to guidelines and advice. The Department has begun a process of examining decision files, identifying common errors, and issuing staff bulletins to advise staff of best practice.

A major new training programme for DOs, DPs and others is also expected to lead to ongoing improvements in decision making.

There are regular meetings between the SWAO and officials of the Department to identify and resolve issues that give rise to appeals, in order to have more consistent application of the legislation and guidelines between the DWAO and the Department's DOs and DPs.

### **Departmental Staff**

34. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her view on the report commissioned by a coalition of non-governmental organisations, including FLAC, Doras Luimní, Nasc and Crosscare, which highlighted serious customer service issues, including racism and rudeness to immigrants on the part of some social welfare officers. [4910/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The report in question: "Person or Number? 2" was produced by a group of NGOs dealing with migrants. It draws heavily on 35 case studies as its main source of information. It is important to be clear at the outset that these 35 cases are not a random sample of social welfare customers, but were drawn only from a selection of people who sought help from outside agencies. The 35 cases, while important individually, also need to be seen in the context that the Department pays about 1.45 million customers each week and nearly 88.5 million payments were made last year. The Department is proud to have a long history of superb customer service and has been considered a leader in this area in the public service. In that context, regardless of how small or unrepresentative

sentative the number of sample cases is, it is unacceptable that any customer of the Department of Social Protection should feel that they have been subjected to inappropriate behaviour and/or language, or left in a situation where they feel they cannot access their entitlements. If the relevant groups are willing to send details of these cases to the Department, the specific allegations will be investigated. Unfortunately, without specific details, it is not possible to take action in relation to the individual cases. The Department provides many services to assist customers (including migrants) in their dealings with the Department. These include:

- **Translations:** Translation services are provided to and from all languages, on request. The majority of translations paid for by the Department relate to supporting documentation required for processing customer claims such as birth, marriage or death certificates, medical reports and statements relating to customers' circumstances. In 2014 almost 4,000 documents were translated to / from over 50 languages.

- **Interpretations:** Interpretation services are provided on request, where necessary to facilitate customers in their engagement with the Department, where English is not the customer's first language. The service is provided by way of either a 3-way phone conversation, or a face-to-face service, where an interpreter attends in person to facilitate customer/staff interaction.

- **Training:** The Staff Development Unit of the Department provides a range of staff training courses which focus on the delivery of quality customer service. This training includes the raising of awareness of disability, mental health and diversity issues relevant to staff and customers.

In addition, operational guidelines and other support and materials are available to staff to assist them in their interactions with customers.

### **Farm Assist Scheme Payments**

**35. Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she has carried out an analysis of the impact her changes to farm assist with respect to income disregards have had on farmers; if she will reconsider the changes she has made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4978/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The farm assist scheme provides support for farmers on low incomes and is similar to jobseeker's allowance. Farm assist recipients retain the advantages of the jobseeker's allowance scheme such as retention of secondary benefits and access to activation programmes. The 2015 Estimates for the Department provide for expenditure this year on the farm assist scheme of €88.7 million. All recipients of farm assist have benefitted from the Christmas Bonus paid last month and all recipients with children will also benefit from the increase in child benefit I announced in the Budget. Changes introduced in Budgets 2012 and 2013 have brought farm assist into closer alignment with the jobseeker's allowance scheme's treatment of self-employed persons.

Farm assist is a flexible payment and any farmer experiencing lower levels of income or cash-flow issues can ask their local social welfare / Intreo office to review the level of means applying to their claim.

The assessment of means for the purpose of qualifying for farm assist is designed to reflect the actual net income from farming. Income and expenditure figures for the preceding year are generally used as an indicator of the expected position in the following year. However, account is taken of any exceptional circumstances so as to ensure that the assessment accurately reflects the current situation.

As part of the normal budget process, all potential budget measures, including any changes to the farm assist scheme, are assessed in terms of the impact they would have if introduced. The scheme is kept under ongoing review by my officials. There are no plans to change the current scheme criteria.

### **Industrial Relations**

36. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the discussions she has had with the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation in order to deal with the way pensioners can get access to the State's industrial relations machinery when their retirement income is being altered, an issue which she has acknowledged needs to be addressed. [4906/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** I am glad to say that I have approved measures to facilitate engagement between the trustees of a pension scheme and groups representing the interests of pensioner and deferred scheme members. I recently signed the Occupational Pensions Schemes (Section 50 and 50B) (Amendments) Regulations, 2015 and approved Pensions Authority guidance to facilitate this change. The change to regulations will require the Pensions Authority to notify groups representing the interests of pensioner and deferred scheme members in situations where the Pensions Authority is proposing to issue a unilateral direction under section 50 of the Pensions Act to restructure scheme benefits or to wind up a pension scheme under section 50B. This requirement will afford the representative group an opportunity to make a submission to the Pensions Authority in relation to such proposals. The Regulations also give the representative group the right to appeal such a direction by the Pensions Authority to the High Court on a point of law. I also approved an amendment to guidance issued by the Pensions Authority on this matter. This change to guidance will require the trustees of a pension scheme to notify groups representing the interest of scheme members of proposals by the trustees of a defined benefit pension scheme to issue a direction under section 50 of the Pensions Act to restructure scheme benefits. This requirement will afford the representative group an opportunity to make a submission to the trustees of a pension scheme in relation to proposals to restructure scheme benefits.

These changes will facilitate engagement between groups representing the interests of pensioner and deferred scheme members and the Pension Authority and the trustees of a pension scheme.

The question of whether it is appropriate that groups representing the interests of pensioners and deferred scheme members have access to the State's industrial relations machinery in pursuing pension scheme matter has been raised for consideration with the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and officials of both Departments have met to discuss this matter. It is acknowledged that the industrial relations system in Ireland is voluntary in nature both as regards access to the Labour Relations Commission and the Labour Court. Any change to that principle which would put in place a mandated right to be part of the process would alter fundamentally the conduct of industrial relations.

### **Rent Supplement Scheme Eligibility**

37. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will review the eligibility for rent supplement to include issues such as the need not to participate in anti-social behaviour; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4717/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** There are currently approximately 71,500 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €298 million for 2015. In the case of private rented accommodation, tenancy arrangements involve a contract between the landlord and the tenant. The Department has no contractual relationship with the landlord and tenant behaviour is a matter for the landlord in the first instance. There are a number of avenues open to landlords in such cases, including the mediation service for landlords and tenants operated by the Private Residential Tenancies Board and/or recourse to the Garda Síochána and/or the Courts in relation to the enforcement of the law in dealing with anti-social or criminal behaviour. Under the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 tenants are obliged not to behave within a dwelling, or in the vicinity of it, in a way that is anti-social. Landlords are obliged to enforce the tenant's obligations, and may seek termination of a tenancy due to a tenant's antisocial behaviour.

The Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 provides the Department with the authority to refuse, suspend or terminate payment of a rent supplement in the case of a person who has been required to deliver up possession of a dwelling provided by a housing authority or an approved body where the reasons for that requirement include anti-social behaviour or the interests of good estate management.

The Department's strategic position is to transfer responsibility of long term rent supplement tenancies from this Department to the housing authorities which will be delivered through the new Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). The Department is working closely with the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government and housing authorities to support the achievement of the targets of the HAP scheme as set out in the "Social Housing Strategy 2020: Support, Supply and Reform".

### **Social Welfare Appeals Delays**

38. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the measures her Department is taking to address the delays, often months, in the individual section review process and social welfare appeals process due to delays in getting files from different social welfare departments to the appeals office; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4970/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The review and appeal processes in the Department of Social Protection are, at all times, predicated on the principles of fairness and natural justice. 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.

Appeal processing times are calculated from the registration date of the appeal to the date of its finalisation. They include all activities during this period including time spent awaiting any clarification from the appellant, time in the Department for comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal put forward by the appellant, and any further investigation, examination or assessment by the Department's Inspectors and Medical Assessors that is deemed necessary. While this process carries an inherent delay in terms of finalising an appeal, it also crystallises the flexibility and accessibility of the appeals system. By its nature and because it is a quasi-judicial function, the processing of appeals takes time and reflects the fact that, by definition, the appeal process cannot be a quick one.

This multi-layered approach is designed to give every opportunity to the customer to present their case as fully as possible can, at times, move more slowly than the Department would wish.



I can assure that Deputy that there is a continuing focus on the processes to ensure that they are completed as expeditiously as possible.

I am satisfied that the process in place give as much opportunities to customers as possible in ensuring they get their correct entitlements.

### **Rent Supplement Scheme Payments**

39. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection in view of the fact the current rent supplement scheme is not fit for purpose and is creating hardship and homelessness for housing applicants, her plans to introduce a revised scheme including increased rent caps and increased rent supplement payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4988/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** There are currently approximately 71,500 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €298 million for 2015. I am acutely aware of the difficulties people are experiencing in maintaining affordable rented accommodation in areas of high demand in the current market, including those in receipt of rent supplement in areas of Tipperary. The Department is finalising a review of the maximum rent limits and raising rent limits may not be the solution to the problem as it is likely to add to further rental inflation and could impact, not alone on rent supplement recipients, but also on many lower income workers, their families and students. I am keeping the matter under close review. The Department has put measures in place to ensure that the housing needs of rent supplement customers throughout the country who were a risk of homelessness are addressed by providing for increased flexibility within the administration of the rent supplement scheme. Notices circulated to all Community Welfare Service staff reminding them of their discretionary power to award, on a case by case basis, a supplement for rental purposes in such circumstances in July and December 2014. A National Framework has also been developed to ensure that appropriate supports continue to be provided throughout the country in a consistent manner. The Interim Tenancy Sustainment Protocol introduced in the Dublin region during 2014 has also been extended to Cork city within the last week.

I would advise the Deputy that he should advise any person in receipt of rent supplement who is at risk of losing their tenancy to contact their local Community Welfare Service responsible for their claim as soon as possible.

### **Farm Assist Scheme Payments**

40. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on reversing the changes she made to farm assist with respect to income disregards in view of the serious negative affect on the income levels of already struggling farming families; the reasons she is refusing to carry out an analysis to assess the impact that the changes have made on those families; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4979/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The farm assist scheme provides support for farmers on low incomes and is similar to jobseeker's allowance. Farm assist recipients retain the advantages of the jobseeker's allowance scheme such as retention of secondary benefits and access to activation programmes. The 2015 Estimates for the Department provide for expenditure this year on the farm assist scheme of €88.7 million. All recipients of farm assist have benefited from the Christmas Bonus paid last month and all recipients with children will also benefit from the increase in child benefit I announced in the

Budget. Changes introduced in Budgets 2012 and 2013 have brought farm assist into closer alignment with the jobseeker's allowance scheme's treatment of self-employed persons.

Farm assist is a flexible payment and any farmer experiencing lower levels of income or cash-flow issues can ask their local social welfare/Intreo office to review the level of means applying to their claim.

The assessment of means for the purpose of qualifying for farm assist is designed to reflect the actual net income from farming. Income and expenditure figures for the preceding year are generally used as an indicator of the expected position in the following year. However, account is taken of any exceptional circumstances so as to ensure that the assessment accurately reflects the current situation.

As part of the normal budget process, all potential budget measures, including any changes to the farm assist scheme, are assessed in terms of the impact they would have if introduced. The scheme is kept under ongoing review by my officials. There are no plans to change the current scheme criteria.

### **Rent Supplement Scheme Administration**

41. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 60 of 14 January 2015, in view of the fact that the payment of rent supplement was suspended pending a review, the reason it was reinstated without a review taking place; if an investigation into this matter is ongoing; if this will be considered a case of fraud; her plans to ensure this situation is prevented in future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4718/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The payment of Rent Supplement is a matter between the Department and the tenant, subject to the tenant satisfying the eligibility criteria and payment issues directly to the tenant. Where the Department is notified of issues regarding a tenant not passing the Rent Supplement to the landlord, the Department can request the tenant to authorise payment directly to the landlord. This can only be arranged with the tenant's consent.

Any contract/lease agreement that exists between the tenant and the landlord is a private matter, regardless of whether or not Rent Supplement is in payment. Any difficulties that arise between the two parties are a matter for either party to resolve or to pursue through the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) or through civil proceedings.

As previously stated, the landlord contacted the Department on 23 May 2014 to state that the tenant had not paid rent for 4/5 months. The case was examined but payment continued. In September 2014 the Department was notified of a change in circumstances and a rent review was undertaken. On foot of this review the tenant was requested to authorise the payment to be made to the landlord. The tenant consented and Rent Supplement issued for September and October 2014 directly to the landlord's account. The tenancy ceased shortly after.

The circumstances surrounding the case have been reviewed and there is no evidence of fraud against the Department having occurred.

### **Unemployment Data**

42. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will

provide the latest statistics for the long-term unemployed here; if she is satisfied with the current impact of labour activation matters in her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4914/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The latest data on the long-term unemployed are from the CSO's Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) for Q3 2014. The number of long-term unemployed at that time was 139,000, down by over 60,000, or almost one third, from the level seen in 2012. The long term unemployment rate has fallen from a peak of 9.5% in 2012 to 6.4% in late 2014.

The *Pathways to Work* Strategy sets out a comprehensive reform of the State's approach to helping unemployed jobseekers return to work. Since its inception in 2012, there have been a number of reforms including the new one-stop model of Intreo; increasing initial one-to-one guidance interviews with jobseekers (with the number of such interviews, at 169,000 in 2014, up 8% on 2013); and making 57,000 FET places available to the long-term unemployed.

In addition to on-going measures, *Pathways to Work* 2015 includes additional actions. First, from early 2015, a structured process of engagement with the existing long-term unemployed will commence. This will see at least 8,300 long-term unemployed people being referred to the activation process (Group Engagement followed by regular one-to-one case officer contact) each month in early 2015.

Second, a new employment services model, JobPath, will be rolled out in 2015. It is a payment by results contract model with third party providers of employment services specifically targeted at long-term unemployed jobseekers. JobPath aims to provide additional capacity to the Public Employment Service in order to enable it engage more systematically with long-term unemployed jobseekers.

In support of these enhanced engagement processes, 57,000 FET places will continue to be reserved for the long-term unemployed in 2015. A minimum of 16,000 places for the long-term unemployed will also be provided through key public employment programmes. This includes an expansion of the JobsPlus initiative, an employment subsidy that incentivises employers to recruit the long-term unemployed.

There are definite signs that, in tandem with the recovery in economic demand, reforms undertaken to date are having some impact in improving the employment prospects of people who are unemployed. I am satisfied these measures together with reforms planned for 2015 will help to bring about continuing falls in unemployment and especially long-term unemployment.

### **Rent Supplement Scheme Administration**

43. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the extent to which she continues to monitor the situation in respect of applicants on local authority housing lists living in counties immediately adjacent to Dublin in receipt of rent support in respect of private accommodation, the rent of which is rapidly moving beyond the ability of the tenants to pay; if her attention has been drawn to the extent to which this seriously impacts on the counties immediately adjacent to Dublin; her views on extending the provisions available to tenants in the Dublin local authority areas to those in adjoining counties, thereby averting large-scale homelessness in the months ahead; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4975/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** There are currently approximately 71,500 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over

€298 million for 2015.

I am acutely aware of the difficulties people are experiencing in maintaining affordable rented accommodation in areas of high demand in the current market, including areas surrounding Dublin such as North Kildare. The Department is finalising a review of the maximum rent limits and raising rent limits may not be the solution to the problem as it is likely to add to further rental inflation and could impact, not alone on rent supplement recipients, but also on many lower income workers, their families and students. I am keeping this matter under close review.

The Department has put measures in place to ensure that the housing needs of rent supplement customers throughout the country who are at risk of homelessness are addressed by providing for increased flexibility within the administration of the rent supplement scheme. Notices were circulated to all Community Welfare Service staff reminding them of their discretionary power to award, on a case by case basis, a supplement for rental purposes in such circumstances in July and December 2014. A National Framework has also been developed to ensure that appropriate supports continue to be provided throughout the country in a consistent manner. The Department continues to monitor the measures in place to ensure that the appropriate supports are in place for rent supplement recipients including the Interim Tenancy Sustainment Protocol operating in Dublin, which was extended to Cork city within the last week.

Responsibility for monitoring applicants on local authority housing lists is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government.

### **Rent Supplement Scheme Administration**

44. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection in view of her previous assertion that raising the rent supplement caps would lead to further rises and artificial inflation of rents, the steps she has taken to guard against this happening on foot of the supplementary welfare allowance note for information 2014/18 circulated to staff of her Department on 9 December 2014 which effectively raises the rent supplement caps; the discussions she has held with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government; and if rent controls will be urgently introduced. [4909/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** There are currently approximately 71,500 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €298 million for 2015.

The Department is finalising a review of the maximum rent limits and raising rent limits may not be the solution to the problem as it is likely to add to further rental inflation and could impact, not alone on rent supplement recipients, but also on many lower income workers, their families, and students. I am keeping this matter under close review.

The Department has put measures in place to support rent supplement recipients at risk of homelessness or loss of their tenancy in the currently constrained private rented market, including the issuance of the information note referred to by the Deputy. A National Framework has also been developed to ensure that appropriate supports continue to be provided throughout the country in a consistent manner. The Interim Tenancy Sustainment Protocol introduced in the Dublin region during 2014, has provided support for some 340 families to date which represents approximately 2% of families receiving rent supplement in Dublin. The protocol has also been extended to Cork city within the last week.

These measures, whilst they provide for flexibility within the administration of the rent supplement scheme on a case by case basis, will ensure that the risk of rent supplement contrib-

uting to rental inflation trends throughout the State is minimised. The Department continues to monitor the use of discretionary power for the purposes of preventing homelessness or the loss of a tenancy, which remains low in the overall context of the rent supplement customer base.

Policy in relation to rent controls is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government.

### **Pensions Reform**

45. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the measures she is taking to reduce the pension costs charged to members of pension schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4916/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The 2012 Report on Pension Charges undertaken by my Department, working with the Central Bank and the Pensions Authority, was the first comprehensive Government report on this subject. Since publication, a range of measures have been taken to deliver on the report's recommendations and work is ongoing in this regard. For example, in line with the recommendation that the implementation of the Consumer Protection Code should be monitored, the Central Bank has undertaken a number of themed reviews aimed at ensuring this is the case. This includes a recently published review of annual pension statements which found the vast majority of firms were in compliance with the code. Where the Bank identified a small number of firms where the format of annual statements were not as required, those concerned were required to submit implementation timelines for full compliance.

In parallel, my Department is involved in complementary EU negotiations on a review of the IORPs (Institutions for Occupational Retirement Provision) Directive which lays down basic requirements for occupational pensions. It is anticipated that final provisions will result in improvements in the areas of transparency, trustee competencies and scheme governance and which will promote competitiveness in charging structures.

Under the Social Welfare and Pensions (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2013 the Pensions Board was restructured into the Pensions Authority and the Pensions Council. The Pensions Council was established to provide advice on pensions and also to give consumers a greater input into pension policy. The Pensions Council will ensure that the system has a far stronger consumer focus. I have previously highlighted that there a number of specific areas which I want the Council to focus on which includes pension charges. Progress on the issue of charges will also be supported by the restructuring of the Pensions Authority to strengthen governance and regulation of schemes.

### **National Internship Scheme Administration**

46. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on the appropriateness of job clubs contracted by her Department to provide courses to jobseekers using JobBridge interns to deliver these classes on their own; her views that this discovery highlights the inadequacy of the safeguards and monitoring mechanisms built into the JobBridge scheme; and if she will take any action in response to the revelations. [4911/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** I believe that the Deputy is referring to a recent report on Job Clubs prepared by the internal audit unit of the Department. In preparing this report the Department's internal auditor raised a query in rela-



tion to the appropriateness or otherwise of one Job Club hosting a small number of interns in a role of Job Club instructor. It is important to note in this regard that the Department funds the operation of some fifty Job Clubs located around the State. These Job Clubs are operated by 46 separate contractors who are, in the main, Local Development/Partnership Companies (LDCs). The Job Club in question is a community based, not for profit, social enterprise. Department records show that it is one of two Job Clubs which have hosted JobBridge interns.

All Job Club providers are private limited companies and therefore, for the purpose of the JobBridge scheme, are treated like any other employer providing internship opportunities in line with criteria attaching to the scheme. With regard to the appropriateness of JobBridge interns working in Job Clubs the question of the suitability of any individual intern to operate as a Job Club administrator/instructor is a matter to be assessed, on a case by case basis, by Job Club management. I note that in this case the internship posts advertised required applicants to have FETAC level 6 qualifications in delivery of training programmes and that Departmental records show that all of the interns who completed an internship with the Job Club concerned subsequently entered into paid employment. Accordingly the internships appear to have met their purpose in providing a bridge between unemployment and paid employment. Their use by the Job Club in this case appears therefore to have been an appropriate activation intervention and is to be welcomed rather than criticised.

In the past JobBridge has been criticised by some people on the grounds that some of the opportunities offered were so called low level jobs. In this instance the appropriateness of the internships is being questioned on the basis that the roles required 'higher level' qualifications. In fact what this case shows is that JobBridge offers a broad range of internships to respond to the needs and aspirations of the complete spectrum of jobseekers, including those targeting very specific sectors but lacking critical real workplace experience in their chosen field.

I am satisfied therefore that no question arises in respect to JobBridge arising out of this case.

To ensure that both the host organisation and intern are abiding by the spirit and the rules of the scheme, the Department undertakes ongoing monitoring of internships. This involves the regular review of monthly compliance reports and random site visits to facilitate discussions with both parties to the internship. The Department has conducted over 9,000 monitoring visits to-date, and 97% of these visits have been of a satisfactory nature.

### **Departmental Schemes**

47. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the level of engagement between her Department and recruitment agencies here to encourage and maximise the use of jobsireland.ie in identifying possible candidates; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4981/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Department provides a free recruitment service to employers and recruitment agencies through the Jobs Ireland website ([www.jobsireland.ie](http://www.jobsireland.ie)). The purpose of the service is to support employers and recruitment agencies to increase employment and to provide a mechanism through which job-seekers can search for job opportunities and submit applications. In 2014, over 110,000 vacancy positions were advertised on the JobsIreland website, either directly by employers or by recruitment agencies on behalf of a company. Over 400 recruitment agencies have used the service since its establishment in 2000.

The Department is engaged in a programme to modernise its services. This modernisation programme is fundamental to the Department's objectives of delivering a comprehensive service to people, positioning the Department to better adapt to political priorities and changing customer needs, while delivering on internal effectiveness and efficiency goals.

As part of the modernisation programme and in order to improve the job/candidate matching capability of Jobs Ireland, a tender process is currently under way for a new job matching system. Subject to the outcome of the tender process it is anticipated that the new system will go live during 2015. Improving the job/candidate matching capability of this service will incentivise employers and recruitment agencies to use the service to provide more jobs for those who are unemployed.

In line with the Government's programme of change, the Department established a dedicated employer engagement Unit in 2012 with a focus on building relationships with employers and recruitment agencies to raise awareness and take-up of employment services and supports, including availing of the Jobs Ireland service. This work will continue during 2015.

### Poverty Data

48. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on the Central Statistics Office's survey on income and living conditions finding that the percentage of the population experiencing enforced deprivation has risen to 30.5%; and if she will introduce emergency social welfare provisions targeting those groups experiencing deprivation. [4907/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The recently published CSO release on SILC 2013 shows that the basic deprivation rate was 30.5 per cent, an increase of 3.6 per cent on 2012. The increase in deprivation in particular affected children, the unemployed, households with no one at work, and lone parent households. Overall, the rise in basic deprivation has affected all income groups and reflects the legacy of the economic crisis since 2008 on many low and middle income households.

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

At-risk-of-poverty rate fell from 16.5 per cent in 2012 to 15.2 per cent in 2013. A key reason for this fall is the enhanced impact of social transfers in reducing income poverty. In 2013, welfare payments and other social transfers (including pensions) lifted a third of the population out of the at-risk-of poverty, thereby reducing the rate from 49.8 per cent to 15.2 per cent. This is equivalent to a poverty reduction effect of 69.5 per cent, as compared to 67.2 per cent in 2012.

It is clear that since 2012-2013, the period reported in this survey, there has been a recovery in economic growth and employment, with the unemployment rate falling from 14.7% in 2012 to 13.1% in 2013 and to 11.3% in 2014. Also indicators like the long-term unemployment rate show an improvement.

We are committed to delivering a new deal on living standards to ensure that economic recovery is felt by low and middle income working families. Thus, Budget 2015 increases support for families raising children, assists unemployed families with children to return to work and improves the financial position of vulnerable welfare recipients, including those living

alone. I am confident that these measures will be reflected in future poverty statistics.

### **Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Scheme Payments**

49. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will restore the back to school allowance to 2009 levels; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4986/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The back to school clothing and footwear allowance (BSCFA) scheme provides a once-off payment to eligible families to assist with the extra costs when children start school each autumn. The Government has provided €44.3 million for this scheme in 2015.

In 2014, BSCFA payments were made to over 166,000 families in respect of over 304,400 children at a cost of €42.5 million. The rate of payment was €100 in respect of children aged 4 to 11 and €200 for children over 12 years in second level education.

Any changes to the scheme to increase the payment amounts would have to be considered in a budgetary context.

### **Youth Guarantee**

50. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide an update on the roll-out of the Youth Guarantee scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4917/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Government's primary strategy to tackle youth unemployment is to create the environment for a strong economic recovery by promoting competitiveness and productivity. Economic recovery will underpin jobs growth and the availability of productive employment for young people. This strategy has been succeeding, with an increase of over 80,000 in employment over the last 2 years.

Within this framework, the Youth Guarantee sets a medium-term objective of ensuring that young people receive an offer of employment within four months of becoming unemployed. The main plank of the guarantee is assistance to young people in finding and securing sustainable jobs. For those who do not find employment, additional offers are provided for. Most such offers (over 70%) are in further education or training. Others are in community-based employment programmes such as CE, Gateway and Tús, or through the JobsPlus employment subsidy for private employment.

Overall, the Youth Guarantee provides for over 28,000 programme opportunities for unemployed young people in 2014, as set out in the following table. This figure excludes some 24,000 places provided for young people through PLC courses and apprenticeships. These PLC and apprenticeship places, together with the wide range of vocational third-level courses provided for the young, although not reserved for unemployed jobseekers, nevertheless contribute to the spirit of the guarantee.

It is important to note that some of the initiatives planned under the guarantee required primary legislation to allow positive discrimination on age grounds in the provision of employment services and supports. Two employment schemes in particular, the Youth Guarantee developmental internship programme and the JobsPlus variant for young people, were launched in November 2014 after the required legislation was passed in June 2014. The legislation also

permits the introduction of earlier and more intensive engagement by INTREO with the young unemployed.

Models for the engagement of young people through Intreo have been agreed and will form the basis of the national roll-out of the Youth Guarantee in 2015. Potential refinement of these models may be considered on the basis of outcomes and learning from the Ballymun Youth Guarantee Pilot Project.

#### **Youth Guarantee Progress YTD: End December 2014**

Programme	Expected full-year intake	2014 YTD	Note
Youthreach/CTC	3,300	3553	CTC starters end Dec -- including Youthreach 1800 persons
JobBridge (including developmental internship)	5,000	3,138	As of end December 2014
Tús	1,000	1,410	As of 30th November 2014
JobsPlus	1,500	410	As of end Dec 14- U25 estimated as 14.6% of total starters in 2014 (2806)
Momentum	2,000	631	As of December 12th 2014
BTEA (excl Momentum)	3,300	2319	As of 14th October
BTWEA	200	139	Including 5 persons on STEA
VTOS	500	672	Estimated unemployed entrants
FAS/Solas	9500	8,027	Based on SST, Traineeship, Bridging & LTI starters YTD (end December)
CEB youth Entrepreneurship Training and Mentoring supports	700	0	Not yet commenced
CEB/MFI micro-loans for young people	150	10	23rd December 2014
International Work Experience and Training	250	0	Not yet commenced
Gateway	450	192	30th November 2014
Community Employment	500	600	End December 2014
Total	28,350	21,101	Excluding where figures are not available

#### **One-Parent Family Payment Eligibility**

51. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her plans to reverse the proposed changes to the one-parent family payment which will take effect in July 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4915/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** There are currently 69,884 lone parents being supported by the one-parent family payment (OFP) scheme at an estimated cost to my Department of approximately €607 million in 2015.

The purpose of the phased OFP scheme age change reforms that were introduced in the Social Welfare and Pensions Act, 2012, is to reduce long-term social welfare dependency and poverty among lone parents and to ensure that they have improved access to the Department's range of education, training, and employment support programmes in order to assist them in securing employment.

The final phase of the OFP scheme age change reforms will take place on 2 July, 2015, when

the maximum age limit of the youngest child at which an OFP recipient's payment ceases will be reduced to 7 years for all recipients. It is anticipated that approximately 30,200 OFP recipients will transition out of the OFP scheme on that day. These customers will be supported by my Department to transition to an alternative income support payment - as appropriate.

The introduction of the Back to Work Family Dividend as announced in Budget 2015 provides a further incentive for jobseekers and OFP recipients to avail of employment opportunities by allowing them to retain their increase for a qualified child when they leave welfare for employment or self-employment. It is estimated that approximately 9,600 lone parents who transition off their OFP payment will transfer to the family income supplement and as such will qualify for the Back to Work Family Dividend.

There are no plans to review the OFP age reforms.

### **Pension Provisions**

52. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on amending section 50 of the Pensions Act 1990, as amended by section 35 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2012, in order to offer more protection to employees against reductions in their pension entitlements, in view of the growing number of cases like IASS and Tara Mines pensioners experiencing pension cuts when their former employers are not in financial difficulty; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4905/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** Defined benefit pension schemes in Ireland are, in general, set up under trust. The trustees of such pension schemes have a fiduciary duty to act in the best interest of all scheme members. Section 50 of the Pensions Act makes provision for the restructuring of a defined benefit pension scheme where the scheme fails to comply with the Funding Standard. The Pensions Authority can either unilaterally or on an application from the trustees of the scheme issue a direction to the trustees of a scheme to restructure scheme benefits. Such a direction by the Pensions Authority only facilitates a restructuring of benefits which is designed to enable the scheme satisfy the Funding Standard. All directions issued by the Pensions Authority to date have been as a result of an application to the Authority by the trustees of a scheme. Before the trustees make such an application, they must consult with the employer, with the scheme members, with any person receiving benefits from the scheme and with the authorised trade union representing scheme members in advance of an application to the Pensions Authority. The Pensions Authority has discretion as to whether or not to issue a direction following an application by the trustees of a scheme.

The changes made to section 50 of the Pensions Act in recent years essentially provide for the sharing of the risk of scheme underfunding across all scheme members. The issue of how these changes might be applied is a matter for the trustees of a scheme who are required under trust law to act in the best interests of all scheme beneficiaries.

At the end of 2013, the Annual Report of the Pensions Authority indicated that there were 933 defined benefit pension schemes subject to the Funding Standard. The Pensions Authority has issued a section 50 direction in respect of 11% of these schemes. In the majority of applications, the restructuring of scheme benefits related to an adjustment of future increases in benefit.

While I do not plan to bring forward amendments to section 50 of the Pensions Act at this time, I will continue to monitor its application.

*Question No. 53 withdrawn.*



**Job Initiatives**

54. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the progress of the Gateway scheme across the country; the number of participants currently on the scheme in each local authority area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5189/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys):** Funding of the order of €22.4m is being provided in the Department's Vote in 2015 to cover the cost of work placements under the Gateway scheme. At the end of January, 1,781 persons were employed by county and city councils of which 85% were male (1,513) and 15% are female.

The majority of positions identified by councils as being suitable for Gateway placements relate to services of an environment or outdoor nature. Work in the main relates to the upkeep and repair to council facilities, including roads, parks, beaches, housing units, sporting and general community facilities. Litter and waste management also feature as important tasks undertaken. Work is also undertaken to support tourism and heritage sites and in the development and upkeep of walks and leisure trails. In addition, councils have engaged Gateway participants in supporting council administration, library, event management and visitor services.

The objective of Gateway is to maintain work readiness and keep jobseekers close to the labour market and in this regard, county and city councils offer excellent work opportunities. A table sets out the distribution of employment for each county and city council at the end of January 2015.

**GATEWAY: Employment by Council - week ending 30 January 2015**

County/City Council	Placements Allocated	Participants on Gateway for week ended 30/01/15	% of Total Allocations Filled
Carlow	55	42	76%
Cavan	55	28	51%
Clare	80	16	20%
Cork City	110	93	85%
Cork	215	130	60%
Donegal	80	26	33%
Fingal	215	143	67%
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	110	50	45%
Dublin City	295	32	11%
Galway City	55	39	71%
Galway	80	56	70%
Kerry	80	70	88%
Kildare	110	33	30%
Kilkenny	80	46	58%
Laois	55	20	36%
Leitrim	55	47	85%
Limerick	110	107	97%
Longford	55	3	5%
Louth	80	74	93%
Meath	110	99	90%
Monaghan	55	33	60%
Mayo	80	80	100%
Offaly	55	45	82%
Roscommon	55	52	95%

County/City Council	Placements Allocated	Participants on Gateway for week ended 30/01/15	% of Total Allocations Filled
Sligo	55	29	53%
South Dublin	215	108	50%
Tipperary	80	57	71%
Waterford	80	34	43%
Westmeath	80	80	100%
Wexford	80	32	40%
Wicklow	80	77	96%
-	3,000	1,781	59%

*Questions Nos. 55 and 56 withdrawn.*

### Momentum Programme

57. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of long-term jobseekers who were placed on a MOMENTUM programme free education and training project in 2014; and if these same jobseekers are categorised as employed for the purposes of the live register while participating in the programme. [5256/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys):** The MOMENTUM Programme 2014, launched in September 2014, is under the remit of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and is managed on behalf of DES by SOLAS. The programmes include on-the job training in the form of work experience modules as well as the provision of accredited further education and training required to obtain and retain employment. One third of the 6,500 places have been ring-fenced for the under 25s. This forms part of the Government's Pathways to Work and the Action Plan for Jobs strategies. The information "the number of long-term jobseekers who were placed on a momentum programme free education and training project in 2014" requested by the Deputy is not available within my Department.

Enquiries will be made with SOLAS (who manage MOMENTUM on behalf of the DES) to establish the number of persons who commenced on MOMENTUM from the 1st January 2014 to the 31st December 2014. My Department will contact the Deputy directly with the data when provided by SOLAS.

MOMENTUM participants are not categorised as employed. Eligible participants are supported through the Department of Social Protection Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) scheme and are categorised as on a BTEA-approved educational programme.

### Job Initiatives

58. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide in tabular form for 2014 a list of all education, training, internship and activation schemes for recipients of a jobseeker's payment; the number of persons attending each scheme; and if recipients of the jobseeker's allowance attending the scheme are categorised as employed for the purposes of the live register while participating in the programme. [5257/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys):** I have provided in tabular format (at end November 2014) a list of education, training, and internship and activation schemes for recipients of a jobseeker's payment, and the number of

persons attending each scheme.

It is to be noted that the number of people involved in such programmes is largely unchanged over the period 2012-2015.

These participants are not necessarily all former recipients of jobseekers' payments; a minority of those involved may have qualified to participate because of receipt of other payments (for example, Disability Allowance or a lone parents' payment).

Participants on these programmes may be categorised as employed, or in education/training, or engaged in an internship, depending on the nature of the specific programme involved. All are, however, excluded from the Live Register whilst participating in the programme.

### ACTIVATION PROGRAMMES

-	Number of participants**
<b>Back to Work schemes</b>	
Back to work allowance scheme - employee strand	5
Back to work enterprise allowance scheme - self-employed strand	11009
Short-term enterprise allowance	492
<b>Total</b>	<b>11506</b>
<b>Other Activation programmes</b>	
Other activation programmes - DSP part-time job incentive	393
Other activation programmes - TUS - community work placement initiative	7860
Other activation programmes - JobBridge	6742
<b>Total</b>	<b>14995</b>
<b>Back to Education courses</b>	
Back to education courses - vocational training opportunities scheme (VTOS)	5000
Back to education courses - back to education allowance (BTEA)	22714
<b>Total</b>	<b>27714</b>
<b>Other schemes/training</b>	
Community employment schemes (excluding supervisors)	23035
FAS full time training for unemployed people	8910
<b>TOTAL ACTIVATION PROGRAMMES</b>	<b>86160</b>

**\*\* As at end November 2014**

### Private Rented Accommodation Provision

59. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her Department's proposals regarding landlords who, when advertising properties to let, state in the advertisements that rent allowance is not accepted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5259/15]

61. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will extend the same support as is now available to local housing applicants in Dublin to local

authority housing applicants in County Kildare who are living in private rental accommodation and who are unable to meet the market-related rent demands, having particular regard to the likelihood of accelerated homelessness in the absence of any action; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5282/15]

95. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide, in tabular form and on a county basis, the total number of persons in receipt of rent supplement payment per annum from 2010 to 2014 and to date in 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5417/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 59, 61 and 95 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 by county from 2010 to 2014 are provided in the attached tabular statement.

I am acutely aware of the difficulties people are experiencing in maintaining affordable rented accommodation in areas of high demand in the current market, including areas of North Kildare. The Department has put measures in place to ensure that the housing needs of rent supplement customers throughout the country who are at risk of homelessness are addressed by providing for increased flexibility within the administration of the rent supplement scheme. Notices were circulated to all Community Welfare Service staff reminding them of their discretionary power to award, on a case by case basis, a supplement for rental purposes in such circumstances in July and December 2014. A National Framework has also been developed to ensure that appropriate supports continue to be provided throughout the country in a consistent manner. The Department continues to monitor the measures in place to ensure that the appropriate supports are in place for rent supplement recipients including the Interim Tenancy Sustainment Protocol operating in Dublin, which was extended to Cork city within the last week.

The Department is aware that some leading property websites ask potential landlords to indicate whether they will accept rent supplement tenancies. It is the Department's expressed position that this practice should cease and the matter was raised with the leading websites. The Department is also engaging with the Department of Justice and Equality regarding this matter.

It open to any person who has been refused a private tenancy and who feels discriminated against on the basis of his or her gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Travelling community to refer a discrimination complaint to the Equality Tribunal under the Equal Status Acts.

**Tabular Statement - Rent Supplement Recipients by County End of 2010 - 2014**

County	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Dublin	33,818	34,423	32,584	29,541	26,453
Cork	10,988	10,732	9,878	9,020	8,273
Kildare	4,409	4,447	4,338	4,135	3,698
Galway	4,829	4,615	4,134	3,983	3,591
Wexford	4,055	4,102	3,700	3,179	2,700
Limerick	3,896	3,833	3,323	2,984	2,461
Louth	2,563	2,734	2,549	2,422	2,211

County	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Wicklow	2,613	2,719	2,495	2,381	2,130
Tipperary	2,680	2,609	2,199	2,094	1,961
Donegal	3,194	2,977	2,411	2,047	1,812
Meath	2,552	2,723	2,143	1,941	1,726
Kerry	2,339	2,278	2,037	1,888	1,736
Mayo	3,012	2,928	2,435	1,900	1,619
Westmeath	1,623	1,671	1,592	1,588	1,533
Waterford	2,332	2,098	1,773	1,556	1,443
Clare	1,937	1,961	1,722	1,547	1,336
Kilkenny	1,577	1,619	1,365	1,210	1,011
Carlow	1,484	1,440	1,239	1,108	1,086
Offaly	1,273	1,349	1,240	1,124	1,041
Laois	1,151	1,178	1,097	1,085	1,008
Roscommon	1,276	1,275	997	802	687
Longford	715	623	511	507	476
Sligo	787	698	591	542	451
Cavan	1,029	843	519	455	414
Monaghan	598	488	438	395	352
Leitrim	530	440	374	354	324
Total	97,260	96,803	87,684	79,788	71,533

### Rent Supplement Scheme Payments

60. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 175 of 27 January 2015, wherein it is affirmed that her Department had not made any contact with a person regarding an ongoing entitlement to rent supplement, when in fact the person was instructed to seek a reduction in rent from the person's landlord in line with the maximum on foot of which supplement is allowable, and as a result of which, on intimation to the landlord, the person was not informed to vacate the property or meet the increased rent; if, in such circumstances, any provision will be made to assist, as otherwise the tenant will be homeless in a very short time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5266/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** As detailed to the Deputy in reply to Parliamentary Question No. 175 of 27th January 2015 and Parliamentary Question No. 47 of 15th January 2015, there is no record of the Department having sought a rent reduction from the client. If the Deputy has information pertaining to the client and their rent situation he should contact the Department directly to discuss.

*Question No. 61 answered with Question No. 59.*

### Mortgage Interest Supplement Scheme Appeals

62. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if consideration will be provided to individual circumstances wherein mortgage support was refused on the basis of lack of sustainability and failure to enter into an arrangement with lenders,



given that a number of agreements have now been reached with lenders, which would be more valuable if mortgage support was made available, even for a short period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5283/15]

71. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of applicants for mortgage support who were refused such payment in County Kildare in the past five years on the basis of the alleged unsustainability of their cases; if a review of such cases will be undertaken where viability has subsequently been proven; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5292/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 62 and 71 together.

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

- Lenders providing sustainable and durable resolution options to their borrower;
- A social housing response sponsored by local authorities;
- Comprehensive advice to borrowers; and
- Personal Insolvency Reform.

In the context of the overall strategy, the continued payment of mortgage interest supplement, the purpose of which was to provide short-term support to meet mortgage interest repayments, does little to assist recipients in improving the long term difficulty in addressing their mortgage problem. Discontinuation of entitlement to the mortgage interest supplement scheme came into effect for all new applicants from 1 January 2014. Customers availing of this support prior to 1st January 2014 have been able to retain entitlement to the scheme up to 1st January 2018. There are currently approximately 5,880 mortgage interest supplement recipients for which the Government has provided €11.9 million for in 2015. Statistics on the reasons customers are refused mortgage interest supplement are not available.

I have no plans to revise the conditionality of the scheme at this time which could only be considered in a budgetary context. I am satisfied that the most appropriate way in which customers experiencing mortgage difficulties can be supported is through on-going engagement with their lender.

### **One-Parent Family Payments**

63. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the extent to which she has received communications from lone parents whose support has been reduced in the past 12 months and now find themselves in a vulnerable position; if her attention has been drawn to the extent of such hardship; if she will provide interim assistance where the level of the reduction of one-parent family allowance has caused severe hardship; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5284/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** Despite significant investment in the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) scheme, lone parents continue to experience higher levels of 'consistent poverty' than the population generally. It is generally agreed that the best route out of poverty is through employment.

The purpose of the reforms to the OFP scheme is to reduce long-term social welfare dependency and associated poverty among lone parents by ending the expectation that they will remain outside of the workforce indefinitely. The reforms aim to provide the necessary supports to lone parents to help them to access the Department's range of education, training, and employment programmes, and to secure employment.

In order to take account of the specific caring responsibilities of lone parents with young children, the Department has introduced the jobseeker's allowance (JA) transitional arrangement in 2013. This exempts former OFP recipients whose youngest child is aged under 14 years from having to satisfy the jobseeker conditions of being available for, and genuinely seeking, full-time employment. The JA transitional arrangement allows lone parents with children aged under 14 years to balance their caring responsibilities and, also, significantly reduces their requirement for child care. It allows these customers to work part-time, e.g. mornings only, while receiving an income support payment.

Budget 2015 brought in an increase of €5 in the Child Benefit rate, from €130 to €135 per child per week, which will benefit over 611,000 households with children, including lone parent households. In addition, Budget 2015 saw the partial restoration of the Christmas Bonus to 1.1 million income support recipients, including to all recipients of the OFP payment and the JA transitional payment.

Budget 2015 also introduced the Back to Work Family Dividend (BTWFD). The introduction of the BTWFD provides a further incentive for jobseekers and OFP recipients to avail of employment opportunities by allowing them to retain their increase for a qualified child when they leave welfare for employment or self-employment. It is estimated that approximately 9,600 lone parents who transition off their OFP payment will transfer to the Family Income Supplement and as such will qualify for the BTWFD.

My officials and I are currently examining the position of lone parents who are in receipt of a half-rate carer's allowance in conjunction with their one parent family payment and the potential impact of that the July changes may have on this cohort. I hope to conclude our deliberations on this aspect of the change in the coming weeks.

As a result of the Social Welfare and Pensions (No. 2) Act, 2014, the OFP scheme income disregard is being maintained at its current level of €90 per week. This measure will benefit approximately 28,000 working OFP recipients in 2015 and retains the existing financial incentive to take up employment.

### **Homeless Persons Supports**

64. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will introduce improvements to the system to ensure families who become homeless as a result of rent increases will not have their relevant social welfare payments discontinued with resultant hardship and administration; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5285/15]

66. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the steps that will be taken to alleviate hardship caused to families who have become homeless and whose social welfare payments have ceased; if arrangements will be put in place to ensure against such possibilities in the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5287/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys):**  
I propose to take Questions Nos. 64 and 66 together.

The Department's role with regard to persons who are homeless is mainly income maintenance. Under the social welfare system, homeless people have entitlements to the full range of social welfare schemes, including supplementary welfare allowance (SWA), subject to the normal qualifying conditions.

Where a person is residing in homeless accommodation, such as a bed and breakfast or long term hostel, steps are taken to verify their address in order to facilitate continued payment of a social welfare payment such as job seekers allowance. Where a person is homeless and has no fixed abode or has night by night accommodation then he/she is referred to the Community Welfare Service for support under the SWA scheme.

The SWA scheme is considered the "safety net" within the overall social welfare system in that it provides assistance to eligible people in the State whose means are insufficient to meet their needs and those of their dependants. The main purpose of the scheme is to provide immediate and flexible assistance for those in need who do not qualify for payment under other State schemes.

Under the SWA scheme, the Department may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off and unforeseen expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. Assistance through ENPs may be provided towards rent deposits. This form of assistance is very important to those on low incomes who are at risk of, or who are homeless, or who rely on the private rented market to meet their housing needs. In 2014, the Department made over 2,990 payments of rent deposits/rent in advance at a cost of €1.48 million throughout the country.

The Department has put measures in place to ensure that the housing needs of rent supplement customers throughout the country who were a risk of homelessness are addressed by providing for increased flexibility within the administration of the rent supplement scheme. Notices circulated to all Community Welfare Service staff reminding them of their discretionary power to award, on a case by case basis, a supplement for rental purposes in such circumstances in July and December 2014. A National Framework has also been developed to ensure that appropriate supports continue to be provided throughout the country in a consistent manner. The Interim Tenancy Sustainment Protocol introduced in the Dublin region during mid-2014 has also been extended to Cork city within the last week.

If the Deputy is aware of a particular case where a homeless family's social welfare payment has been discontinued, he should forward details to the Department for follow up.

### **Exceptional Needs Payment Data**

**65. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of persons in respect of whom application has been made for exceptional needs payments in the past 12 months; the way this compares with previous years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5286/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys):** Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, the Department may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off and unforeseen expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. The Government has provided €27.9 million for the ENP scheme in 2015.

There is no automatic entitlement to a payment. The ENP scheme is demand led and payments are made at the discretion of the officers administering the scheme taking into account

the requirements of the legislation and all the relevant circumstances of the case in order to ensure that the payments target those most in need of assistance.

Statistics are maintained relating to payments made under the ENP scheme. Details of the numbers of payments made for the years 2012 to 2014 are provided in the attached tabular statement. Department records indicate that ENP payments were made to over 57,800 individual persons in 2014 compared to over 72,600 the previous year.

### **Tabular Statement**

#### **Number of Exceptional Needs Payments made by year:**

Year	Number of Payments
2012	197,000
2013	133,000
2014	107,000

*Question No. 66 answered with Question No. 64.*

### **Job Initiatives**

67. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the extent to which efforts continue to be made to address the issue of long-term unemployment; the progress to date in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5288/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys):** The Government's primary strategy to reduce long-term unemployment is through policies to create the environment for a strong economic recovery by promoting competitiveness and productivity. Economic recovery will underpin jobs growth. This strategy has been succeeding, with an increase of over 80,000 in employment over the last 2 years.

The long-term unemployment rate peaked at 9.5% in Q1 2012 before falling to 6.4% in Q3 2014. At the latter date, the long-term unemployed accounted for 57% of all those unemployed, down from almost 65% in early 2012. Despite these improvements, the level of long-term unemployment, and in particular the situation of those who are very long-term unemployed (more than two years), continue to be of concern.

The Pathways to Work Strategy provides for enhanced engagement services and additional activation measures to jobseekers while the recovery takes hold. In addition to ongoing reforms, the 2015 iteration of the strategy prioritises additional measures to enhance engagement with the long-term unemployed. This includes a structured process of engagement with the existing long-term unemployed that will see at least 8,300 long-term unemployed people being referred to the activation process (Group Engagement followed by regular one-to-one case officer contact) each month in early 2015. Second, a new employment services model for the long-term unemployed, JobPath, will be rolled out in 2015. It is a payment by results contract model with third party providers of employment services that will provide additional capacity in order to engage more systematically with long-term unemployed jobseekers. Referrals to JobPath providers are expected to commence early in the second half of 2015.

In support of these enhanced engagement processes, 57,000 FET places will continue to be reserved for the long-term unemployed in 2015. A minimum of 16,000 places for the long-term unemployed will also be provided through key public employment programmes. This includes

an expansion of the JobsPlus initiative, an employment subsidy that incentivises employers to recruit the long-term unemployed.

### **Youth Unemployment Measures**

68. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the progress to date in addressing the issue of youth unemployment; the extent to which targets will be met during the current year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5289/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Government's primary strategy to tackle youth unemployment is through policies to create the environment for a strong economic recovery by promoting competitiveness and productivity. Economic recovery will underpin jobs growth and the availability of productive employment for young people. This strategy has been succeeding, with an increase of over 80,000 in employment over the last two years.

Reflecting the improvement in the labour market, youth unemployment continues to fall (with a rate of 21.6% in December 2014 estimated by Eurostat, as compared to 25.8% in December 2013). However, the Government recognises that as the recovery takes hold, there is a need for additional measures to ensure that as many as possible of the jobs created are taken up by jobseekers and young jobseekers in particular. This is the rationale behind the Government's Pathways to Work strategy and the Youth Guarantee.

The Youth Guarantee sets a medium-term objective of ensuring that young people receive an offer of employment within four months of becoming unemployed. The main plank of the guarantee is assistance to young people in finding and securing sustainable jobs. For those who do not find employment, additional offers are provided for. Most such offers (over 70%) are in further education or training. Others are in community-based employment programmes such as CE, Gateway and Tús, or through the JobsPlus employment subsidy for private employment.

The rollout of the Youth Guarantee will be assisted by the Labour Market Council. The Council recently launched the Employer and Youth Activation Charter which is an example of increased focus on employer engagement. The Charter commits signatories to interview at least 50 per cent of their job candidates from the PES. Pathways to Work 2014 targets with respect to the Youth Guarantee have largely been achieved. In addition it is expected the following targets in Pathways to Work 2015 will be met:

- Roll out the First Steps developmental internships programme for 1500 - 2000 young people.
- Allocate 1,000 places on the Tús scheme to young people.
- Introduce a pilot programme to support young unemployed people to take up opportunities under schemes such as Your First EURES Job.
- Ring-fence a minimum of 2,000 training places for under-25s by the Department of Education and Skills, under a follow-up to the Momentum programme.

### **Social Welfare Appeals Delays**

69. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the sections of her Department currently affected by longer than average appeal waiting times; the



extent to which she will address this issue during the current year and in the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5290/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The average appeal processing time for January 2015 and for 2014 broken down by all social welfare scheme types is outlined in the following tables.

Appeal processing times peaked in 2011 when the average time for an oral hearing was 52.5 weeks and for a summary decision was 25.1 weeks. In 2012 the average processing time for an oral hearing dropped to 39.5 weeks and the time for a summary decision increased slightly to 27.8 weeks. Further improvements were achieved in 2013, when the average appeal processing time reduced to 33.9 weeks for an oral hearing and 25.8 weeks for a summary decision. As at end January 2015 the average time taken to process an appeal requiring an oral hearing has reduced to 27.9 weeks and for a summary decision to 18.0 weeks.

The reduction in processing time reflects the significant resources which have been invested in the Social Welfare Appeals Office over the last number of years.

In addition to the improvement in processing times, these measures have also led to a significant reduction in the number of appeals on hand from 20,414 at 1 January 2013 to 9,501 at 31st January 2015.

Appeal processing times are calculated from the registration date of the appeal to the date of its finalisation. They include all activities during this period including time spent awaiting any clarification from the appellant, time in the Department for comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal put forward by the appellant, and any further investigation, examination or assessment by the Department's Inspectors and Medical Assessors that is deemed necessary. While this process carries an inherent delay in terms of finalising an appeal, it also crystallises the flexibility and accessibility of the appeals system. By its nature and because it is a quasi-judicial function, the processing of appeals takes time and reflects the fact that, by definition, the appeal process cannot be a quick one.

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.

**Table 1: Appeals processing times by scheme 2015**

**January 2015**

Scheme	SWAO(weeks)	Department of Social Protection(weeks)	Appellant(weeks)	Totals
Blind Pension	9.2	13.1	-	22.3
Carers Allowance	8.0	14.4	0.2	22.6
Carers Benefit	11.3	8.5	0.3	20.1
Child Benefit	7.5	11.2	-	18.7
Disability Allowance	7.2	9.7	-	16.9
Illness Benefit	8.2	12.7	1.5	22.4
Partial Capacity Benefit	4.0	40.1	0.4	44.5
Domiciliary Care Allowance	7.8	9.9	0.2	17.9

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Scheme	SWAO(weeks)	Department of Social Protection(weeks)	Appellant(weeks)	Totals
Deserted Wives Benefit	24.9	5.7	-	30.5
Farm Assist	10.7	9.1	-	19.8
Bereavement Grant	15.1	6.0	-	21.1
Family Income Supplement	6.8	12.3	-	19.2
Invalidity Pension	10.5	16.4	-	26.8
Liabe Relatives	8.2	16.4	-	24.6
One Parent Family Payment	22.0	13.5	0.2	35.7
State Pension (Contributory)	13.4	10.5	-	23.9
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	8.0	7.7	0.1	15.8
State Pension (Transition)	19.2	25.3	-	44.6
Occupational Injury Benefit	2.7	9.9	-	12.6
Disablement Pension	11.4	9.4	-	20.8
Incapacity Supplement	13.7	5.9	-	19.6
Guardian's Payment (Con)	12.1	7.8	-	19.9
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	8.6	7.2	-	15.9
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	10.1	12.0	-	22.2
Jobseeker's Allowance	9.6	14.5	-	24.1
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	4.9	3.1	-	8.0
Jobseeker's Benefit	10.3	9.9	-	20.3
Pre Retirement Allowance	12.8	2.2	-	15.0
Respite Care Grant	5.8	13.4	-	19.1
Insurability of Employment	15.2	5.6	-	20.8
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	10.1	10.9	0.1	21.1
Survivor's Pension (Con)	15.0	18.8	-	33.8
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	27.5	2.1	14.1	43.7
Widows Parent Grant	7.7	4.9	-	12.6
All Appeals	9.0	11.3	0.1	20.5

**Table 2: Appeals Processing Times by Scheme 2014**

Scheme	SWAO(weeks)	Department of Social Protection(weeks)	Appellant(weeks)	Totals
Adoptive Benefit	8.2	8.9	-	17.1
Blind Pension	18.7	11.2	-	29.9
Carers Allowance	8.8	19.3	0.4	28.6
Carers Benefit	15.1	6.8	0.1	22.0
Child Benefit	11.7	11.7	0.2	23.6
Disability Allowance	9.6	11.1	0.1	20.7
Illness Benefit	9.4	14.1	4.4	27.8
Partial Capacity Benefit	13.0	37.1	-	50.1
Domiciliary Care Allowance	9.3	11.9	0.2	21.4
Farm Assist	13.1	18.1	0.4	31.7
Bereavement Grant	12.2	8.7	-	20.9
Family Income Supplement	9.6	18.1	-	27.8
Invalidity Pension	9.4	17.4	0.1	27.0
Liabile Relatives	9.8	28.0	0.5	38.3
One Parent Family Payment	14.3	18.6	0.1	33.0
Maternity Benefit	16.2	7.6	-	23.8
State Pension (Contributory)	12.4	17.6	0.7	30.7
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	12.8	13.8	0.1	26.8
State Pension (Transition)	13.8	29.4	0.3	43.5
Occupational Injury Benefit	12.0	35.1	0.4	47.5
Disablement Pension	13.3	14.4	-	27.7
Incapacity Supplement	10.4	23.8	-	34.2
Guardian's Payment (Con)	11.0	8.6	-	19.6
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	11.5	10.1	-	21.7
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	12.6	16.4	0.2	29.1
Jobseeker's Allowance	11.0	13.1	0.1	24.3
JA/JB Fraud Control	12.1	-	-	12.1
Jobseeker's Benefit	10.7	14.6	0.1	25.3

Scheme	SWAO(weeks)	Department of Social Protection(weeks)	Appellant(weeks)	Totals
Pre Retirement Allowance	6.1	4.0	-	10.1
Respite Care Grant	10.8	9.6	0.2	20.6
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	9.3	11.5	0.2	21.0
Survivor's Pension (Con)	10.4	21.4	0.2	32.0
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	10.5	17.5	-	28.0
Widows Parent Grant	15.1	7.1	-	22.2
All Appeals	10.5	13.4	0.4	24.2

### Unemployment Benefits

70. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the extent to which she expects to be in a position to assist, by way of unemployment assistance and jobseeker's allowance, those persons who were previously self-employed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5291/15]

**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.

It may be noted that almost 9 out of every 10 self-employed people who claimed means tested jobseeker's allowance during the three-year period from 2009 to 2011 received payment. I am therefore satisfied that the self-employed have adequate access to income support in the event of business failure.

*Question No. 71 answered with Question No. 62.*

### Live Register Data

72. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the extent to which the age profile of those on the live register continues to be monitored with a view to making any adjustments necessary to assist those most in need; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5293/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys):** The Government's primary strategy to reduce unemployment has been through policies to create the environment for a strong economic recovery by promoting competitiveness and productivity. Economic recovery will underpin jobs growth. This strategy is working. Employment

has risen by about 80,000 in the last two years. The Government's *Pathways to Work* strategy for 2015 prioritises enhanced engagement services for young jobseekers and for the long-term unemployed, as well as providing additional activation measures, to ensure that these groups are able to benefit from the economic recovery.

Therefore the Department of Social Protection keeps a detailed breakdown of the profiles of jobseekers. Data on each client's age, past occupation, and his/her education, is collected at the point of registration for job-seekers' payment; these and other relevant data are processed and the probability of exiting the live register is calculated (PEX). This is essentially a predictor of whether or not someone will become long-term unemployed. The roll-out of the profiling system at the Department's 'one-stop-shop' Intreo offices implicitly involves age profiling of the long-term unemployed, as age is one of the main determining variables in predicting if someone will become long-term unemployed. In other words, if someone is in an age category that is more likely to experience especially long-term unemployment, s/he will, all other things being equal, receive more targeted assistance.

In addition, the Youth Guarantee initiative is specifically aimed at those under 25 who are unemployed with specific targeting of those who are either long-term unemployed or are most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed.

Summary statistical information on the clients' age, duration of unemployment, and last held occupation together with other demographic and regional information is published each month on the Central Statistics Office website.

### **Mortgage Interest Supplement Scheme Appeals**

73. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if it is recognised that repossession of a home will become inevitable in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare in the absence of mortgage support, which has been discontinued despite clear evidence to the persons' continued entitlement in this regard; that this family need cancer treatment and treatment for childrens' illnesses, resulting in severe and unnecessary hardship; if immediate steps will be taken to restore the payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5296/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** As outlined in previous replies to the Deputy the documents outstanding to enable this case to be reviewed were set out to the client in letters from the Department on 16th May 2014 and 6th August 2014. The most recent letter of 4th September 2014 also outlined the items that remain outstanding as follows:

- Full copy of original loan application in question
- Full copy of loan offer
- Copies of mortgage payment protection plan or plans and details of any payments received under these plans
- Current professional valuation of farm or lands.

This claim remains closed. The client will again be written to this week with a deadline of 21 days for submission of outstanding information to enable a review. If not received within the time frame the matter will be considered closed and not revisited.



Question No. 74 withdrawn.

### Departmental Policy Reviews

75. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the reason citizens who avail of the services of her Department are referred to throughout departmental communications and publications as customers; her views that such nomenclature originates in an ideological mindset more disposed towards a vision of a market-oriented society and, as such, is perhaps unnecessary for a Department whose primary role is to maintain a social floor and more cohesive and equal society; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5303/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** Since the launch of the Strategic Management Initiative in February 1994, the provision of high quality customer service has been an essential element of the modern Public Service. *Delivering Better Government* published in May 1996, recommended the introduction of a Quality Service Initiative for the customers of the Civil Service and in 1997 the Quality Customer Service (QCS) Initiative was launched. Since 1997, public service organisations have been producing Customer Action Plans to assist them in improving the way in which services are delivered to their customers. In 2003, as part of a continuing drive to further promote Quality Customer Service, public service organisations additionally began to adopt Customer Charters.

It is generally accepted that there is a broad public understanding of the term ‘customer services’. It is not confined to specific genres of business that members of the public may from time to time engage in or require. It is entirely appropriate therefore to use such terminology when referencing the delivery of high quality public services to members of the public. Such services include the provision of information, financial and other support services, including more recently employers support, delivered on a daily basis by the Department of Social Protection to almost 1.5 million people, in a way that ensures they get the help and support they need, when they need it.

The Department’s Customer Charter, which is displayed in all public offices, sets out the standards of service that people can expect in their dealings with the Department. The Customer Action Plan 2013 - 2015, which is available on [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie), outlines a range of commitments and actions to help deliver a high quality service during the lifetime of the Plan.

In achieving its overall aim of providing people with the timely and customer-friendly information, financial and other support services they require, the Department is committed to ensuring that a customer service ethos is embedded in everything it does and is embraced by everyone in the organisation.

### One-Parent Family Payment Appeals

76. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will re-open a claim for a one-parent family payment in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5314/15]

85. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if all social welfare entitlements as requested are in payment in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5391/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 76 and 85 together.

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

The person concerned has been in receipt of Supplementary Welfare Allowance from the local Community Welfare Services office while her One Parent Family Payment application was being processed. The designated person responsible for paying the person concerned a Supplementary Welfare Allowance payment, recently spoke with the person concerned and informed her that she will need to re-open her application for One Parent Family payment and be available for interview with the Social Welfare Inspector in order for a Supplementary Welfare Allowance payment to continue.

### **Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility**

77. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a claim for dental benefit in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny will be reviewed; and if refused, whether a dental claim be made in future years, based on the existing contributions. [5316/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** Qualification for the dental benefit scheme is based on a person's PRSI record. In order to qualify for dental benefit during 2015, the person must have 260 PRSI contributions paid (at Class A, E, H, or P) since first starting work, and 39 such contributions paid or credited in 2013, the relevant PRSI year.

While the person concerned meets the first condition listed, according to records held he does not have 39 qualifying contributions paid or credited in 2013. As a result, he does not currently qualify for dental benefit. If he has information to indicate that he has additional contributions or credits that have not been recorded, he should forward this to the Department and his application will be reconsidered.

Any similar claims made in the future will be based on different calendar years. The relevant PRSI year is two years before the year in which the claim is made. For example, a claim made in 2016 will be based on the 2014 PRSI record.

### **Social Welfare Schemes**

78. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on whether it is correct and acceptable that someone on the Gateway scheme can earn less than if that person (details supplied) in County Laois remained on social welfare benefits. [5317/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** Gateway is a Local Authority initiative which aims to provide short-term quality and suitable work opportunities

to improve the employability and maintain the work readiness of those who have been unemployed for 24 months or more.

All employees who have income over €352 per week are liable for Class A PRSI contribution at a rate of 4% on the total earnings. Employees are also subject to normal income tax and payroll deductions if their level of earnings brings them into the tax net. This also applies to employees in the private and public sector and those engaged in other work placements initiatives such as Tús, community employment, gateway and the rural social scheme.

Participants on employment schemes, who pay Class A, can establish entitlement to the full range of short term benefits including jobseeker's benefit, illness benefit, and maternity benefit and to long term benefits including state pension (contributory).

The Department continues to work with the Local Authorities to highlight the benefits of work placements to allow the person affected to remain on the scheme or to identify other activation opportunities.

The experience gained on work placements can greatly enhance a person's ability to identify other work and development opportunities to access the jobs market. Additional benefits that must be considered in this context are the provision of participants with paid annual leave and the opportunity to engage in paid work in the hours they are not working on the scheme.

### **Social Welfare Appeals**

79. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will approve and expedite an appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5321/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned together with the relevant Departmental papers were received by that office on 2nd February 2015 and that the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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

*Questions Nos. 80 and 81 withdrawn.*

### **Water Conservation Grant**

82. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the total expected cost for the extra resources needed to oversee and manage the payment of the water conservation grant for 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5348/15]

92. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the total number of staff expected to work on the administration of the water conservation grant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5413/15]

93. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if her Department has hired external consultants or other external bodies in the development and

administration of the water conservation grant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5414/15]

94. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the total estimated costs of administrating the new water conservation grant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5415/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 82 and 92 to 94, inclusive, together.

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. The first payment is to be made in September 2015.

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 needed to administer the scheme. The administration and payment of this grant is a significant project for the Department as it will require the development and implementation of requisite IT systems and various customer support and communications services.

Any IT development is in the context of ongoing technology investment that improves the efficiency, delivery and customer focus of the Department's overall schemes and offering to customers.

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 the ongoing administration of the grant. The Department has not hired any external consultants or other external bodies.

### **Carer's Allowance Eligibility**

83. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a carer's allowance will be approved in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow, on the basis of the information that person has submitted in full; if she will review the letter of 5 January 2015 from her Department as all the information requested has already been submitted. [5354/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** It is a condition for receipt of Carer's Allowance (CA) that a carer must not be employed outside the home in excess of 15 hours per week.

The person in question was awarded Carer's Allowance (CA) from 30th March 2006. In 2014 a continuing eligibility review of the CA payment was carried out. Following this review and taking all available information into account a deciding officer (DO) decided that the person in question was working outside the home in excess of 15 hours per week. On the 9th September 2014 the person concerned was notified that her CA payment would be stopped. Furthermore, CA was disallowed for the period that the person in question was working in excess of 15 hours while in receipt of CA resulting in an overpayment being assessed.

The department received a new application for CA from the person in question on the 8th

August 2014. An information request was made to the person in question on 26th November 2014 requesting statements from financial institutions, payslips from the 8th August 2014 to date, and to have a form regarding schedule of hours worked from 8th August 2014 completed by her employer. As the information requested was not received by the Department, a letter was issued on the 5th January 2015 notifying the person concerned that her claim for CA was withdrawn. No further correspondence has been received from the person in question to date.

### **Pension Provisions**

84. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the level of demand to date for amortising bonds used to underwrite sovereign annuities; her views on the operation of sovereign annuities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5374/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Government's introduction of the sovereign annuity initiative provided an option to the trustees of defined benefit pension schemes to reduce pension scheme liabilities and benefit from the premium available through sovereign annuities over traditional annuities. Sovereign Annuities were initially launched in 2012 and I am pleased to say that data from the industry would indicate that by quarter three 2013 sovereign annuity sales accounted for 75% of all annuity sales. The pensions industry currently holds some €1.2 billion in amortising bonds issued by the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA).

*Question No. 85 answered with Question No. 76.*

### **Jobseeker's Allowance Applications**

86. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will verify a decision in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare who received notification dated 20 January 2015 to the effect that the person's claim had been disallowed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5395/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The jobseeker's allowance application of the person concerned was disallowed as the means of the person concerned could not be determined. This decision was appealed to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office, and the appeal was disallowed.

### **Rent Supplement Scheme Applications**

87. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a decision on rent support will be made in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5401/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** As detailed to the Deputy, in reply to Parliamentary Question No 42 of 22nd January 2015, the outstanding documentation requested from the client concerned has not, to date, been received by the Department. On receipt of same the client's entitlement can be assessed.

### **Rent Supplement Scheme Eligibility**



88. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will review the decision to discontinue rent support in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5405/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The client concerned was refused Rent Supplement on 16/12/14 as both he and his wife were in full time employment. If there has been a change in the client's circumstances, they should provide documentary evidence to the Department confirming same so that their entitlement to Rent Supplement can be reassessed.

### **Jobseeker's Allowance Payments**

89. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the correct level of jobseeker's allowance payable in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5409/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The person concerned was awarded jobseeker's benefit at the rate of €363.30 per week from 30 January 2015. This figure contains a personal rate, a qualified adult allowance rate that takes account of earnings and child dependent allowance for three children. While the rate of jobseeker's benefit reflects a five-day week the first payment was for four days and a *pro rata* reduction applied.

### **Exceptional Needs Payment Applications**

90. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a once-off exceptional needs payment will be made in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5410/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** There is no record of an application for an exceptional needs payment from the person concerned. If he wishes to make application he should contact his local Community Welfare service at 045 887830.

### **Carer's Allowance Appeals**

91. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will arrange an appeal and an oral hearing in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow in respect of a claim for carer's allowance based on that person's letter of 26 January 2015; and if she will expedite the matter. [5411/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that, to date, no appeal in respect of disallowance of carer's allowance has been received from the person concerned.

In order to make a valid appeal the person concerned should write to the Social Welfare Appeals Office outlining her up to date grounds of appeal i.e. the reason why she disagrees with the conclusions of the Deciding Officer. On receipt of same, an appeal will be opened.

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.

Questions Nos. 92 to 94, inclusive, answered with Question No. 82.

Question No. 95 answered with Question No. 59.

### Social Welfare Eligibility

96. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide in tabular form on a county basis the number of persons who have received sanctions imposed on their jobseeker payment due to failure to meet all the conditions that apply to the payment per annum from 2011 to 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5418/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** In order to qualify for a jobseeker's payment, a person must meet certain conditions, including the requirement to be available for, capable of and genuinely seeking full-time work. A range of sanctions, including disqualification, closure or disallowance of the jobseeker claim, may be imposed where a client fails to meet the stated conditions. A jobseeker claim may be reviewed at any time in order to establish continued entitlement.

Additionally, in relation to activation, legislation provides that further sanctions/penalties in the form of reduced payments may be imposed by a Deciding Officer where clients fail, without good cause, to comply with activation measures. Activation measures include the requirement to attend group or individual meetings, and/or avail of suitable education, training or development opportunities, or specified employment programmes, which are considered appropriate to a person's circumstances.

Where a person continues to fail, without good cause, to comply with activation measures, while on a penalty rate, he/she may be disqualified from receiving the personal rate of payment (effective rate reduction to zero). The normal rate of payment may be reinstated at any time, if the jobseeker complies, as requested, with activation measures.

Total numbers of reduced rates applied (including zero rate), since their introduction in Q2 2011, are as set out in the table. The data are not available by county.

Year	Number Applied
2011	359
2012	1,519
2013	3,395
2014	5,325
<b>Total</b>	10,598

### Departmental Bodies Reports

97. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the criteria used by the Citizens Information Board to select a design team to recommend new management structures for Money Advice and Budgeting Service, MABS, and Citizens Information Services, CIS; the reason the existing voluntary companies, or their representative bodies which have developed and managed these services locally are not consulted; the cost of the inconclusive consultants report commissioned by CIB on proposed new structures; and the reason it is necessary to abandon the local management structures when these have proven to have worked

so well for so many years at no cost to the Exchequer to be replaced by regional or national structures which will be less cost-effective and will be removed from the local knowledge base so vital to the success of these services. [5439/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Citizens Information Board (CIB) is the statutory body responsible for supporting the provision of information, advice (including money and budgeting advice service) and advocacy services on a wide range of public and social services. The Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2008 provided for the transfer of responsibility for the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) to the Citizens Information Board (CIB), under the aegis of the Department of Social Protection.

CIB delivers on its remit to provide services to the public by supporting a network of delivery partners which includes 42 local Citizens Information Services (CIS) and 51 local Money Advice and Budgeting Services (MABS).

In 2015, the CIB will receive a budget allocation of €46m from the Department of Social Protection, of which €17.94m will be allocated to MABS.

Among the strategic priorities set out in CIB's Strategic Plan 2012-2015, is the development and implementation of an integrated service delivery model that puts the citizen at the centre.

In 2014, following a public procurement exercise, CIB commissioned a feasibility study to identify options for organisational integration by its delivery partners. The aim was to develop clearer and more effective pathways to the provision of information, advice and advocacy services and thereby achieve better outcomes for citizens, and make optimum use of the state resources available to CIB. The work was carried out by a company called Pathfinder, at a cost of €78,000 excluding VAT, and was overseen by a Steering Group, comprising national representatives from Citizens Information Services staff and Boards, MABS staff and Boards and staff from the Citizens Information Board.

The work carried out by Pathfinder included extensive and comprehensive consultation with all stakeholders, including representatives of CIB's delivery partner services (CIS and MABS) at local level. The study, which presents a number of options, was considered by the Board of CIB, which agreed to the establishment of a Design Group tasked with outlining and recommending possible new structural models. The Design Group includes members of the voluntary boards and staff of a number of the CIS and MABS, together with representation from CIB management. CIB has invited submissions from the representative of Boards and staff of CIS and MABS, to inform the deliberations of the Design Group. This engagement with stakeholders will continue while the work of the Design Group is underway, before reporting back to the Board of CIB in due course.

*Question No. 98 withdrawn.*

### **Property Tax Data**

99. **Deputy Ray Butler** asked the Minister for Finance the names and total number of all Members of Dáil Éireann who have not yet complied with paying their current local property tax and-or household charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5183/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** As the Deputy is aware, for reasons of taxpayer confidentiality, the Revenue Commissioners are prohibited from providing information in respect of any individual taxpayer or any small group of taxpayers.

I am advised by Revenue that mandatory deductions at source from salary or occupational pensions applied for Local Property Tax in relation to about 30,000 properties in 2013, and 40,000 properties in 2014.

In addition, since taking over responsibility for Household Charge [HHC] collection from July 2013, HHC arrears of €40 million has been paid to Revenue in respect of approximately 253,000 properties. This includes 44,500 properties on which mandatory deduction at source was applied.

### **Fuel Laundering**

100. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Finance his plans for introducing new legislation to end the differential between agricultural and non-agricultural diesel as the most effective means of closing down the criminal gangs involved in fuel laundering. [5423/15]

101. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Finance the number of fuel laundering plants uncovered in the past five years, by county and by year. [5424/15]

102. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated capacity of each fuel laundering plant uncovered in the past five years; and the total estimated capacity of all fuel laundering plants per annum for the past five years. [5425/15]

103. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated loss to the Exchequer per annum of the fuel laundering plants uncovered. [5426/15]

104. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated loss to the Exchequer of the supply of illegal fuel per annum for the past five years. [5427/15]

105. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide details of a new product produced to identify illegal rebated fuel. [5434/15]

106. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding co-operation between the PSNI and An Garda Síochána and the Revenue agencies on the island of Ireland; if he is satisfied at the level of co-operation; and his plans to increase co-operation. [5435/15]

107. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Finance the number of filling stations closed by the Revenue Commissioners for breaches of licensing conditions each year and for the past five years. [5436/15]

108. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Finance the number of filling stations closed by the Revenue Commissioners for breaches of the licensing conditions by county. [5437/15]

109. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to introduce new legislation to strengthen the penalties available to the courts against those involved in the illegal fuel laundering trade. [5454/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 100 to 109, inclusive, together.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the number of oil laundries detected and closed down in the period from 2010 to 2014 was 35. Details of those detections, by year and by the counties in which they occurred, are set out in the following table.

Year	Cavan	Donegal	Dublin	Laois	Louth	Meath	Monaghan	Offaly	Waterford	Totals
2010	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	4
2011	0	1	0	0	1	1	6	0	0	9
2012	1	0	0	0	7	0	3	0	0	11
2013	0	0	1	0	2	1	4	0	1	9
2014	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Totals	1	1	1	1	11	2	16	1	1	35

The Deputy will appreciate that it is inherently difficult to estimate the scale of any illegal activity, the capacity of fuel laundries and the impact of the criminal activity on the Exchequer. The Revenue Commissioners advise me that, while there is no reliable estimate of the extent of illegal activity in the fuel sector, they recognise that fuel fraud, including the laundering of markers from rebated fuel, is a significant threat to Exchequer revenues. Action against this illegal activity continues, therefore, to be a priority for Revenue, which is implementing a comprehensive strategy to tackle the problem. Key elements of this strategy 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 place laundered fuel on the market.

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

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

- Following a significant investment in the required IT systems, new supply chain controls were introduced from January 2013. These controls require all licensed fuel traders, whether dealing in road fuel or marked fuel, to make monthly electronic returns to Revenue of their fuel transactions. These data are being used to identify suspicious or anomalous transactions and patterns of distribution that will support follow-up enforcement action where necessary.

Following a joint process, Revenue and HM Revenue & Customs in the UK have identified a new and more effective product to mark rebated fuels. The marker will be produced by Dow Chemical Company and will be introduced in the State and in the UK from the end of March 2015, providing a significant boost in the fight against illegal fuel laundering in both jurisdictions.

In addition, I have introduced a range of legislative measures in recent years to support Revenue's work in combatting fuel fraud, including reckless trading provisions that ensure a mineral oil trader is liable for the mineral oil tax evaded where that trader knew, or was reckless as to whether or not, in making the supply or delivery, he or she was participating in a transaction or series of transactions connected to the evasion of Mineral Oil Tax. In the Finance Act 2014, I introduced measures to further strengthen Revenue's ability to refuse or revoke a mineral oil trader's licence where the trader does not comply with excise law, does not maintain adequate stock management systems and records, or provides false or misleading information.

I am advised also that the Revenue Commissioners co-operate closely with other enforcement authorities, in this jurisdiction and in Northern Ireland, in combatting the all-island problem of fuel fraud. The Cross Border Fuel Fraud Enforcement Group, which includes representatives of the Revenue Commissioners, An Garda Síochána, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and other relevant organisations, was established to facilitate this co-operation. I am assured that it has proven effective in supporting the



identification and targeting of the organised crime gangs, many with links to paramilitaries and former paramilitaries, that are responsible for the bulk of fuel fraud. All of the enforcement authorities engaged in tackling fuel fraud and those responsible for it are committed to working closely together on an ongoing basis in this important work.

Revenue's strategy has already yielded significant results. Since mid-2011, 134 filling stations were closed for breaches of licensing conditions, over three million litres of fuel have been seized and 31 oil laundries were detected and closed down. Industry sources indicate a much-reduced incidence of laundered fuel on the market and increased road diesel consumption and tax revenues are up 13% compared with a couple of years ago. Obviously, other economic factors have contributed to this growth but reduced fraud is an important factor.

Details of closures, by county, for those years are set out in the following table.

Region	County	2012	2013	2014
Dublin	Dublin	8	3	1
Border Midlands West	Cavan	2	0	1
-	Donegal	5	2	0
-	Galway	3	0	1
-	Longford	2	0	0
-	Louth	13	3	3
-	Mayo	2	1	0
-	Monaghan	0	2	0
-	Roscommon	3	0	0
-	Sligo	1	1	0
-	Westmeath	2	0	0
East South East	Kildare	3	4	1
-	Kilkenny	2	1	1
-	Laois	1	0	2
-	Meath	2	9	0
-	Tipperary	1	0	1
-	Waterford	0	3	1
-	Wexford	0	0	3
South West	Cork	4	1	0
-	Limerick	3	0	0
TOTAL	-	57	30	15

The County breakdown for 2011 is not readily available.

It has been suggested on a number of occasions that the current system of marking lower taxed fuels should be replaced by one based on repayments to the users. However, a change of this nature would impact on a wide range of users, would be costly to implement and would, itself, be at risk from fraud. Marked gas oil has a wide variety of uses, including the propulsion of trains, in agricultural, construction and industrial machinery, for commercial sea-navigation (including fishing) and commercial and home heating purposes. A change to a rebate system would involve the establishment of an expensive and wide-ranging repayments system and would place a new administrative burden on oil traders, on the large number of users and the Revenue Commissioners. It would also impose significant cash-flow costs on those currently using marked gas oil.

Repayment schemes are vulnerable to abuse and the introduction of a wide-ranging repayment scheme would not offer greater security against fraud than the current arrangements. Fuel

in respect of which a repayment of duty was made could be easily diverted to on-road use.

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

The penalties for offences relating to fuel smuggling and laundering are laid down in section 119 of the Finance Act 2001 and section 102 of the Finance Act 1999. On conviction following summary prosecution under these provisions, a court may impose a fine of €5,000, or a term of imprisonment not exceeding 12 months, or both. Where a person is convicted for an indictable offence, the court may impose a term of imprisonment not exceeding 5 years, or a fine not exceeding €126,970, or both. In addition, where a person who is licensed to retail hydrocarbon oils is convicted of the offence of dealing in illicit fuel, a court may make an order for a temporary prohibition of trade. This order prevents the person convicted from selling or supplying any mineral oil for a period of up to 7 days for a first offence and up to 30 days for a second or subsequent offence.

The fines that may be imposed on conviction were increased in the Finance Act 2010 to an amount significantly higher than that which had applied previously. For example, the fine on conviction for an indictable offence was increased from €12,695 to an amount not exceeding €126,970.

The Courts decide on the level of fine to be applied in any particular case and, in practice, they do not apply fines up to the existing limits. I have no plans at present to increase the penalties available to the Courts. However, the position is kept under review, taking account, among other considerations, of the practical experience of the application of penalties under the current provisions.

### **Tax Credits**

110. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Finance if a person (details supplied) in County Kildare is in receipt of that person's proper payments; if the deductions, as determined by his Department, are correct; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5196/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I have been advised by the Revenue Commissioners that details of the 2015 tax credits were issued to the person's pension provider in December 2014. These tax credits were based on the information available to Revenue at that time.

The total tax credits of €2,090 for 2015 are less than those available to the person concerned for 2014, as the tax credit for rent paid is reduced due to the phasing out of the relevant relief introduced in the Finance Act 2011.

### **Life Insurance Policies**

111. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Finance the income that can be taken into account as guaranteed lifetime income when drawing down a life insurance policy. [5209/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I have consulted with the Central Bank of Ireland and Insurance Ireland regarding this matter. Both bodies have advised that the question of guaranteed lifetime income does not apply to life insurance policies.

**Tax Reliefs Eligibility**

112. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Finance his views on raising the age limit of 35 years to 40 years for stamp duty relief for young farmers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5219/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I take it the Deputy is referring to the stamp duty relief available to farmers under the age of 35 years - generally referred to as the Young Trained Farmer Relief.

In common with a number of tax reliefs in relation to the transfer of farmland, it was introduced to encourage older farmers to transfer land to young farmers at an age when they would be active, thereby ensuring that farm land is put to more productive use than might otherwise be possible if farmed by an elderly farmer. To qualify for the relief a farmer must be under 35 years of age at the time of transfer of land and have (or obtain ) a farming qualification.

The Report of the Agri-taxation Working Group to the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Agriculture Food and the Marine published in October 2014 recommended retention of the relief in its current form. Indecon, in its 2014 Review of Agricultural Tax Incentives, stated that the potential of Irish agriculture will in Indecon's judgement only be unlocked if progressive farmers with ambition have access to agricultural land. In addition the report stated that from their research they found significant positive results from training, with a trained farmer having on average 12% higher levels of output compared with an untrained farmer.

Given that the purpose of the relief is to encourage the transfer of land to young trained farmers and as no compelling arguments have been put forward to justify increasing the age, I have no plans to increase the qualifying age from 35 years of age to 40 years.

**Social and Affordable Housing Provision**

113. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 53 of 29 January 2015, in view of the 1,200 residential properties reserved for social housing, when these were acquired by the National Asset Management Agency; when local authorities confirmed demand; the anticipated month and year of delivery to the local authorities; and if he will provide a breakdown of their location by local authority. [5229/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** Under an initiative agreed with the then Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in 2012, NAMA has to date identified 5,753 houses and apartments held by its debtors and receivers as being available and potentially suitable for social housing. The 5,753 properties have been identified on an ongoing basis, as they have become available, since 2012.

Once NAMA identifies a property as being available, the onus for determining its suitability for social housing rests with local authorities, which, in conjunction with the Housing Agency, assess the demand for the identified houses and apartments based on criteria such as their location and on wider planning and housing policy considerations. NAMA has no role in this process. Once local authorities have confirmed demand for units, the Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) are, through the Housing Agency, asked to confirm and progress their interest in leasing or purchasing the units. Local authorities also have the option of directly acquiring the properties.

I am advised that local authorities commenced assessment through the auspices of the Hous-

ing Agency of the properties made available by NAMA in 2012 and had clarified their position in respect of the vast majority of the properties by the end of 2013. However, in some instances this process is ongoing as local authorities consider the suitability of specific properties in the wider context of evolving demand, community need and sustainability.

Of the 5,753 properties made available by NAMA, local authorities have confirmed demand for 2,214, of which 1,068 have already been delivered by NAMA across 65 individual transactions. NAMA expects that the other units for which demand has been confirmed will be delivered in 2015 on the basis that local authorities and approved housing bodies contract to purchase or lease the properties.

Once demand has been confirmed for units and contracts signed there is no impediment to the early delivery of properties by NAMA's debtors and receivers or directly through NAMA's social housing SPV, NARPS. In the case of NARPS, once demand has been confirmed by local authorities NAMA acquires the related properties from its debtors and receivers for onward leasing under long-term leasing arrangements to AHBs. The establishment of NARPS is one example of the initiatives that NAMA has taken, in conjunction with the other key stakeholders in this process, to streamline the delivery of properties for social housing. NAMA has also introduced standardised leasing terms.

The Deputy will note that, in the vast majority of cases, the properties for which demand has been confirmed require substantial completion or remediation work and the resolution of compliance issues in relation to planning conditions, and regulatory standards, title issues and Multi-Unit Development Act compliance including transfer of common areas and insolvent management companies. It is NAMA's policy and practice that all properties are completed to a high standard, in compliance with all relevant planning and building regulations. In this context, NAMA has to date provided over €20m for completion works to facilitate the delivery of properties for social housing. All properties contractually accepted by the AHBs and Local Authorities by end 2014 should be occupied by mid-2015 following the completion of remaining work.

Further detail on this initiative can be found at <https://www.nama.ie/social-initiatives/social-housing/>.

The following table provides a detailed breakdown by local authority functional area of the properties identified by NAMA and the take up by local authorities.

**Table 1: Social Housing Delivery by Local Authority**

Local Authority	Identified by NAMA	Demand Confirmed by Local authorities	Delivered
Carlow Co. Co	145	85	55
Cavan Co. Co	49	17	0
Clare Co. Co	210	50	7
Cork City	419	95	53
Donegal Co. Co	118	55	0
Drogheda Borough Council	27	27	27
Dublin City	813	409	336
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Co.Co	321	130	93
Fingal Co. Co	223	60	60
Galway City	138	138	65
Galway Co. Co	133	69	18
Kerry Co. Co	183	57	15

Local Authority	Identified by NAMA	Demand Confirmed by Local authorities	Delivered
Kildare Co. Co	272	111	93
Kilkenny Co. Co	167	71	5
Laois Co. Co	170	78	0
Leitrim Co. Co	35	0	0
Limerick City	49	47	4
Limerick Co. Co	86	31	12
Longford Co. Co	31	3	0
Mayo Co. Co	75	58	0
Meath Co. Co	215	45	11
Monaghan Co. Co	42	42	0
Offaly Co. Co	79	51	29
Roscommon Co. Co	91	0	0
Sligo Co. Co	111	14	0
South Dublin Co. Co	575	115	48
Tipperary Co. Co	92	13	0
Waterford Co. Co	72	46	8
Westmeath Co. Co	64	47	20
Wexford Co. Co	152	94	30
Wicklow Co. Co	36	7	0
Grand Total	5,753	2,214	1,068

### Tax Credits

114. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the tax liability in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare has increased in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5294/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I have been advised by the Revenue Commissioners that details of the 2015 tax credits were issued to the person's pension provider in December 2014. These tax credits were based on the information available to Revenue at that time.

The total tax credits of €2,090 for 2015 are less than those available to the person concerned for 2014, as the tax credit for rent paid is reduced due to the phasing out of the relevant relief introduced in the Finance Act 2011.

### NAMA Loans Sale

115. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide details of National Asset Management Agency's plans to dispose of loans with a combined value of €8 billion; if he will provide the number of the agency's debtors involved; if he will provide the institutions that are currently managing the loans on the agency's behalf; if the assets underpinning the loans are generally Irish in nature or located abroad; the procedure that will be used for the disposal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5298/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** As advised by the NAMA Chief Executive in his opening address to the Public Accounts Committee in December 2014, NAMA is aiming to redeem a cumulative 80% (€24 billion) of its senior debt by the end of 2016 and



hopes that it will have redeemed all of its senior debt by the end of 2018. As part of its ongoing deleveraging programme to achieve these targets, NAMA is making preparations for the sale of its smaller debtor loan portfolio and expects to appoint a loan sales adviser shortly to advise it on the sale, including how best to package the loans into smaller portfolio. NAMA aims to complete the sale process by mid-2016.

I am advised by NAMA that these loans, which have a par value of approximately €8.4 billion, are currently being managed on its behalf by AIB and Capita Asset Services. The loans relate to approximately 500 debtor connections and over 88% of the underlying property security is located in Ireland.

### **Tax Reliefs Application**

116. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of customers for whom tax relief on their private medical insurance was capped in 2014; the total number of customers claiming tax relief on private medical insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5360/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the information sought by the Deputy in respect of the number of customers for whom tax relief on their private medical insurance was capped will not be available until the 2014 annual returns are submitted later this year.

I am further advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the latest available figures show that an estimated 2.2 million customers claimed the relief for 2013.

### **Revenue Commissioners Staff**

117. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of staff due to retire from the Revenue Commissioners in the next five years; the current total number of revenue staff; the average age of staff in the Revenue Commissioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5361/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that they estimate that in the region of 1,000 staff will retire from their organisation over the next five years based on the current age profile.

Revenue's multi-annual pay ceiling for 2015-2017 provides for an annual average whole time equivalent (WTE) staff level of 5,874 while its current whole time equivalent staff number is 5,651 (6,040 headcount). The current average age of staff in Revenue is 48.

Based on current staffing levels and projected retirements Revenue will require to fill critical posts at all grades in the next five years.

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.

In my Budget Statement I signalled an increase in Revenue resources as one of the elements of the Corporate Tax Reform Road Map to reflect its role as 'competent authority' and in recognition of the many changes taking place globally in corporate tax. I fully support Revenue's proactive approach in sourcing the skilled professional and technical expertise required to allow it to deliver on its challenging role.

### **Insurance Costs**

118. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the mis-selling of payment protection insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5362/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** In March 2014, following the conclusion of its investigations, the Central Bank reported on its review into the sales of Payment Protection Insurance ("the PPI Review"). The PPI Review included the sales by 11 credit institutions since July 2007 and resulted in a refund figure of €67.4 million (including €4.9 million in interest) to consumers. 353,806 policies were within the scope of the PPI Review.

Credit institutions included in the PPI Review were required to demonstrate that their PPI sales were in compliance with the Consumer Protection Code. This included requirements to assess and evidence suitability and eligibility and to check that claims were not declined for reasons which the seller should have identified during the sales process.

The Central Bank has informed me that it is continuing to engage with smaller entities that sold PPI including Credit Unions.

A copy of the press release, report and a customer Q and A is available on the Central Bank's website.

### **Home Renovation Incentive Scheme Data**

119. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons who have availed of the home renovation incentive scheme since its inception; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5363/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** As the Deputy will be 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, where the relevant 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 available 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 €4.3 million. 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 still operating in the shadow economy. This approach will be continued and should 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:

### **General Statistics on Home Renovation activity at 29 January 2015**

<b>Home Renovation Activity</b>	<b>Statistics</b>
Number of Works	20,334
Number of Properties	15,487
Number of Contractors	4,133
Value of Works	€318 million

### **Tax Reliefs Availability**

120. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons who have availed of the start your own business relief scheme since its inception; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5364/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** As the Deputy is aware, I introduced the Start Your Own Business initiative in Finance (No. 2) Act 2013, which provides an exemption from Income Tax for individuals who have been unemployed for a period of 12 months and who start a new, unincorporated business between 25 October 2013 and 31 December 2016.

An exemption from Income Tax is provided on profits up to a maximum of €40,000 per annum for the first two years of trading. However, USC and PRSI continue to be payable. If a loss is incurred, then loss relief is available in the normal manner.

The business must be unincorporated i.e., it must not be registered as a company. In order to claim this relief, the individual must file a tax return notwithstanding that there may be no liability to tax.

This relief does not require pre-approval. Instead, the relief is claimed by completing the relevant section of the individual's annual Income Tax return form in late October of each year. As a result, figures on the level of the initial take-up of the scheme will not be available until later this year.

### **Mortgage Data**

121. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if mortgage deposit rules apply to corporate entities or investment funds purchasing residential property; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5365/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** The regulations providing for the macro prudential measures are currently being finalised by the Central Bank in advance of being laid

before the Houses of the Oireachtas. However, the Central Bank has advised that the draft regulations issued with Consultation Paper 87 referred to “housing loans” which is basically a loan between a lender and a borrower which is secured on residential property (where a borrower means a ‘person’ to whom a housing loan is granted). A ‘person’ in that sense incorporates both legal (i.e. corporates) and natural persons and accordingly, where the loan is secured on a residential property, the regulations would apply irrespective of the legal personality of the borrower.

### **Financial Services Ombudsman**

122. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when the merger of the Financial Services Ombudsman and the Pensions Ombudsman will take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5366/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** As the Deputy may be aware, my Department is currently progressing the amalgamation of the Offices of the Financial Services Ombudsman and the Pensions Ombudsman. A Steering Group chaired by my Department with representatives from the Financial Services Ombudsman, the Pensions Ombudsman, the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform and Social Protection meets as necessary to progress the amalgamation process.

It is intended as part of the merger process that one person will take on the existing separate roles of Financial Services Ombudsman and Pensions Ombudsman. A competitive appointment process is currently being run for the role of Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman (designate). It is anticipated that the successful candidate will take up the role of Financial Services Ombudsman in March 2015 when the term of office of the current Financial Services Ombudsman ends and will be nominated as Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman when the legislation to merge both offices is agreed by the Oireachtas.

### **NAMA Operations**

123. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if contractual restrictions on former National Asset Management Agency staff working on property related matters with which they had previously had exposure during their tenure of employment are being revised for both new and existing staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5367/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** In light of changes made in the NTMA policy in 2013 in respect of notice periods and post-termination restrictions on employment, which relate to all NTMA employees including those assigned to NAMA under Section 42 of the NAMA Act, I consider that the existing contractual provisions relating to NAMA staff are appropriate.

As previously advised to the House, in early 2013 the NTMA Chief Executive committed to a review of NTMA policy in respect of notice periods and post-termination restrictions on employment. Accordingly, the law firm Matheson was engaged by the NTMA to:

(i) advise on market norms in the private sector in terms of notice periods and post-termination restrictions;

(ii) assess the adequacy of the protections in the current NTMA employment contracts/ codes of conduct where employees leave the NTMA to join a commercial entity in the private

sector that might gain an unfair advantage by employing them; and

(iii) recommend changes that could be made in this area by the NTMA.

This review applied across all the NTMA's business areas, including NAMA. All NAMA staff are employees of the NTMA and under Section 42 of the National Asset Management Agency Act, 2009 the NTMA assigns staff to NAMA. Other than a small number of staff re-assigned from other functions within the NTMA, NAMA staff are employed on the basis of specified purpose contracts their employment lasts for as long as NAMA requires their particular function - or fixed term contracts.

Matheson's principal recommendations were as follows:

- longer notice periods (3 to 6 months) to be introduced for middle and senior NTMA management employees.
- garden leave provisions to be included in all NTMA employment contracts.
- post-termination of employment restrictions (including cooling-off periods and non-solicitation of employees) to be considered on a case-by-case basis in respect of senior NTMA management employees in particular.

However, Matheson stressed that the imposition of such restrictions would need to be balanced against the NTMA's need to recruit good candidates for whom such restrictions may act as a significant disincentive to taking up employment with the NTMA. Furthermore, to maximise the prospects of enforceability, Matheson advised that any such restrictions would need to be drafted as narrowly as possible.

It was proposed by Matheson that any required changes resulting from these recommendations would be introduced for new NTMA employees and for existing NTMA employees on promotion. The NTMA accepted the Matheson proposals and is implementing them on this basis.

With regard to staff assigned to NAMA, it should be noted that the 3 month notice period and garden leave provision were already in operation since the first employees were assigned to NAMA at the start of 2010. A provision prohibiting certain activities in an employee's subsequent employment for a defined period of time has also been introduced on a case by case basis for new employees, in cases where employees have moved from fixed to specified purpose contracts, and on promotion.

The Deputy will also be aware of S202 provisions in the NAMA Act which are lifelong provisions with respect to confidentiality for all current and former staff assigned to NAMA and to members of the NAMA Board.

### **Mortgage Interest Relief Expenditure**

124. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the projected cost of mortgage interest relief this year; the estimated cost in 2014, the number of persons currently in receipt of mortgage interest relief; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5368/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the provisional cost to the Exchequer of mortgage interest relief in respect of principal private residences, provided via tax relief at source (TRS) in 2014 is €266 million. I am also informed that, on the basis of returns in respect of eligible TRS accounts, it is estimated



that approximately 495,000 individuals availed of the relief in 2014.

The cost of mortgage interest relief in 2015 will depend on a variety of factors including the numbers of mortgages, the monetary amount of the qualifying loans taken out, the rate of relief applying to those qualifying loans, the year the qualifying loans were taken out and the extent to which the ceilings for relief are impacted by changes in interest rates. Accordingly it is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of the expected cost of the relief.

### **NAMA Bonds**

125. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of subordinate National Asset Management Agency bonds in issuance; the interest payment that will attach to these bonds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5369/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I would like to advise the Deputy that the information requested is available in the NAMA Section 55 Quarterly Report for Q3 2014 which was laid before the Oireachtas and published on the NAMA website on the 21st of January 2015.

In the report NAMA states that there are €1.593 billion of subordinated bonds in issue and that the coupon on the bonds is based on the Irish 10 year Government bond yield at the date of issue plus a margin of 75bps, this is 5.264%.

### **Small and Medium Enterprises Debt**

126. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the latest information he has available as to the amount of small and medium enterprise debt outstanding in the country; the amount which is in arrears; the amount classified as non-performing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5370/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am informed by the Central Bank that they do not publish statistics on SME debt as part of any of their statistical series. However, the Bank do publish the level of outstanding debt, through the statistical release “Trends in Business Credit and Deposits: Q3 2014”, which indicates that total loans by Irish resident credit institutions to Irish resident SMEs was €59.4 billion at end-September 2014. This publication is available on the Central Bank website: [http://www.centralbank.ie/polstats/stats/cmab/Documents/2014q3\\_ie\\_trends\\_in\\_business\\_credit\\_and\\_deposits.pdf](http://www.centralbank.ie/polstats/stats/cmab/Documents/2014q3_ie_trends_in_business_credit_and_deposits.pdf).

The Deputy may be interested in the Central Bank publication “SME Market Report 2014 H2”, which reports on SME default numbers (as per the Basel II definition of default). This publication is available on the Central Bank website: <http://www.centralbank.ie/publications/Documents/SME%20Market%20Report%202014H2.pdf>.

### **Ireland Strategic Investment Fund Investments**

127. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of projects in which the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund has currently invested; the number of new jobs created as a result of these projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5371/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** The Ireland Strategic Investment Fund

(ISIF) was established on a legislative basis on 22 December 2014 taking over the assets of the National Pensions Reserve Fund under new National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) governance arrangements.

The mandate for the ISIF is to invest on a commercial basis to support economic activity and employment in Ireland. This means the ISIF has the dual objectives of investment return and economic impact. There is little precedent for sovereign funds investing with such a mandate, although a number of such funds are beginning to emerge.

The ISIF Investment Strategy will be approved in due course by the NTMA, following consultation as specified in legislation with the Minister for Finance and with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

In recent months the NTMA, following consultation with the Department of Finance and a number of other Government Departments and Agencies in 2014, has been developing a new Economic Impact Framework which will be a key element of the ISIF Investment Strategy. The Economic Impact Framework will seek to identify target areas for investment which have higher potential economic and employment impact, and will also facilitate the identification of categories of investment that would be expected to assist and accelerate normalisation of capital markets in Ireland following the financial crisis.

The ISIF has committed to a number of investments in Ireland including infrastructure, water, long-term financing for SMEs (both credit and equity) and venture capital. A detailed table of the commitments to Irish investments at 31 December 2014 is set out as follows:

31/12/14	ISIF Commitment Capital (€m)	3rd Party Capital (€m)	Total Project size in Ireland (€m)
SME Equity Fund- Carlyle Cardinal	125	167	292
SME Credit Fund BlueBay	200	250	450
West Summit “China Ireland” Funds	72	36	72
Innovation Fund Ireland	125	125	250
Local Venture Capital Funds	116	460	576
Silicon Valley Bank	36	72	72
Irish Water	300	-	300
Irish Infrastructure Fund	250	67	317
Forestry	30	187	217
PPP Schools Bundle 3	14	121	121
PPP N11	18	165	165
Covanta project	44	456	500
WLR Cardinal CRE Mezz	75	195	270
Committed to Date	1,406	2,301	3,602

Because of uncertainty regarding the nature of investment opportunities satisfying the Fund’s commercial return and economic impact objectives that may emerge or can be developed, it is not feasible at this stage to estimate in advance what the economic activity and employment impacts of the ISIF may be.

In the interim, the NTMA is developing its capabilities for collating and analysing data to measure and report on economic impact of ISIF investments on an *ex post* basis (i.e. after the investment has been made). This will require a completely new data set to be sought and reported on by funds and the underlying companies in which funds have invested and by companies or

project sponsors in which the ISIF has invested directly. While it is standard practice that companies report financial information to their investors, the ISIF mandate will also require metrics that can be used to help assess economic impact to be reported. The NTMA expects to be able to publish a preliminary assessment of the economic impact of the investments made to date in Ireland by the ISIF during the second quarter of this year.

### **Company Data**

128. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of Irish incorporated companies that are not judged to be resident here under the test of management and control and which have advised the Revenue Commissioners as to where they are actually resident, since the change announced in budget 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5372/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** Further to the announcement I made in Budget 2014, a change in company residence rules was made in Section 39 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 2013 to provide that where, by reason of a mismatch of residence rules with a treaty-partner country, an Irish-incorporated company would neither be resident in that country nor in the State and, accordingly, would not be resident in any country, the company will then be treated as resident in the State for tax purposes. The change will ensure that the mismatch of company residence rules does not allow an Irish-incorporated company to be 'stateless' in terms of its place of tax residency. The change applies from 24 October 2013 for newly-incorporated companies (i.e. companies incorporated on or after that date) and from 1 January 2015 for companies incorporated before 24 October 2013.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that they have been advised of companies that will be affected by the change in residence rules in Section 39 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 2013. However, because of the small number of companies involved, the Revenue Commissioners' obligation in relation to confidentiality of taxpayer information precludes them from providing the information requested.

### **Additional Voluntary Contributions**

129. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield in 2014 from allowing persons early access to pension as provided for in budget 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5373/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that up to 30 September 2014, 12,104 individuals have availed of the option provided under section 782A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (as inserted by the Finance Act 2013) to access, before retirement, up to 30% of their Additional Voluntary Contributions (AVCs) with the amount withdrawn being subject to income tax (the withdrawals are exempt from the Universal Social Charge and PRSI). Up to 30 September 2014 the funds withdrawn under this option amount to about €94 million and income tax of about €37 million has been paid. The table shows the relevant amounts (rounded to the nearest €million) in respect of 2013 and 2014 (up to 30 September).

Year	Number of Individuals	Gross Amount withdrawn	Income Tax paid	Net payments after tax
2013	9,179	€66 million	€26 million	€40 million

Year	Number of Individuals	Gross Amount withdrawn	Income Tax paid	Net payments after tax
2014 (to 30/9/14)	2,925	€28 million	€11 million	€17 million

The data for the end- December 2014 quarter is being collated by the Revenue Commissioners and will be available shortly.

### Banking Sector Regulation

130. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of customer mobility measures that are in place in respect of Irish banks; his views on the effectiveness of such measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5375/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** As part of the European Commission's approval of both AIB's and BOI's restructuring plans it was agreed that the banks would provide a Customer Mobility package to certain qualifying competitors. During 2014 KBC issued promotional material to BOI customers. AIB is currently seeking expressions of interest from relevant competitors wishing to have its advertising material issued to a proportion of AIB's customers.

In addition, in order to attract new entrants to the Irish banking sector, the Central Bank Supervision and Enforcement Act 2013 introduced changes to Section 149 of the Consumer Credit Act 1995, which provides for the approval of bank charges by the Central Bank. The effect of the change is that Section 149 of the Consumer Credit Act, 1995 will not be applied to new entrants in their first 3 years of commencing business in Ireland.

For customers considering switching their personal current account, the Central Bank has a Code of Conduct designed to assist with switching current accounts. This is a statutory code, meaning that all banks and building societies offering current accounts in Ireland must comply with it. The Code is available on the Central Bank's website: [www.centralbank.ie](http://www.centralbank.ie). The website of the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) also lists the various charges imposed by the various financial institutions in Ireland for different types of transactions - [www.consumerhelp.ie](http://www.consumerhelp.ie).

I would strongly encourage people to look at this comparison site with their specific circumstances in mind in order to decide which institution offers the best product for their pattern of account usage.

### Insurance Compensation Fund

131. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide in tabular form the total amount raised from the levies on insurance policies in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5376/15]

140. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the current balance on the insurance compensation fund; his views on whether it is adequate to meet all possible claims on it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5387/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 131

and 140 together.

The management and administration of the Insurance Compensation Fund is under the control of the President of the High Court acting through the Office of the Accountant of the Courts of Justice. Every year the Office of Accountant produces the annual accounts of the ICF. As Minister for Finance, I am required to publish these under Section 2(8)(b) of the Insurance Act 1964. The 2013 Accounts were published in December 2014. The Accountant has advised that while the 2014 accounts are not yet complete, information regarding the current balance and the 2014 receipts is available.

The current balance on the ICF is €81,766,275.40. The ICF levy receipts received in the Accountant's Office in 2014 is set out in the table.

The role of the Minister for Finance in relation to the ICF is prescribed in Insurance Act 1964. The Minister may, on the recommendation of the Central Bank, advance from time to time to the ICF such sum as he thinks proper to enable payments out of the Fund to be made expeditiously. Advances shall be made on such terms as to repayment, interest and other matters as may be determined by the Minister for Finance after consulting the Central Bank.

As Minister for Finance I also have a role to protect the interests of the Exchequer, and in that context I seek to ensure that an administration process is carried out in the most efficient way possible and that any call on the ICF is kept to a minimum.

The Central Bank of Ireland has responsibility under Section 6 of the Insurance Act 1964 to assess the Fund from time to time to see if it needs financial support. Where it is of the opinion that the state of the ICF is such that financial support should be provided for it, it is allowed determine an appropriate contribution to be paid to the ICF by each insurer or insurer authorised in another EEA Member State. This is calculated as a percentage determined by the Central Bank, not exceeding 2 per cent, of the aggregate of the gross premiums paid to the insurer or insurer authorised in another EEA Member State in respect of policies issued in respect of risks in Ireland. Currently, the levy is set at 2 per cent.

The Central Bank wrote to me in January after carrying out its annual analysis and I am currently examining the Central Bank's recommendations in respect of 2015.

Tabular breakdown of Insurance Compensation Fund receipts in calendar year 2014 - Figures provided by the Office of the Accountant of the Courts of Justice 2nd February, 2015

Date	Details	Amount Received €
10/1/2014	December 2013 collection from Revenue	76,399.41
12/2/2014	January 2014 collection from Revenue	9,599,334.22
13/3/2014	February 2014 collection from Revenue	5,398,132.15
15/4/2014	March 2014 collection from Revenue	25,397.53
15/5/2014	April 2014 collection from Revenue	4,027,112.60
12/6/2014	May 2014 collection from Revenue	13,433,972.71
10/7/2014	June 2014 collection from Revenue	18,247.00
14/8/2014	July 2014 collection from Revenue	14,497,444.32
17/9/2014	August 2014 collection from Revenue	2,736,346.44
13/10/2014	September 2014 collection from Revenue	29,010.87
12/11/2014	October 2014 collection from Revenue	13,506,928.12
15/12/2014	November 2014 collection from Revenue	2,321,297.98
-	-	€65,669,623.35

It should be noted that the above figures are net receipts less the cost and expenses of the Of-



fice of the Revenue Commissioners so the actual amount raised by the levy is higher than this.

### **Household Charge Collection**

132. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons who have been subject to each of the following sanctions in respect of the household charge for 2012; mandatory deduction at source from salary or occupational pension; surcharge on income tax, corporation tax or capital gains tax returns; referral to the sheriff for collection; referral to the Revenue Commissioners' solicitors for collection through the courts; attachment of financial institution accounts held by the defaulting taxpayer; offset of household charge of any refunds due to the defaulting taxpayer across any other taxes; refusal of tax clearance certification; and interest penalty on late payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5377/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by Revenue that with effect from 1 July 2013, Section 156 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) converted Household Charge (HHC) to Local Property Tax (LPT), increased all outstanding liabilities from €100 to €200 and made Revenue responsible for collection of those outstanding amounts.

As part of the handover of responsibility, Revenue received the HHC database from the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) and carried out a comprehensive data matching exercise with its own LPT Property Register. The data matching exercise produced a list of properties in respect of which the HHC did not appear to be paid.

Once the 'unpaid' cases were identified Revenue announced a compliance campaign, including a six week window (to 31 March 2014), to allow people get both their HHC and LPT affairs in order. In regard to HHC, the six week window was necessary because Revenue could not be certain that the 'unpaid' list was fully accurate due to the format of the information held on the LGMA database, for example capturing the details of the person that physically paid the bill rather than the liable person and not capturing data in respect of exemptions/waivers.

In mid April 2014, Revenue wrote to the owners of approximately 274,000 properties who did not bring their HHC affairs up to date during the six week window. The notices clearly warned of the consequences of continued non-compliance and outlined the steps that needed to be taken to avoid debt collection/enforcement sanctions, including making immediate payment or updating the HHC record where either exemptions or waivers applied.

Revenue has informed me that since assuming responsibility for HHC it has collected in excess of €40m in respect of approximately 253,000 properties, the vast majority of which has been collected since the compliance campaign started. Revenue has also informed me that there are still ongoing discussions in a significant number of cases where the accuracy of the liability is being challenged. Further payments are being received on a daily basis as these cases are finalised and phased payment arrangements are being accepted when requested in the same manner as applies to LPT.

In regard to the Deputy's specific questions, Revenue has confirmed that to date it has issued mandatory instructions to employers/pension providers to deduct HHC in almost 45,000 cases and has offset over 19,000 payments to HHC from pending tax refunds. Revenue has also referred over 800 cases (combined HHC/LPT) to the Sheriff for collection and refused tax clearance certification in over 13,000 cases (combined HHC/LPT).

Revenue has also confirmed that neither interest on late payment charges or surcharges on Income Tax, Corporation Tax and Capital Gains Tax returns have been applied in respect of

HHC and no cases have yet been referred for either solicitor action through the Courts or Attachment.

### Tax Yield

133. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield from stamp duty on credit cards, debit cards and cheques in each year from 2012 to 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5378/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the yield from Stamp Duty on credit and debit cards and on cheques, for the years in question, is as shown in following table. Also shown is the yield from Stamp Duty on all cash cards for information.

Year	Credit Cards €m	Debit Cards Only €m	Cash Cards* €m	Cheques €m
2012	51.64	0.03	16.54	30.97
2013	49.62	Nil	18.32	25.32
2014	45.85	Nil	18.76	27.42

\* Cash cards include debit only cards, ATM only cards and combined ATM/debit cards.

### Tax Yield

134. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield from the high earners restriction in each year since it was introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5379/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the additional Income Tax yield in respect of the restrictions introduced in the 2006 and 2007 Finance Acts, with effect from 1 January 2007, limiting the use of certain tax reliefs and exemptions by high income individuals is outlined in the table. These figures are based on returns received and analysis by Revenue.

Year	Additional Tax*€m
2012	63
2011	64
2010	80
2009	39
2008	40
2007	40

\* Figures are rounded

Reports are published on the both my Department's and the Revenue Commissioners' websites that provide comprehensive analysis of the high earners restriction. The most recent report was in respect of 2012. The follow up report for 2013 will be published in due course.

### Tax Exemptions

135. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the tax expenditure, the

number of participants and jobs supported under the employment and investment incentive and seed capital scheme in 2013 and 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5380/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the relevant information in relation to the Employment and Investment Incentive (EII) for the years in question is as set out in the following table.

Year	Estimated Cost	Number of Investors	Number of Companies
2013	€12.3 million	1,006 (including 6 EII funds)	185
2014*	€15.1 million	1,132 (including 4 EII funds)	179

\*Provisional

Data in relation to the number of jobs supported should become available at a later stage. Under the terms of the scheme in force in the years shown above, relief in respect of 30% of the amount invested in a qualifying company is granted to the investor in the year of investment, while the balance is only due where it has been proven that employment levels have increased at the company at the end of the holding period (3 years) or where evidence is provided that the company used the capital raised for expenditure on research and development. Claims for the balance of the relief will be due from 2015.

The tax expenditure on the Seed Capital Scheme in 2013, the latest year available, was €1.1 million. There were 57 investors and 51 companies associated with these investments. Figures for 2014 will be available in due course.

### Tax Exemptions

136. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the tax expenditure, the number of participants and the number of jobs supported by the special assignee relief programme in 2013 and 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5381/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that they will shortly finalise a report, for presentation to me, in relation to the Special Assignee Relief Programme for 2012 and 2013, which I intend to publish in due course. The report, once completed, will contain the information requested by the Deputy and I will draw his attention to it when available.

I am also informed by the Revenue Commissioners that a similar report will be prepared in relation to 2014. However, as the tax returns for those who availed of the relief in 2014 are not due for submission to Revenue until later this year, the 2014 report will not be finalised until early 2016 at the earliest.

### Tax Exemptions

137. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the tax expenditure, the number of participants and the number of jobs supported under the foreign earnings deduction scheme in 2013 and 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5382/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** The full year estimated cost to the Ex-

chequer of the Foreign Earnings Deduction (FED) for the 2013 tax year, the latest year for which complete statistics are available, was €0.8 million. 106 employees claimed the deduction for that tax year. Complete information in relation to 2014 tax year returns is not yet available, as the Form 11 tax returns for 2014 are not due to be filed until later this year.

There is no reporting requirement in relation to the number of jobs supported by the incentive. However, the Deputy will be aware that it was introduced to encourage the development of trade and exports to non-traditional markets for Irish goods and services. The conditions surrounding qualification for the deduction were significantly enhanced in the recent Finance Bill, following a review of the FED, which was carried out last year. The report of that review was published on Budget day and is available at [http://www.budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2015/Documents/FED\\_Report\\_Oct14\\_final.pdf](http://www.budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2015/Documents/FED_Report_Oct14_final.pdf).

### **Carbon Tax Yield**

138. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield from carbon tax on solid fuel in 2013 and 2014; the additional revenue that will be raised from increasing the tax on solid fuel from 1 May 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5383/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the yield from Carbon Tax on Solid Fuel was €7.3m in 2013 and €17.2m in 2014. The Solid Fuel Carbon Tax was introduced on a phased basis at a rate of €10 per tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> emitted on 1 May 2013 increasing to €20 per tonne from 1 May 2014.

The 2014 receipts are provisional at this time and may be subject to revision. Please note that for Solid Fuel Carbon Tax, the accounting period is a 2 month period and returns and payment are due to Revenue by the end of the following month (e.g., the May-June return and payment is due the end of July).

### **Fuel Rebate Scheme**

139. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of hauliers currently availing of the rebate scheme for auto diesel; the total amount of the rebate in 2013 and 2014; his plans to streamline the process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5386/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I introduced the diesel rebate scheme to provide for a repayment by the Revenue Commissioners to qualifying road haulage and bus operators of a part of the mineral oil tax paid on their purchases of auto-diesel for use in qualifying vehicles during the course of business.

The Revenue Commissioners inform me that there are 2,057 qualifying road transport operators currently availing of the scheme. These operators include road haulage operators and bus/coach operators. The total amount repaid in 2013 and 2014 was €0.7m and €21.1m respectively.

In order to facilitate broad access to the scheme and to enable effective validation of claims, the scheme is fully automated through the Revenue Online Service (ROS) and certain conditions apply to fuel purchases. These controls are necessary as repayment systems are vulnerable to abuse and it is essential that they are tightly controlled whilst not impacting negatively on legitimate business.

Purchases in bulk must be made from a licensed mineral oil trader, and delivered, in a quan-

tity exceeding 2,000 litres, to a premises or place that is under the control of that qualifying road transport operator. Purchases by means of a fuel card, approved by Revenue for that purpose, also qualify for repayment and there is no minimum requirement on purchases made in this way. A fuel card will be approved where Revenue is satisfied that the fuel card provider will supply it with the information required about purchases of auto-diesel by means of that card. Fuel cards are widely available and are usable across the road network and there are a number of fuel card providers who can supply suitable fuel cards to road transport operators and fuel retailers.

The conditions governing the scheme and the level of automation enable Revenue to validate claims and ensure prompt processing of repayments. These anti-fraud safeguards are designed to protect the scheme from abuse and restrict its application to legitimate operators. I am satisfied that the current arrangements represent an appropriate balance between the efficient processing of claims and controlling the risk of fraud effectively and I have no plans to change them.

*Question No. 140 answered with Question No. 131.*

### **Property Tax Administration**

141. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of refunds that have been completed for second-hand home buyers who were incorrectly charged the local property tax in 2013; if the process is completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5390/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the refunds to which the Deputy refers arose as a consequence of the initial interpretation of Section 8 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended).

As a consequence of the original interpretation of Section 8 of the Act some home owners were charged and paid LPT where they were entitled to benefit from the relief. Once the revised interpretation of Section 8 was confirmed, Revenue carried out a review of properties purchased during 2013 and wrote to individuals who may have been eligible for the relief advising them of their possible entitlement (which depending on the purchase date of the property could apply up to and including 2016). Revenue also outlined how to apply for the relief and for refund of any LPT already paid.

In total, Revenue reviewed 12,191 potential 'Section 8' cases to establish entitlement to the relief. Exemptions were granted in 4,305 cases (some commencing in 2014/2015 rather than 2013 depending on date of purchase) and refunds issued where the LPT was already paid. Less than 600 cases have yet to respond to Revenue with the necessary clarifications.

Revenue has assured me that these outstanding cases will be dealt with as a priority as soon as the required clarifications are received.

### **Tax Code**

142. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which full family tax credit status is available to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5408/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am informed by the Revenue Commis-



sioners that, based on the information available the person concerned is in receipt of the correct tax credits.

The personal tax credit due to an individual depends on whether that individual is single, married, in a registered civil partnership, widowed, a surviving civil partner, separated, divorced, or a former civil partner. There is no tax credit available in respect of dependent children where adult individuals are cohabiting. In addition, the single person's tax credit is non-transferable in these cases.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

143. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the number of staff from his Department or agency under his remit working out of a Government building at a location (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5590/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** My Department does not have any staff working out of Government Buildings, Abbeylax, Portlaoise, County Laois.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that they currently have two staff based in Government Buildings, Abbeylax Road, Portlaoise, County Laois.

All other agencies under my remit have advised me that they have no staff at this location.

### **Flood Risk Assessments**

144. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the Bellurgan flood embankment, County Louth will be upgraded and reinforced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5216/15]

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

LCC, with the support of funding provided by the Office of Public Works (OPW), engaged consultants in 2011 to assess the condition of the embankment and to make recommendations for any necessary upgrading. The consultants' report, which was submitted by LCC to OPW in 2013, outlined a number of recommendations for short, medium and long term measures. Following a review of the report, the OPW sought additional information and clarification from LCC in May 2014 in relation to the consultants' conclusions and recommendations, including further details regarding the nature of the proposed works and the basis of the economic benefit attributed to them. This information is still awaited and when received the OPW will give further consideration to the report's recommendations.

It is open also to LCC to utilise its own resources to undertake any works required on the Bellurgan embankment.

### **Public Sector Staff Recruitment**

145. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform

the reason employees holding prison administration and support officer grades are deemed ineligible to apply for vacancies for Civil Service grades in other Departments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5184/15]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin):** All Civil Servants are eligible to apply for competitions to fill vacancies in Civil Service grades through open competition or through confined interdepartmental competition, subject to satisfying the relevant eligibility criteria.

Eligibility for Departmental competitions is a matter for the Department concerned, subject to compliance with legal and other requirements relating to Civil Service recruitment and promotion competitions.

### EU Directives

146. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when EU Directive 2014/24/EU, which is to replace Directive 2004/18/EC regarding public procurements, will be transposed into law, in view of the fact that the transposition date is supposed to be before the end of April 2015. [5214/15]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin):** On 28 March, 2014, the European Commission published three new Directives as a collective reform of the existing EU regime for public procurement under the existing provisions of Directive 2004/17/EU - coordinating the procurement procedures of entities operating in the water, energy, transport and postal services sectors and Directive 2004/18/EU - on the coordination of procedures for the award of public works contracts, public supply contracts and public service contracts.

The three new Directives, including the Directive referred to by the Deputy are:

- 2014/23/EU - on the award of concession contracts
- 2014/24/EU- on public procurement and repealing Directive 2004/18/EU
- 2014/25/EU - on procurement by entities operating in the water, energy, transport and postal services sectors and repealing Directive 2004/17/EC

The three Directives require to be transposed into national law by all EU Member States by April 2016. In this regard, the Office of Government Procurement, which is under the aegis of my Department, is progressing the process of transposition into Irish law.

### Departmental Properties

147. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide a list in respect of properties that are leased by his Department at a location (details supplied) in County Laois; the address of each of the buildings concerned; the Department or Government agency which is using the building; the purpose for which it is required; the expiry date of the lease; the annual rent-lease for this building; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5230/15]

150. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the sanction provided for a project (details supplied) in October 2013 is still being implemented; if funding has been allocated for this project; the position regarding this matter; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [5243/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 147 and 150 together.

The following shows details of the properties leased by the Commissioners of Public Works in Portlaoise:

Name and address of Building	Annual Rent	Occupancy
Unit 11 Clonminham Industrial Estate, Portlaoise	98,133.16	Dept of Agriculture, Food and the Marine - Record Office
Grattan Business Centre, Dublin Road, Portlaoise	190,000.00	Dept of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Eircom Building, Knockmay, Portlaoise	118,000.00	Dept of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Eircom Building, Knockmay, Portlaoise	100,000.00	Dept of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Grattan House, Grattan Business Centre Portlaoise	46,860.00	Dept of Education and Skills, National Council of Special Education, National Education & Welfare Board
Grattan House, Grattan Business Centre Portlaoise	43,650.00	Dept of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Portlaoise Agri Warehouse, Kylekiproe, Portlaoise	107,919.25	Dept of Agriculture, Food and the Marine - Warehouse
Kilminchy Crescent, Portlaoise	84,051.49	Dept of Agriculture, Food and the Marine - Appeals Office
Portlaoise Employment Services, JFL House, Portlaoise	90,000	Dept of Social Protection
Portlaoise Furniture Store, Timahoe Rd, Portlaoise	1,800	Office of Public Works - Furniture Store
Portlaoise NCCA & Equality	50,000	National Council for Curriculum Assessment

In October 2013, sanction was received from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to proceed with the extension to the existing Government Buildings at Abbeylax Road to facilitate the consolidation of Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine staff. However, funding was not provided and, consequently, this project has not been advanced.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine consider it a priority that staff are consolidated in order to re-integrate and co-locate different business areas that have cross-over functions. The OPW has been working with the Department with this consolidation in mind and in 2014, three leases in Gandon Court were surrendered and additional centralised space was leased in Portlaoise town. In addition to the consolidation of staff, a rental saving of approximately €100,000 per annum was achieved. In order to achieve further consolidation, it is proposed to commence a space audit of the State owned Government Offices on the Abbeylax Road. This will establish the potential for consolidation of staff through re-configuration of the space with a more modern open plan layout and furniture. The provision of the extension will be reviewed following completion of the space audit.

For commercial reasons, the Commissioners of Public Works do not release lease expiry dates. The Commissioners advise that they would be happy to discuss this issue with the Deputy.

### Departmental Staff Data

148. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of staff from his Department or agency under his remit working out of a Government building at a location (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5231/15]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin):** In response to the Deputy's question I can confirm that there are currently no civil servants in my Department, or those under my aegis, working in Portlaoise, County Laois.

### Disability Act Employment Targets

149. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will reinstate the quota of 3% of persons with a disability employed in the Civil Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5239/15]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin):** The 3 per cent target for the employment of people with disabilities in the Public Service is set out in the Disability Act 2005 and remains in place.

My Department reports to the National Disability Authority on compliance with this target for Government Departments and Offices staffed mainly by civil servants. In 2013 those organisations employed 3.9% people reported to have a disability. The corresponding figure for 2012 was 3.6%

*Question No. 150 answered with Question No. 147.*

### IDA Site Visits

151. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation to detail the number of sponsored site visits by enterprise agencies to counties Cavan and Monaghan in each of the past seven years by each of the agencies; the number of these that were successful; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5210/15]

152. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide, in tabular form, the number of jobs created in each of the past seven years in enterprise agency-supported companies in counties Cavan and Monaghan; the number of jobs lost in each of the past seven years in enterprise agency-supported companies in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5211/15]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 151 and 152 together.

I am informed by IDA Ireland that in the period 2008 to 2014 inclusive, there were a total of 12 IDA Ireland-sponsored site visits by potential investors to counties Cavan and Monaghan. The number of such visits to each county in each year are set out in the following tabular statement A. Enterprise Ireland's core focus is supporting the internationalisation of indigenous companies and the Agency does not arrange site visits of a type similar to IDA Ireland.

I understand from IDA Ireland that investments resulted from some of these visits, but for reasons of client confidentiality and commercial sensitivity, the Agency does not comment pub-

licly on the success rate of such site visits.

Details of the gross jobs gains and losses in IDA Ireland client companies in Counties Cavan and Monaghan in each year from 2008 to 2014, inclusive, are set out in the following tabular statement B. The number of permanent full time jobs gained and lost in Enterprise Ireland client companies, in each of those years are shown in tabular statement C.

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.

In the CSO Quarterly National Household Survey for Q3 2014, unemployment continued to fall in the Border Region (which includes Monaghan and Cavan). The current unemployment rate in the Border Region is 11.7% (down from 17.7% in Q3 2012) a remarkable improvement over the last 2 years. 18,000 extra people are at work in the region over that period.

Meanwhile, I am working with IDA and Enterprise Ireland to get certain projects across the line in the Cavan - Monaghan area which will deliver investment and jobs.

Table A

**IDA Ireland-sponsored Site Visits Cavan/Monaghan (2008-2014):**

County	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Cavan	1	0	3	0	3	2	1
Monaghan	0	0	0	1	0	1	0

Table B

**Employment for Cavan and Monaghan (2008-2014):**

County		2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Cavan	New Jobs Created (Gross Gains)	14	30	92	5	10	15	27
Cavan	Gross Losses	-49	-70	-71	-28	-54	-8	-26
Monaghan	New Jobs Created (Gross Gains)	7	7	45		7	29	13
Monaghan	Gross Losses	-40	-18	-17	-66	-11	-12	-103

Table C

**Annual Employment Survey Jobs Created and Lost in Enterprise Ireland Client Companies in Cavan & Monaghan 2008-2014**

Cavan	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
PFT Gain	802	73	111	337	374	140	394
PFT Loss	-431	-896	-466	-643	-244	-243	-92
Monaghan	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
PFT Gain	293	107	253	344	294	359	382
PFT Loss	-1038	-822	-271	-275	-142	-249	-107



## **Employment Rights**

153. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation to set out the position regarding entitlements in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5234/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Gerald Nash):** Under the provisions of Section 8 of the Payment of Wages Act 1991 a Rights Commissioner's decision may be enforced as if it were an order of the Circuit Court. A formal request for such an order may be filed in the County Registrar's office by the person seeking the order. Where a person's former employer was a limited company and the company is in liquidation or receivership, the person may claim for payment of an award under the insolvency payments scheme. The purpose of the insolvency payments scheme, which operates under the Protection of Employees (Employers' Insolvency) Act, 1984, is to protect certain outstanding pay-related entitlements due to employees in the event of the insolvency of their employer. These entitlements include wages, holiday pay, sick pay, payment in lieu of minimum notice due under the Minimum Notice & Terms of Employment Acts, 1973-2001, and certain pension contributions. Various other statutory awards made by the Employment Appeals Tribunal, Rights Commissioners, etc., are also covered by the scheme. There are statutory limitations on the amount payable. An Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton, has responsibility for the administration of the payments from the insolvency payments scheme.

There are companies which cease trading without engaging in a formal winding-up process and in some such cases those employers may owe monies to their employees. Such employees are not eligible for payments under the insolvency payments scheme.

I am informed that the Department of Social Protection is currently reviewing the position to establish what, if anything can be done to progress payments to individuals in these situations. The Department of Social Protection is not in a position to indicate when this review will be completed.

## **Foreign Direct Investment**

154. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation to outline his plans to encourage foreign direct investment in Drogheda, Ardee and Dundalk, County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5261/15]

155. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation to detail the number of current active leads by the IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland by location in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5262/15]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 154 and 155 together.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in County Louth is thriving. In the four year period from 2011 to 2014 employment in IDA Ireland client companies in county Louth has doubled. The latest Annual Employment Survey shows that there are 23 IDA Ireland client companies in County Louth employing 3,029 people in full and part time employment while the corresponding figure for 2011 showed that there were 1,511 employed in IDA Ireland supported companies. In the same four-year period there were a total of 52 IDA Ireland-sponsored site visits by potential investors to the county.

County Louth has strong clusters in international business services, with companies in the region such as eBay, Coca-Cola, National Pen and International Fund Services; and in manufacturing with companies such as Cargotec and Becton Dickinson. These international brands are an attraction for additional companies to potentially locate to the North East region. In 2014 alone Becton Dickson announced a €16m investment and expansion of its headquarters in Drogheda while PayPal announced the expansion of its facility in Dundalk with creation of a further 400 jobs.

County Louth also has a strong base of indigenous industry across a wide range of sectors. In fact as recently as this morning, I was happy to be in Dundalk for the opening of a brand new, state-of-the-art Customer Engagement Centre established by SalesSense, Ireland's leading sales solution provider, which will lead to the creation of 100 jobs during the year. There were 4,797 people employed in Enterprise Ireland assisted companies in County Louth in 2014. Enterprise Ireland's core focus is supporting the internationalisation of indigenous companies and the Agency does not arrange site visits of a type similar to IDA Ireland.

Enterprise Ireland recently launched a number of initiatives in the North East region (which includes County Louth) including the Competitive Feasibility Fund for the North East Region, which was launched in October 2014. An Enterprise Start event was held last week on 27th January in the Dundalk office with 12 participants. Over €5.4m in funding to companies was approved in 2014.

In terms of infrastructure, Enterprise Ireland has supported five Enterprise Centres in County Louth, which include the Science Services Centre at Finnabair Business Park, the Creative Spark Enterprise Centre on the Inner relief road at Muirhevnamor and more recently The Mill Enterprise Hub in Drogheda.

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.

### **Action Plan for Jobs**

156. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation when the regional enterprise strategy for the west, which includes counties Roscommon, Leitrim and Galway, will be rolled out; if he has specific job creation targets for counties Roscommon, Leitrim and Galway as part of this strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5328/15]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The 2015 Action Plan for Jobs which was published on 29 January includes a commitment to develop and publish a suite of Regional Enterprise Strategies to support enterprise growth and job creation in every region of the country. These Strategies will include a series of specific actions to be delivered by a range of public bodies and local stakeholders, building on the particular strengths and assets of each region. The areas to be covered by the Regional Enterprise Strategies correspond to the eight NUTS III level regions at which data is collected by the CSO. Under this

classification, the West Region is comprised of Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. Leitrim is included in the Border Region, along with Cavan, Donegal, Louth, Sligo and Monaghan.

The first two Regional Enterprise Strategies to be developed will cover the Midlands and the South East regions respectively. Following a consultation process in the Midlands, my officials are currently finalising the preparation of the Regional Enterprise Strategy for that region.

Consultation with stakeholders on the Strategy for the South-East region will commence over the coming weeks and work on developing the other Regional Enterprise Strategies will follow on a rolling basis. My objective is that six Regional Enterprise Strategies, including those for the Border and West regions, will be launched by July, with the two remaining Strategies in development. It is not intended that specific job creation targets will be set for each county in the Regional Enterprise Strategies, but, rather, that the Strategies will identify measures that can be taken to enable each region as a whole to realise its economic potential and create jobs, building on its existing competitive strengths.

### **Employment Support Services**

157. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation whether IDA Ireland and the Government have sourced any alternative employer that is interested in creating alternative employment for those impacted by the MBNA downgrading; and whether the marketing pack produced by IDA Ireland and MBNA management brought interest from any new potential investors, Irish or foreign-based, in the facility (details supplied). [5329/15]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton):** A series of actions are being implemented by local and national bodies to source an alternative employer and find alternative employment for those impacted by the MBNA redundancies, which unfortunately took effect on November 28th last. An inter-agency group, led by Enterprise Ireland, has been formed and its membership includes representatives of all the relevant State players. This Group has met on a monthly basis and is providing a coordinated approach to the needs of the affected staff and ensuring that all necessary steps are put in train to pursue an alternative employer.

The IDA, through its global network, continues to market the former MBNA facility to a range of potential investors and Enterprise Ireland is also marketing it to its client base. The availability of a skilled pool of the former MBNA employees is being highlighted.

There have been a small number of preliminary enquiries about the facility, both from foreign owned and Irish owned businesses but it is too early in the process to be specific about their potential.

With regard to Regional Development, under the 2015 Action Plan for Jobs which I launched recently, it is intended to develop and publish a suite of Regional Enterprise Strategies, based on consultation with key stakeholders at regional level and on the analysis of the strengths of each region. The process will commence with the publication of strategies for the Midlands and South East regions. Similar strategies for the other regions will be commenced over the course of the year, on a phased basis. All will include specific actions for all the enterprise development organisations and other public bodies active in each region, to promote enterprise growth and job creation. Of course specific issues and factors relevant to particular regions, such as the MBNA closure, will be fully embraced in the new Strategies.

**Job Creation Data**

158. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation to detail the number of IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland-supported jobs that have been created in counties Longford and Westmeath since 2011; if he will confirm the locations of these jobs in these counties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5334/15]

159. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide, in tabular form, the number of visits by IDA Ireland to Athlone and Mullingar in County Westmeath and to County Longford for every year since 2011 to 2014 and from 2015 to date. [5336/15]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 158 and 159 together.

I am informed by IDA Ireland that there were 43 IDA-sponsored site visits by potential investors to County Westmeath since 2011. There were no visits to County Longford during this period. The number of visits to Co. Westmeath in each of the years 2011 to 2014 are set out in the following tabular statement (A). For reasons of commercial sensitivity and client confidentiality information in relation to site visits is given on a county by county basis only. While IDA Ireland does seek to influence, decisions as to where to visit and where to locate is ultimately a matter for the investor.

IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland have a strong presence in Counties Longford and Westmeath. Counties Longford and Westmeath are home to 22 IDA Ireland client companies employing 3,055 people. As well as the FDI sector, there are 5,796 people employed in 149 Enterprise Ireland-supported jobs in Westmeath and Longford. The Annual Employment Survey shows that since 2011, there were a total of 2,537 jobs created in IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland companies in Westmeath and Longford in the period 2011 to 2014, 780 of which were created in IDA Ireland client companies with 1,757 being created in Enterprise Ireland supported companies. The breakdown of employment in respect of the years 2011 to 2014 in Co. Westmeath and Co. Longford and by agency is outlined in the following tabular statements (B).

Information for the Annual Survey is gathered on an annual basis and aggregated at county level. Data is supplied by individual companies on a confidential basis for statistical purposes only so it is not possible to provide information in respect of individual locations. Counties Longford and Westmeath are part of IDA Ireland's Midlands Region, along with the counties of Roscommon, Laois and Offaly. The Region has a strong cluster in Medical Technology and Life Sciences and is home to key IDA Ireland clients such as Ark Consulting in Longford and Abbott, Covidien, Integra, GeneMedix elsewhere in the region generally. In addition, the region is home to International Business Services companies such as Teleflex, AXA, NPD Group and PPD. All of these companies are an attraction for potential IDA Ireland clients to locate in the Midlands and to provide employment opportunities for people living in both Westmeath and Longford.

The IDA Mullingar Business and Technology Park is an essential infrastructure to provide for FDI clients and also for indigenous companies interested in developing their business in the Midlands. For example, Patterson Pumps acquired a 1.62 hectare site from IDA under leasehold title in the Mullingar Business and Technology Park and are currently on site.

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 months a series of actions to help drive the achievement of this goal.

**Table shows the number of IDA Ireland sponsored Site Visits by potential investors to County Westmeath from 2011 to 2014 (A).**

-	2011	2012	2013	2014
Westmeath	15	7	9	12

### **Employment in IDA Ireland supported companies in Longford and Westmeath**

#### **2011 - 2014 (B)**

Longford	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total Jobs	658	696	701	650
New Jobs Gains	6	44	25	10
Westmeath	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total Jobs	2,123	2,262	2,216	2,405
New Jobs Gains	161	177	131	226

### **Employment in Enterprise Ireland supported companies in Longford and Westmeath**

#### **2011 - 2014**

Longford	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total Jobs	1,650	1,677	1,820	2,360
New Job Gains	86	116	147	258
Westmeath	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total Jobs	2,411	2,592	2,854	3,436
New Jobs Gains	339	275	313	223

### **Departmental Staff Data**

160. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation to set out the number of staff from his Department or agency under his remit working out of a Government building at a location (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5592/15]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I can advise the Deputy that there are no staff of my Department, or the agencies under its remit, at the location in County Laois specified.



### **Agri-Environment Options Scheme Applications**

161. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a site inspection for an agri-environment options scheme application for 2013 and 2014 (details supplied) will take place in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5194/15]

**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 the 1 May 2013 and full entitlements have issued in respect of the 2013 Scheme year. A review of the land parcels declared by the person named under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme revealed that three of the land parcels declared contained ineligible features. However, while the person named was notified of this decision and of his right of appeal on two separate occasions, firstly on 11 September 2013 and secondly on 12 June 2014, his appeal has only been received in the last few days, specifically on 26 January 2015.

Following the review of my Department's decision, as sought by the person named, a visit by a Department official to verify the position on the ground is now necessary. The person named will be advised, in writing, of the findings of the verification visit as soon as possible following the visit. In the event that the person named is dissatisfied with the outcome of this verification check, the decision can be appealed to the independent LPIS Appeals Committee, within 4 weeks of the notification letter.

The AEOS application of the person named in respect of the 2014 Scheme year is currently being processed based on the reduced area and 75% payment will issue shortly. The balancing 25% payment will follow thereafter. Should the current SPS review result in a further adjustment to the 2014 parcel areas, any necessary adjustment to AEOS payments already issued will be made.

### **Sheep Technology Adoption Programme Payments**

162. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) in County Galway did not receive a sheep technology adoption programme payment or a beef technology adoption programme payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5204/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The person named participated in the 2014 Beef Technology Adoption Programme (BTAP) and 2014 Sheep Technology Adoption Programme (STAP). In relation to his participation in the 2014 STAP scheme the Terms and Condition of the Scheme state: "applicants who are selling lambs directly for processing must apply for membership of the Bord Bia Beef and Lamb Quality Assurance Scheme (BLQAS) and achieve certification by 3 October 2014."

According to my Department's records, the person named was not certified on this date and as such does not qualify for payment. If the person named wishes to appeal this decision he can do so by applying in writing to Innovation Unit, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Government Buildings, Old Abbeylax Road, Portlaoise. In addition, it is advised that any new facts or fresh evidence presented in support of his case should be included along with any supporting documentation. In relation to his participation in the 2014 BTAP Scheme, his application is cleared for payment, which will issue shortly.

## Single Payment Scheme Payments

163. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) in County Galway received a substantial reduction in their single farm payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5205/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** An application under the 2014 Single Payment Scheme was received in my Department from the person named on 23 April 2014. Following processing, full payment issued directly to the nominated bank account of the person named, the first instalment issuing on 16 October 2014 and the balance issuing on 1 December 2014. Following the Reform of the CAP, changes were made to the payments under the Single Payment Scheme. Under the 2013 Scheme, payments were subjected to a 10% Modulation deduction with the first €5,000 paid to all farmers exempt from the deduction. The monies deducted under Modulation were made available to Member State for funding Pillar II Schemes. From 2014, the Modulation deduction no longer applied but the total amount of funding was deducted from the National Ceiling and permanently transferred to Pillar II. As the National Ceilings of Member States were reduced, the EU Regulations provided for a reduction in the value of payment entitlements to ensure compliance with the Ceilings. The discretionary provision in the Regulations to exempt any farmer, who was paid €5,000 or less in 2013, was applied in Ireland in order to protect smaller-scale farmers. The rate of reduction in Ireland on all other farmers in order that the adjusted Ceiling would be respected was 10.49%.

## Pigmeat Sector

164. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the discussions that have been held at official and political level with the Russian authorities in relation to the ban on pigmeat exports from Ireland to Russia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5225/15]

165. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if Russia has eased the ban on the import of live pigs and pigmeat products from some member states of the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5226/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 164 and 165 together.

Since the introduction of the Russian ban on imports of EU pig products in January 2014, my Department has continually monitored the situation and continues to engage at EU level and with the Russian authorities on how the restrictions imposed could be lifted. This reflects the importance of the market to Ireland given that nearly a quarter of all European pigmeat was exported to Russia before trade was restricted and that in 2013, Ireland exported 20,165 tonnes of pork and pigmeat to Russia with a value €55m. This was up from 15,057 tonnes (€39m) in 2012.

A high-level team from my Department visited Moscow on 18 December last for discussions with the Russian authorities on a range of agri-food matters which included the ban on pig products. This was followed by a second meeting on 10 January. The meetings were organised on foot of bilateral discussions which I had with the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Ireland. At those meetings the Russian authorities confirmed that they continue to view the ban as an EU-wide issue. Notwithstanding some media reports that certain EU MS are making particular progress on having parts of the ban lifted my understanding is that all MS are still

restricted in full by the ban.

At EU level the Commission has referred the matter to the WTO for resolution and the issue has also been on the agenda at the Council of Ministers. At recent Council meetings I have joined with other European Ministers in requesting the European Commission to continue to monitor developments on markets, and have called for the introduction of remedial measures such as private storage aid. The Commission have acknowledged the significant decline in pig prices and will keep the situation under review. They have also committed to actively working with Member States to remove SPS barriers to trade and open new markets, and agreed to provide an additional €30m in funding under the EU Scheme for Promotion of Agricultural Products to support market developments in third country markets.

I am pleased to report that overall Irish pigmeat exports in 2014 increased by 10%, to a value of €570m. Exports to Asia alone are estimated to have risen by 20% to China, 210% to Japan and 650% to South Korea. International trade is expected to improve in 2015, reflecting the ongoing increase in demand in response to growing per capita wealth in China, and the re-direction of pigmeat usually directed towards the Russian market to different locations such as South Korea and the Philippines. I am pleased to report also that we have secured major market access successes in the second half of last year including Vietnam and the Philippines which are already proving to be valuable outlets for Irish pigmeat.

I am of course aware of the current price difficulties for Irish pig farmers and have met with farm organisations and with processors on a number of occasions to discuss possible solutions to alleviate these difficulties. I am also continuing in my efforts to secure new third country markets, which has been a priority of mine since assuming office. I will continue to work closely with like-minded Ministers in the EU to persuade the European Commission to come forward with market response measures in response to current price difficulties. In addition my Department will continue to engage with the Russian authorities and with a view to lifting the pigmeat restriction as a priority.

### **Departmental Offices**

166. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans in relation to a project (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5232/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** In October 2013, sanction was received from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to proceed with the extension to the existing Government Offices at Old Abbeyleix Road, Portlaoise to facilitate the consolidation of Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine staff. However, funding was not provided and, consequently, this project has not been advanced. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine consider it a priority that staff are consolidated in order to reintegrate and co-locate different business areas that have cross-over functions. The OPW has been working with the Department with this consolidation in mind and in 2014, three leases in Gandon Court, Portlaoise were surrendered.

OPW proposes to commence a space audit of the State owned Government Offices on the Abbeyleix Road, Portlaoise in the coming weeks. This will establish the potential for consolidation of staff through re-configuration of the space with a more modern open plan layout and furniture.

The provision of the extension will be reviewed following completion of the space audit.

## Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

167. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Cork will receive their disadvantaged areas payment for 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5237/15]

**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 9 May 2014. Processing of this application has recently been completed with payment under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme due to issue directly to the nominated bank account of the person named shortly.

## Harbours and Piers Expenditure

168. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the funding allocations approved for each local authority in 2014 and the amount paid to each of these local authorities in 2014; the funding allocated to these local authorities in 2015; the amounts paid to the local authorities to date in 2015 following the Government decision of 11 February 2014 to allocate funding for the clean-up, repair and restoration works in relation to public infrastructure damaged in the period from 13 December 2013 to 6 January 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5246/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Local Authority harbours, piers and slipways are owned by the Local Authorities themselves and responsibility for their repair and maintenance rests with the Local Authority in the first instance. My Department, however provides funding for the development and repair of Local Authority owned piers, harbours and slipways under the annual Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme subject to available Exchequer funding and overall national priorities.

In 2014, in addition to funding provided to the Local Authorities under our Capital Programme, additional funding was provided under a 'Storm Damage' Programme. The 'Storm Damage' Programme was an exceptional, once off measure as part of the Government's overall response to the impact of the Winter Storms last year on the public pier harbour and slipway network linked to fisheries and aquaculture.

The table details the total funding allocations approved and the total expenditure by this Department in relation to all Local Authority funding for 2014.

Local Authority	2014 Approvals	2014 Expenditure
Clare County Council	€232,650	€232,389
Cork City Council	€187,500	€0
Cork County Council	€915,700	€709,454
Donegal County Council	€1,267,750	€747,793
Fingal County Council	€11,250	€0
Galway County Council	€2,241,000	€2,145,846
Kerry County Council	€313,290	€301,882
Louth County Council	€84,750	€20,712
Mayo County Council	€1,772,100	€1,739,622
Sligo County Council	€150,300	€150,121
Waterford County Council	€768,000	€511,046

Local Authority	2014 Approvals	2014 Expenditure
Wexford County Council	€1,820,400	€710,515
Wicklow County Council	€198,900	€196,766
Local Authority Programme Total	€9,963,590	€7,466,146

The Fishery Harbour & Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme for 2015 is currently under consideration.

### Agriculture Scheme Payments

169. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 79 of 29 January 2015, the reason incorrect information (details supplied) was provided. [5250/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The original PQ was answered on 29 January 2015, based on the information available to the LPIS Appeals Unit on that date. The inspection file relating to the person named, which confirmed the completion of the inspection, was not completed until after that date. The file is currently being processed and the person named has been contacted by an official of my Department to advise him accordingly. My Department has also undertaken to contact the person named, by phone, to verify the findings of the verification visit as soon as the processing is completed.

### Animal Welfare

170. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of cases of animal cruelty prosecuted in 2014; the number of convictions secured; and the average sanction imposed. [5269/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Prosecutions have been taken under animal welfare legislation including the Protection of Animals Act, 1911 and 1965; the Animal Health and Welfare Act, 2013 which I commenced in 2014 (and which replaced the aforementioned Protection of Animals Acts) and under related EU animal welfare legislation. In terms of cases initiated by and on behalf of my Department, there is in the order of thirty cases being progressed with three prosecutions to date. With regard to the three cases, in one case sanction will be administered by the Courts at a later date, in another the individual was prohibited from keeping animals of the type in question and in the third case the individual was ordered to sell his animals.

### Animal Welfare

171. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to increase the penalties for cases of animal cruelty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5270/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Animal Health and Welfare Act, 2013 substantially increased the penalties for cases of animal cruelty. Under the Act, on summary conviction a person can receive a fine of up to €10,000 and on indictment €250,000 and/or imprisonment up to 5 years. There are fixed penalty payments for



lesser offences. There are no plans to further increase the penalties.

### **Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments**

172. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding a disadvantaged areas scheme payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5304/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The person named is one of a number of applicants under the 2012, 2013 and 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, whose cases are impacted by the requirement of a minimum stocking density of 0.3 livestock units per forage hectare in 2011 and who applied for derogation in this regard. The person named subsequently submitted additional information to my Department which following review unfortunately did not provide sufficient reasons to allow the application. The person named has been notified of the outcome in writing and advised of the option to appeal to the Office of the Ombudsman should they so wish.

### **Departmental Investigations**

173. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the EU Petitions Committee has recommended that he should issue an apology in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; if the apology will be issued; when the independent company will be appointed to analyse the scientific data collected relevant to the case as agreed at the EU Petitions Committee; the cost to date of all Government agencies involved in the examination of the case; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that some recordings of data were under recorded by 50%; if he will investigate same; if he will assist the person to recoup losses at their farm during this time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5319/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** A large number of studies and investigations have been undertaken by various state agencies into the production problems affecting the farm of the person concerned between 2004 and 2009. The farm issues were investigated by my own Department's Veterinary Laboratory Service with the assistance of Teagasc and subsequently by the Centre for Veterinary Epidemiology and Risk Analysis (CVERA) based in UCD. The factory emissions were investigated by the EPA and no evidence was found to indicate that factory emissions were the cause of the individual's difficulties. The factory closed in December 2008. Investigations or validations of the performance of animals on this farm have not been undertaken by my Department since 2008 and it is not proposed to take any further action in relation to this case. The issue of recouping losses does not arise. My Department has at all times sought to assist in every way possible the person concerned, most particularly through the extensive investigations undertaken on his behalf. At a meeting of the Petitions Committee of the EU in March 2012, the Committee were advised that a remedy available to them in regard to trying to understand conflicting views of the significance of complex data was to ask the EU Commission and specifically DG Sanco to refer the report in question to one or other of the expert bodies available to the Commission such as the Joint Research Council or the European Food Safety Authority for an independent expert opinion. This was for them to pursue and not my Department.

Based on information available to me, the costs incurred by my Department in examination of the issue amounted to almost €600,000 and my Department is continuing to assist the herd

owner with his ongoing milk recording. I am unaware of an allegation that some recordings of data were under recorded by 50% and if the Deputy has any further information on this I would be grateful if he could forward this to my Department.

### **Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Appeals**

174. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding an appeal submitted on 10 November 2014 under the disadvantaged areas scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5320/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The person named submitted a 2014 Single Payment/Disadvantaged Areas scheme application on 14 May 2014. Payment has not issued to the person named as the holding concerned has not satisfied the Scheme minimum stocking density requirements. An appeal was received in respect of this issue and the person named was informed of the outcome of the appeal in writing on 12 January 2015.

### **Single Payment Scheme Eligibility**

175. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath who had to cease farming due to medical circumstances in 2013 and is now in a position to resume farming in 2014 will be granted appropriate single farm entitlements under the force majeure conditions, which apply to the new scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5326/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The person named participated in the Single Payment Scheme for each scheme year up to 2011. Having leased out his entitlements for the scheme years 2012 and 2013, he did not establish an automatic right to receive new entitlements under the Basic Payment Scheme and was advised by my Department to transfer his entitlements permanently under the 2014 scheme year. The person named subsequently sold his entitlements under the 2014 scheme. Such a transfer is exempt from Capital Gains Tax.

The EU Regulation governing the introduction of the new CAP reform provides for a Force Majeure category under the National Reserve. An on-line application form for this measure will be made available by my Department in early April 2015.

### **Appointments to State Boards**

176. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when appointments to the board of Bord Bia are likely to be completed; the total number of applicants for the State board; his plans to publish the curriculum vitae of each successful candidate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5351/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** From November 2014 all appointments to State boards (including Bord Bia), are subject to revised arrangements established by Government, whereby the filling of all State board vacancies is assigned to the Public Appointments Service (PAS). Under the new *Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards* established by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, State board

vacancies (with a limited number of exceptions), must be publicly advertised by the Public Appointments Service (PAS).

With regard to the Board of Bord Bia, there are currently seven vacancies. The post specifications for these particular vacancies will shortly be notified to PAS.

Once notified, PAS will collaborate with the Chair of the State board concerned and my Department to finalise an Information Booklet to be placed on the State boards portal to advertise these vacancies. A period of three weeks is allowed by PAS for receipt of expressions of interest, which are then considered by its assessment panel. All applicants for such State board positions must apply through the independent PAS system.

Following their assessment process, a list of suitable candidates will be forwarded to my Department for selection by me of appointees. In accordance with the new arrangements I will announce the new members appointed to the Board and the basis for their selection in due course.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

177. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of staff from his Department or agency under his remit working out of a Government building at a location (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5583/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** There are currently 172 (162.39 in terms of full time equivalents) staff of my Department working in Government Buildings, Abbeyleix Road, Portlaoise, Co. Laois.

### **Defence Forces Allowances**

178. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Defence if a person (details supplied) in County Kildare is in receipt of their proper payments; if the deductions as determined by his Department are correct; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5197/15]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The person concerned is in receipt of a Defence Forces retirement pension from my Department, and I am advised that he getting his full statutory entitlements in that regard. His pension is liable to income tax and the universal social charge on the same basis as applies generally. These are statutory deductions from his pension based on specific instructions as issued periodically to my Department by the Revenue Commissioners. If the person concerned has any queries in that regard he is advised to contact his regional Revenue office directly, the address of which is shown on his Tax Credit Certificate or on any correspondence received from Revenue. His pension is also subject to the Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR) measure. This came into effect on 1 January 2011 in accordance with the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) Act 2010, as amended, as part of the programme of measures to urgently address the serious state of the public finances. Under that legislation, the public service pensions of retired public servants such as the person concerned are liable to the PSPR reduction; however, the first €12,000 of their gross pension is exempt. The PSPR is a tiered reduction, which is progressively more for those with higher rates of pension. The amount of the PSPR decrease depends essentially on the person's date of retirement and their gross annual rate of pension. In this person's specific case, the amount of his gross annual pension above the €12,000 exemption threshold is liable to

a PSPR reduction of 6%, which works out at an actual reduction of €7.12 a month. Income tax and USC are only then applied, as appropriate, to his pension after the PSPR deduction. Details of the various deductions are shown on the monthly pension payslip of the person in question.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

179. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Defence the number of staff from his Department or agency under his remit working out of a Government building at a location (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5587/15]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Defence Organisation includes civil servants, military personnel, and civilian employees attached to military installations. There are no employees of the Defence Organisation working out of the Government building specified by the Deputy.

### **Garda Deployment**

180. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will discuss with the Garda Commissioner the need to assign additional gardaí and new vehicles to Tallaght Garda station, Dublin 24, from the extra resources she will have at her disposal; her views on the need to deal effectively with crime in Tallaght; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5218/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** One of the primary functions of the Garda Commissioner under the Garda Síochána Acts, is to direct and control An Garda Síochána. The Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel among the Garda Regions, Divisions, and Districts. Garda management keep this distribution under continuing review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources.

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the personnel strength of Tallaght Garda Station on 31 December 2014, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 170. There are also 12 Garda Reserves and 12 Civilians attached to Tallaght Garda Station.

As the Deputy will be aware, 100 new recruits entered training at the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014, the first intake of Garda recruits since 2009. This was followed by an intake of a further 100 new recruits in December. A further intake of 100 is due to enter training in the next few days. This will bring to 300 the number of recruits in the Garda College since last September and is a measure of this Government's commitment to the Garda Síochána. The first intake of recruits will attest as members of An Garda Síochána in May of this year and will be assigned to Garda Stations by the Garda Commissioner. The Garda Commissioner, will of course, continue to keep the needs of Tallaght Garda Station under review within the overall context of the needs of Garda Divisions throughout the country.

In relation to vehicles the provision and allocation of Garda transport is a matter for the Garda Commissioner in the light of her identified operational requirements and the availability of resources. Responsibility for the efficient deployment of Garda vehicles in each Division is assigned to the Divisional Officer, who may allocate vehicles between stations, as required by operational circumstances.

The Deputy will be aware that I recently secured an additional €10 million for investment in

the Garda fleet, €7 million of which was made available in 2014, with the remaining €3 million being provided in 2015. The additional investment of €7 million enabled An Garda Síochána to purchase 370 new vehicles towards the end of last year. These vehicles will be allocated to Garda Divisions in line with the Garda Commissioner's operational requirements. I am advised by the Garda authorities that the needs of the area referred to by the Deputy will be fully considered when these vehicles are being allocated.

### **Prison Staff**

181. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason employees holding prison administration and support officer grades are deemed ineligible to apply for vacancies for Civil Service grades in her Department; her views on altering the rules to permit such applications; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5309/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** In common with all other civil servants, Prison Administration and Support Officer (PASO) grades may compete for vacancies in the Civil Service through open competition or through confined interdepartmental competition, and would, therefore, be eligible to fill vacancies in my Department that fall to be filled from such competitions.

The PASO grades are staff of the Irish Prison Service and are not part of my Department's promotion pool. Therefore, the staff concerned are not eligible to apply for competitions confined to staff within that promotion pool. Similar eligibility arrangements apply to staff of other parts of the justice family, including the Courts Service, the Garda Síochána, the Property Registration Authority, the Legal Aid Board or the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission. It is an established practice across the Civil Service for different Departments or Bodies to operate a promotion pool restricted to their own staff.

The PASO grades are new grades in the Prison Service specifically designed to carry out the administrative and support duties required for the operation of a modern and efficient service. There are three grade levels for the PASO, starting at Grade 3 and progressing to Grade 1. The circulars used to fill PASO posts made it clear that the PASO grades were posts in the Prison Service. The circulars also confirmed that those appointed to the grades were civil servants but with specific terms and conditions including their assignment to a prison campus and in a uniformed capacity.

### **Garda Promotions**

182. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure for Cabinet sign-off on Garda promotions; the protocol when gardaí put forward for promotion are the subject of an ongoing investigation; and the status of necessary improvements to the management of the fixed charge processing office. [5310/15]

200. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to reform the appointments process regarding the promotion of senior gardaí; her role in this process; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5450/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 182 and 200 together.

Promotions in the Garda Síochána to all ranks from Sergeant to Assistant Commissioner are



covered by the Garda Síochána Promotion Regulations of 2006. Regulation 3 provides that:

(1) The selection of members for promotion in competitions held under these Regulations shall be based on merit and the readiness and suitability for promotion of the candidates.

(2) Competitions shall be conducted in a manner which is -

- (a) fair, impartial and objective,
- (b) in line with best practice,
- (c) consistent throughout, and
- (d) open, accountable and transparent.

Prior to the interview stage, reports on candidates for promotion to all ranks from Sergeant to Chief Superintendent are completed by the candidate's supervisor appropriate to the rank being applied for. In relation to ongoing investigations, the integrity of any internal Garda disciplinary inquiries or investigations by GSOC, and any related proceedings, must of course be respected. Where any findings are made against a member due process must be followed. The Garda Code also provides for the reporting of concerns in relation to the conduct of any member who is on a promotion list, but again due process must be observed in the investigation of any such concern.

On completion of the interview process, a list of successful candidates is provided to the Garda Commissioner who then publishes the final list by way of bulletin throughout the organisation.

Appointments to positions at the rank of Sergeant and Inspector are made by the Commissioner and appointments to the ranks of Superintendent, Chief Superintendent and Assistant Commissioner are made by the Government (by way of Government memorandum brought by the Minister). In both cases appointments are made from the list in strict order of their position on the list.

The Deputy will be aware that the the post of Garda Commissioner was recently filled through open competition and that the vacant posts of Deputy Commissioner will be filled in the same manner.

Insofar as the management of the Fixed Charge Processing Office (FCPO) is concerned, the Garda authorities introduced a new policy, with effect from 16 June 2014, to give affect to the recommendations of the Garda Inspectorate Report on the operation of the Fixed Charge Processing System (FCPS). The recent report of the Garda Professional Standards Unit recognised the significant improvements that have been made on foot of the new policy.

It is the case, however, that the report identified areas which require further attention and made a series of recommendations to address these. A number of these recommendations relate to Garda operations and procedures and have been accepted by the Commissioner.

The report also makes a number of recommendations with respect to legislative and related cross-cutting aspects of the FCPS, and I have referred these to the Criminal Justice (FCPS) Working Group for further examination.

I have also decided, again in the interests of maintaining public confidence in the system, to put in place a further assurance and oversight mechanism. In particular, I have appointed Judge Matthew Deery, former President of the Circuit Court, to act as Independent Oversight authority for the FCPS cancellation process.

## Road Traffic Offences

183. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 144 of 21 January 2015, her views on whether it is pertinent to gather information such as the number of potentially dangerous drivers who are continuing to drive after being disqualified; and her plans to request that the Garda Síochána record this information. [5311/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I have brought the Deputy's question to the attention of the Garda authorities for their observations and will contact him again when I have a response. I can, however, inform him that a range of data is recorded concerning persons who are detected driving without a licence. This data includes the number of fixed charge notices issued in respect of persons detected for the offence of driving without a driving licence; the number of prosecutions for failure to surrender a driving licence for endorsement; and the failure of a disqualified driver to submit a driving licence contrary to relevant road traffic legislation.

## Garda Deployment

184. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 308 of 27 January 2015, if she will provide reassurance that the Garda Commissioner will be requested to assign new gardaí to traffic duty to ensure the correct and safe policing of our roads; and her views on the establishment of a dedicated Garda traffic police within An Garda Síochána for traffic policing duties alone, in view of the death and casualty rates on Irish roads. [5312/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel, including the Traffic Corps, 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 also be aware that I have no direct role in operational road traffic enforcement which is a matter for the Garda Commissioner. I can, however, assure the Deputy that one of An Garda Síochána's strategic objectives is to provide a safe environment for all road users and enforcement remains high and determined throughout the country.

While all operational Gardaí may, as the need arises, enforce road traffic legislation, the Garda National Traffic Bureau (GNTB) formulates policy in line with the Road Safety Strategy and oversee traffic policing throughout the state. Operational Traffic Corps Units based in each Garda Division implement the policies developed by GNTB and enforce road traffic legislation.

As I have previously stated in my answer to the Deputy on the 27 January 2015, on attestation of the new recruits, the Garda Commissioner will assign each of these to Garda stations throughout the country and the needs of the Garda Traffic Corps will be considered within the overall context of the needs of Garda Stations and Units throughout the country.

## Insolvency Service of Ireland Data

185. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of personal insolvency proposals vetoed by banks in the course of the work of the Personal Insol-

vency Service of Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5330/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy is aware, the Insolvency Service of Ireland (ISI) began accepting cases in September 2013. The ISI releases its statistics on a quarterly basis and the most up to date figures reflecting Quarter 4 of 2014 were published recently to their website *www.isi.gov.ie*. 2014 was the ISI's first full year of operation and during that time almost 1000 debt solutions were approved, comprising 547 alternatives to bankruptcy and 448 bankruptcy cases.

85% of proposals for Debt Settlement Arrangements (DSAs) were successful and 71% of proposals for Personal Insolvency Arrangements (PIAs) were successful. Overall, 75% of proposals for DSAs and PIAs were successful. It is encouraging that three out of four proposals are being supported by creditors. While this demonstrates that many financial institutions are constructively engaging in the process, clearly, some are not.

Last week, the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and I met with representatives of the Insolvency Service and a selection of Personal Insolvency Practitioners (PIPs) in order to hear first-hand the PIPs' experience of putting arrangements in place between people struggling with debt and their creditors.

A number of suggestions were made by the PIPs with a view to improving engagement by creditors in the process. I will be considering these suggestions, and proposals received from a range of stakeholders, in the context of the review of the operation of the insolvency legislation, as committed to in the Statement of Government Priorities 2014-2016, to ensure that the ISI has the powers necessary to support families willing to work their way through their debt problems.

### **Residency Permits**

186. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of applications received for residency here, based on the extension of criteria for investors in budget 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5385/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I assume the Deputy is referring to the Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) option to the Immigrant Investor Programme which was introduced in Budget 2014. This is a demand led scheme and to date, there have been no applications for the REIT option.

### **Immigration Policy**

187. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will review the refusal to grant stamp 4 status in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 1; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5392/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service that the situation remains the same as my reply to the Deputy on 20 November 2014. The person in question is subject to the immigration regime for full time non-EEA students which was published in September 2010 and has been in effect since 1 January 2011. As such they do not qualify for Stamp 4 status. A letter to this effect issued to this person on 24 July 2014. The situation is that if this person wishes to work in the State they require a work permit to do so. The issuing of work permit is of course a matter for the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.

### Residency Permits

188. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current residency status in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Waterford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5393/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the persons concerned comprise a family of four, made up of two parents and their two minor children. The cases of the mother and one of the children are at the Section 3/Leave to Remain stage, the case file of the father will also be at that stage in the near future, once a 'three options letter' has been issued to him, while the case file of the remaining child rests with the Refugee Appeals Tribunal.

As the Deputy may be aware, it is the practice of the INIS, insofar as it is possible to do so, to seek to have the cases of all members of a family unit processed to completion at the same time. This principle will be applied in the context of the cases of the persons concerned also. The Deputy will appreciate that the cases of the persons concerned cannot be processed to completion at this point in time given that one member of the family has an outstanding asylum/protection issue to be determined.

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

### Residency Permits

189. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5394/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a valid application for a certificate of naturalisation has been received from the person referred to by the Deputy, who currently has permission to reside in the State until 31 December, 2015.

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

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

### **Deportation Orders**

190. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will note the change of address in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5397/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the address change included with the Deputy's Question has been reflected on INIS records.

In terms of the position in the State of the person concerned, I am advised that as the person concerned had no valid basis to remain in the State, they were, by letter dated 4th April, 2014, notified that the then Minister proposed to make a Deportation Order in respect of them, in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). They were given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of making written representations to the then Minister setting out the reasons why they should not have a Deportation Order made against them. Written representations have been submitted by and on behalf of the person concerned. These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended), in advance of a final decision being made.

The Deputy should note that the person concerned does not hold a current right of residency in this State, they would not be in a position to take up a position of paid employment. Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

### **Residency Permits**

191. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5398/15]

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

As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process. I am informed that processing of this application is well advanced and will be finalised as expeditiously as possible.

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



response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

### **Deportation Orders Re-examination**

192. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will revoke a deportation order in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Waterford in view of the fact that the person's circumstances have changed since the making of the order; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5399/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order, made following the refusal of their asylum and subsidiary protection applications and the consideration of their case under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended).

Representations were received in late 2013 from the legal representative of the person concerned, requesting that the Deportation Order be revoked, pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). This request is under consideration at present. Once a decision has been made on this request, this decision will be notified in writing. The Deputy might wish to note that any such decision will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Order. In the meantime, the Deportation Order remain valid and in place.

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

### **Residency Permits**

193. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency position in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5400/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a letter of application for residence in the State as a family member of an EU citizen was submitted on behalf of the persons concerned on 05/01/2015. However the relevant EU1 application forms were not submitted at that time and the persons concerned were requested by letters dated 22/01/2014 and 28/01/2015 to submit the completed EU1 application forms together with the necessary documentation in support of their applications. Officials in INIS have advised they are not aware of any conflicting requests in this regard. As the Deputy has been previously advised it is incumbent on applicants to co-operate with any request for supporting documentation which is a key part of the application.

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

view, inadequate or too long awaited.

### **Residency Permits**

194. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the record in respect of continuous residency held in her Department in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare will reflect that person's continuous residency as per that person's passport in this jurisdiction from 30 May 2000 to 30 May 2008 and that any loss of residency stamps thereafter has been due to the fact that the person had difficulty having their file updated which is due to no fault of that person; if that person's case will be evaluated on this basis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5402/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that the person concerned was granted temporary permission to remain in the State for one year in 2000 under the arrangements then in place for the non-EEA national parents of Irish born citizen children. This permission was renewed subsequently until 1 September, 2008, the expiry date on her Latvian aliens passport. Following a review of her case by the relevant officials in my Department, and on receipt of her new Latvian aliens passport, the person concerned was granted further permission to remain in the State for two years until 11 February, 2015. Periods for which the person concerned did not have permission to remain in the State are excluded under section 16A(1)(a) of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, when assessing if the residency conditions for naturalisation are satisfied. An on-line residency calculator is available on the website [www.inis.gov.ie](http://www.inis.gov.ie) which may be of assistance in establishing if and when the residency requirements are met.

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

### **Family Reunification Applications**

195. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if and when an application for family reunification will be decided in respect of the spouse of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5403/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department that there is no current application for family reunification in respect of the spouse of the person referred to by the Deputy.

It is open to the person concerned to make an application for a visa at any time. Guidelines regarding the visa application procedures are available on the website of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service at [www.inis.gov.ie](http://www.inis.gov.ie).

Queries in relation to general matters may be made directly to INIS by email 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 email

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

### **Leave to Remain**

196. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will facilitate the update of a stamp 4 in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 7; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5404/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am informed by the Naturalisation Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned was granted permission to remain in the State under the arrangements then in place for the non-EEA national parents of Irish born citizen children. Officials in my Department granted him a further period of twelve months permission to remain in the State on a stamp 4 basis, which is due to expire on 24 March, 2015. The person concerned should make a written application one month prior to this expiry date, with supporting documentation, for further renewal of his residency to the INIS, PO Box 10003, Dublin 1.

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

### **Garda Strength**

197. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if Garda numbers provided include those on career breaks and maternity leave and so on; the total personnel strength of a Garda station; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5447/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel, including community Gardaí, among the Garda Regions, Divisions, and Districts. Garda management keep this distribution under continuing review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources.

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the personnel strength of An Garda Síochána on 31 December 2014, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 12,799. Of this number, there were 98 members on career breaks, 102 on maternity leave and 31 on unpaid maternity leave.

### **Garda Deployment**

198. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide an update regarding her plans not to have gardaí carry out administrative work; her plans to recruit civilians to do this work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5448/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of all personnel, including

civilian staff, 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 all resources.

Civilians have always worked in An Garda Síochána and there have been significant increases in their numbers in recent years from 1,688 at the end of 2007 to approximately 2,054 (whole time equivalents) as of the 31 December 2014. Civilians are employed in a wide range of management, administrative, technical and operational duties covering such positions as Chief Administration Officer, Executive Director of Finance, Crime Analysts, Head of Legal Affairs, clerical officers, photographers etc. A civilian Executive Director of Human Resources and Personnel Development was appointed at the end of 2014. I also recently received sanction from the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for the filling of a number of priority civilian posts either by open recruitment or internal promotion competition.

Apart from the posts outlined and the administrative support duties in Garda stations and offices, civilianisation has also enabled the establishment or expansion of some vital services which are wholly or largely provided by civilian staff – including the Garda National Immigration Bureau, the Garda Information Service Centre, the Garda Central Vetting Unit, the Fixed Charge Processing Office, the civilianisation of the Call Taking function in the Command and Control Centre and most recently the appointment of Immigration Control officers in Dublin airport.

We will continue to maximise the number of civilian support staff in An Garda Síochána so that highly trained Gardaí can be released from administrative tasks to frontline operational policing.

### **Garda Recruitment**

199. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of new gardaí recruited during the past ten years; the number of gardaí who have retired during the past ten years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5449/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** One of the primary functions of the Garda Commissioner under the Garda Síochána Acts, is to direct and control An Garda Síochána. The Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel among the Garda Regions, Divisions, and Districts. Garda management keep this distribution under continuing review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources.

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the number of intakes and departures (which includes retirements, resignations and dismissals) to and from An Garda Síochána on 31 December 2005 -2014 and on 31 January 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available, is as set out in the table:

Year	‘05	‘06	‘07	‘08	‘09	‘10	‘11	‘12	‘13	‘14	‘15
Intakes	1,125	1,114	1,026	926	200	0	0	0	0	200	100
Departures	462	403	289	341	776	407	480	462	335	291	21

*Question No. 200 answered with Question No. 182.*

201. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding bail laws; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5451/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** A decision to grant bail in a particular case is a matter for the court, which is, subject only to the Constitution and the law, independent in the exercise of its judicial functions. There is a constitutional presumption in favour of bail because, in the eyes of the law, a person is innocent until proven guilty. The provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights also restrict the extent to which the right to bail can be limited.

Prior to the Sixteenth Amendment of the Constitution, bail could be refused essentially only on the grounds that the accused person would be likely to abscond or interfere with witnesses or evidence. Section 2 of the Bail Act 1997, which gave effect to the Sixteenth Amendment of the Constitution, permits the courts to refuse bail to a person charged with a serious offence where refusal of bail is reasonably considered necessary to prevent the commission of a serious offence by that person. A “serious offence” is an offence listed in the Schedule to the Bail Act that is punishable by at least five years imprisonment.

In exercising its jurisdiction under section 2 of the Bail Act, a court is required to take into account the following matters:

**(a) the nature and degree of seriousness of the offence with which the accused person is charged and the sentence likely to be imposed on conviction,**

**(b) the nature and degree of seriousness of the offence apprehended and the sentence likely to be imposed on conviction,**

**(c) the nature and strength of evidence in support of the charge,**

**(d) any conviction of the accused person for an offence committed while he or she was on bail,**

**(e) any previous convictions of the accused person,**

**(f) any other offence in respect of which the accused person is charged and is awaiting trial.**

If one or more of the foregoing matters is taken into account, the court may also take into account the fact that the accused person is addicted to a controlled drug within the meaning of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977.

As regards reform of the bail laws, I can inform the Deputy that the preparation of the General Scheme of a Bail Bill to modernise the law on bail is at a very advanced stage and I intend to bring proposals to Government on the matter in the coming weeks.

While the primary aim of the proposed Bail Bill is to consolidate and update bail law, I wish to take the opportunity to seek, as far as is possible, within the constraints of the Constitution and the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights, to focus the legislation on the protection of the individual and of the public. The intention is that the new provisions will provide better guidance to the courts on how such protection might be provided. The new Bill will seek to improve the operation of the bail system and make the law as effective as possible in protecting the public against the commission of offences by persons on bail.



**Irish Prison Service**

202. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to reform the Prison Service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5452/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The Irish Prison Service Strategy Statement 2015 - 2018 is currently being developed in consultation with our staff at headquarters, those based in prisons, and other stakeholders in the criminal justice system and will set out the overall high level objectives and key strategic actions the Irish Prison Service intends to take during the period 2015 - 2018.

On 17 September 2014 published the report of the Penal Policy Review Group. The report presents a penal policy which aims to make Ireland a safer and fairer place. The rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders resulting in their desistance from crime is seen as the key to making Ireland safer. The report sets out the adoption of a penal policy with the dual purposes of punishment and rehabilitation both in the imposition and management of criminal sanctions. It also sets out a road map for the strategic development of penal reform into the future which will help modernise and shape how, we as a society, deal with some of the most complex issues involved in criminal justice and penal reform policy.

Some of the report's recommendations can be implemented in the short to medium term, while others will require a more long term approach. As an initial step, the Government agreed, in principle, to proceed immediately with the implementation of a number of key recommendations including the bringing forward of legislative proposals to establish the Parole Board on an independent statutory basis: preparing proposals and options for an open prison for female offenders. Work is currently underway to implement these recommendations.

The Strategy Statement 2015 - 2018 will set out how the Irish Prison Service, along with other statutory, community and voluntary sector partners, will implement the Report's recommendations to help reduce offending, improve opportunities for reintegration, improve outcomes more generally and to commit to treating each other fairly, with courtesy, respecting personal dignity, regardless of their role and background, as part of the prison community. These principles will be at the heart of what we set out to achieve as we continue to build and harmonise policy and service delivery.

The Strategy Statement 2015 - 2018 will build on the current Strategy which set out a challenging range of commitments in respect of our mission to provide safe and secure custody, dignity of care and rehabilitation to prisoners for safer communities.

I am pleased to note that some key targets have already been met, most notably overcrowding has been eliminated in Mountjoy Prison and priority has been given to reducing overcrowding in Cork, Limerick and the Dochas Centre. On 12 December 2014 the numbers in custody was 3,725. This compares to 4,244 on 12th December 2012.

In conjunction with the Probation Service, the Irish Prison Service has continued the national roll out of the Community Return Programme, an incentivised scheme for earned temporary release under which carefully selected offenders can be granted structured temporary release in return for supervised community service. This co-operative approach is a direct result of the Joint Strategy published with the Probation Service which aims to deliver more effective offender management. This enhanced integration between both services is the realisation of the commitment in the Programme for Government to ensure better coordination in order to create an integrated offender management programme. 1,216 prisoners have taken part in the Community Return Programme since October 2011, and 909 have completed the programme.

In addition to Community Return, the Community Support Schemes have been set up in Cork Prison, Mountjoy Campus, West Dublin Campus and Limerick Prisons, the aim of which is to reduce recidivism rates by arranging for additional support structures and provide for a more structured form of temporary release. At present there are 70 persons on temporary release with over 220 prisoners released onto this Scheme having successfully completed their sentences.

I am proud that these positive initiatives are being taken during my time as Minister for Justice and Equality. Over the lifetime of the proposed Strategy for 2015 - 2018, the Irish Prison Service will continue to build on progress it has made and will continue to promote respect for human rights, dignity and respect.

I intend to launch the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service Strategy Statements in May 2015.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

203. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of staff from her Department or agencies under her remit working out of a Government building at a location (details supplied) in County Laois; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5593/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The Deputy may note that there are currently 11 staff based in Government Buildings, Abbeylax Road, Portlaoise. All of these staff work in the Probation Service.

### **Child and Family Agency Services**

204. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position regarding social services in respect of a family (details supplied) in Dublin 17; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5307/15]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly):** As the Deputy will appreciate, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on an individual case. I have referred the details of this case to the Child and Family Agency for attention, having regard to its statutory responsibility in this area.

### **Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries**

205. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if consideration will be given to a matter (details supplied) regarding the mother and baby homes inquiry (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5185/15]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Terms of Reference for the Mother and Baby Home Investigation and certain related matters have been approved by Cabinet and both Houses of the Oireachtas last month. Details in respect of the Commission are available on my Department's website including a number of explanatory documents. My Department is currently advancing arrangements with Judge Yvonne Murphy to establish the Commission as soon as possible.

The Commission is tasked with thoroughly examining the experience of mothers and chil-

dren who were resident in 14 named Mother and Baby Homes and a sample of County Homes. The Commission is required to address seven distinct questions related to the practices and procedures regarding the care, welfare, entry arrangements and exit pathways for residents of these institutions. In accordance with the Terms of Reference approved by Government, the investigation will cover the period 1922-1998 – over three quarters of a century. It is important to appreciate the scale of this investigation which will potentially involve tens of thousands of mothers and children who resided in these homes during the period.

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.

### **Child Care Services Provision**

206. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the early childhood sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5188/15]

**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.

The support programmes implemented by my Department include the free pre-school year provided under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) which provides support to low income and disadvantaged families, the Childcare Education and Training Programme (CETS) providing support to Solas and Education Training Board students and trainees, the Community Employment Childcare that supports Community Employment workers and the Afterschool Childcare Programme (ASCC) which provide childcare supports to eligible parents returning to work.

The above programmes represents an annual investment of approximately €260 million and provides support each year to more than 100,000 children. Despite the difficult budgetary situation in recent years this funding has been maintained. My Department will continue to fund the childcare support programmes, with an emphasis on improving the quality of the services provided, and as funding becomes available I would hope that the capitation rates for all programmes could be increased to provide further support.

To ensure that all the benefits of childcare investments are fully realised, future public investment in childcare must be evidence-based and strategically co-ordinated. 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 Departments of Education and Skills, Social Protection, Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Public Expenditure and Reform, Finance and the Department of the Taoiseach and will be led and supported by my Department.

## National Lottery Funding Applications

207. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a club (details supplied) in Dublin 17 will be eligible for national lottery funding through his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5198/15]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly):** My Department will not be administering a National Lottery scheme in 2015. In framing the Department's Estimate for 2015, regard had to be taken of the many competing demands facing the sector and the overall budgetary envelope available. A number of other Departments are in receipt of National Lottery funding in 2015, including the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. The specific club mentioned by the Deputy may wish to make inquiries as to whether that Department is running any appropriate schemes this year.

## Youth Services Expenditure

208. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide the details of the more than €180 million spent on youth services, of which there is a lack of evidence to show that it aided better outcomes for disadvantaged young persons; the action that will be taken to ensure that better quality data will be recorded; the further action that will be taken to ensure that any programme is based on evidence and best practice; if his Department will initiate a compliance structure with clear and measurable outcomes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5207/15]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly):** My Department is responsible for the administration of funding for the provision of youth services. The funding schemes support the delivery of a range of universal and targeted youth work programmes and services for young people throughout the country, including those from disadvantaged communities. Three of these targeted funding schemes, the Special Projects for Youth scheme, the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund, and the Local Drug Task Force projects scheme, were the subject of a recently completed *Value for Money and Policy Review*. The review covered the period 2010 to 2012. In 2012, expenditure on the schemes amounted to €39.7m.

The review involved an in-depth scrutiny of a complex area to do with the impact youth service provision has in young people's lives. Overall, the review found that the youth programmes can provide a significant contribution to improving outcomes for young people, and should be considered for ongoing public funding.

The review encountered problems with the availability of accessible data and administrative information deriving from the complexity of the historical development of the schemes and the governance arrangements under which they had been operated. It noted that it was not possible to secure robust evidence of improvement in young people's lives, especially as these changes are subtle and can be hard to measure and-or to attribute to one intervention.

The review makes a number of recommendations for the future operation of the youth schemes and their development in the years ahead. It recommends that the three existing schemes be replaced with a single, targeted, evidence-based and outcomes-focused scheme designed to secure the optimal outcomes for young people and their communities.

The findings and recommendations of the review are being discussed by stakeholders in the consultations, which are under way at present, on the new proposed new National Youth Strategy. I intend that the reforms recommended in the review will be progressed in the con-

text of the new Strategy. This work has been prioritised by my Department together with the development of the data management systems that will support good performance oversight of the youth programmes and provide assurance about efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of services for young people. A project team, comprising youth service providers, funding administrators and other youth experts is being established in my Department to oversee the development and introduction of the new scheme over 2015 and 2016.

### Child and Family Agency Services

209. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children who are waiting in the constituency of County Louth to be allocated a social worker; the number of these that are high priority and emergency; the length of time they have been on a waiting list; the number of social workers employed; the number of vacancies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5260/15]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly):** As of November 2014 a total of 778 children in Louth-Meath were waiting to be allocated a social worker and 464 of these cases were deemed to be high priority. I am assured by Tusla that emergency cases continue to be dealt with immediately, for instance, that a child who has been abandoned or is in immediate physical danger or at immediate risk of sexual abuse, and that high priority cases are kept under review.

The most recent information from Tusla indicates that in late 2014 there were 85.25 social work Whole Time Equivalents in Louth-Meath, with 15 vacancies being filled.

The Agency is taking a number of initiatives to address staff shortfalls:

- Continuing recruitment, with 164 social workers recruited since the Agency was established, and a further 219 posts currently at various stages of recruitment;
- The introduction of a pilot Maternity Leave Scheme whereby temporary staff can be offered a 12 month contract to cover maternity leave;
- In recognition of the challenging nature of this work, new entrants and graduates have a reduced workload for their first year, with opportunities for regular supervision with experienced practitioners;
- The roll out of a caseload management system to ensure caseloads are manageable and prioritised appropriately.

I have set out in tabular format data relating to unallocated cases for Louth-Meath. I am advised by the Agency that separate data for County Louth is not available.

**Table 1:**

#### Breakdown of Unallocated cases by Priority Louth-Meath, November 2014

Open Cases by Priority	Unallocated
High	464
Medium	220
Low	94
TOTAL	778



**Table 2:**

**Breakdown of Unallocated cases by length of time of Priority Louth-Meath,  
November 2014**

Open Cases Unallocated at the end of the Month	High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority	Total
<1 week	0	0	0	0
1-2 weeks	16	8	3	27
2-3 weeks	20	0	0	20
3-4 weeks	32	6	2	40
1-2 months	51	20	2	73
2-3 months	51	0	0	51
>3 months	294	186	87	567
TOTAL	464	220	94	778

**Child Care Services Provision**

210. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his plans in 2015 to deal with the child care crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5306/15]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly):** There are more than 4,300 preschool childcare service throughout the country providing a range of childcare services to children in the 0 to 6 age group. I am aware that some parents have problems in accessing affordable childcare services and my Department is supporting the implementation of a range of childcare programmes to help support these parents.

The support programmes implemented by my Department include the free pre-school year provided under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) programme which provides support to low income and disadvantaged families, the Childcare Education and Training (CETS) programme providing support to Solas and Education Training Board students and trainees, the Community Employment Childcare (CEC) programme that supports Community Employment workers and the Afterschool Childcare (ASCC) programme which provide childcare supports to eligible parents returning to work.

The above programmes represent an annual investment of approximately €260 million and provide support each year to more than 100,000 children. Despite the difficult budgetary situation in recent years this funding has been maintained. My Department will continue to fund the childcare support programmes, with an emphasis on improving the quality of the services provided, and as funding becomes available I would hope that the capitation rates for all programmes could be increased to provide further support.

To ensure that all the benefits of childcare investments are fully realised, future public investment in childcare must be evidence-based and strategically co-ordinated. 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 Departments of Education and Skills, Social Protection, Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Public Expenditure and Reform, Finance and the Department of the Taoiseach and will be led and supported by my Department.

**Departmental Staff Data**

211. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of staff from his Department or agency under his remit working out of a Government building at a location (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5585/15]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly):** There are no staff from my Department or agencies under the aegis of my Department working out of the Government building at the location in County Laois which was specified by the Deputy.

**Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland**

212. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the nature of the relationship between his Department and An Bord Altranais; if he has an oversight role in regard to the financial spending of the board; his views on the need to raise the registration fee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5222/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (previously known as An Bord Altranais) is governed by the Nurses and Midwives Act 2011 and is a legal entity in its own right. Its accountability lies in the main to the Minister for Health. Having regard to the relevant sections of the Act, there is a certain amount of accountability to the Houses of the Oireachtas but in the most part the Minister for Health has the greater role in this regard.

The Minister for Health can require the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (the NMBI) to provide him with information in relation to the performance of its functions. He can give general policy directions in writing to the NMBI in relation to the performance of the NMBI's functions and it shall comply with such directions. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) under the direction of the NMBI shall keep on a continuous basis proper books of accounts of all income and expenditure of the NMBI and of the sources of such income and the subject matter of such expenditure, and of the property, assets and liabilities of the NMBI. The CEO shall keep, and account to the Board for, all such special accounts as the Minister or the Board, with the consent of the Minister, may from time to time direct should be kept. The NMBI has recently published Annual Reports for 2012 and 2013, including the accounts that have been signed off by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

The NMBI has a statutory responsibility to ensure that it discharges its legal obligations within the financial resources available while also maximising efficiencies and income generation, in keeping with best practice in financial governance.

I, with the Chief Nursing Officer, met with the President, Vice-President and Chief Executive of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland on 29th January 2015 to discuss the current dispute over the increased registration fee. I again requested that the NMBI re-engage in discussions with the staff associations, as a matter of urgency. I expressed my concern regarding the potential implications for the health service and patient safety should the current impasse over the annual retention fee increase continue. I appreciate the registration fee is set by the NMBI which is a self-funding organisation. It is facing considerable costs arising from changes to the way the laws regulating the professions operate, and also from handling fitness to practice complaints.

I encouraged the NMBI to find an outcome which secures the Board's minimum financial

operating requirements but avoids a potential scenario where nurses and midwives may be removed from the Register for non-payment of fees with potential consequences for service availability. Taking nurses off the register in a few months time would create huge problems for hospitals and community facilities which need nurses to function, and for nurses themselves who would not be able to work or get paid if they were not registered. Since that meeting the Board has agreed to engage in discussions with the staff associations, facilitated by a third party, on the means by which the board and staff associations might come to an agreement on the fee structure for the future.

I will continue to monitor the situation closely in the interests of patient safety and continuity of care.

### **Child and Family Agency Services**

213. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will support a family (details supplied) in Dublin 1; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5238/15]

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

### **Ambulance Service Provision**

214. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding provision of an emergency ambulance service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5240/15]

**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.

### **Homeless Accommodation Provision**

215. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the reason there are no long-term residential home facilities for mental health patients who are homeless; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5241/15]

**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.

### **Health Services**

216. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health when an assessment of needs will be carried out in respect of a child (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5242/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** As the particular issue raised by the Deputy relates to an individual case, this is a service matter for the Health Service Executive. Accordingly, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

### **Accident and Emergency Departments**

217. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the way Kerry General Hospital's accident and emergency department is performing in comparison to other hospitals nationwide in relation to trolley figures and waiting times; his views on the figures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5249/15]

**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**

218. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the annual budget for wheelchair provision in County Wicklow from 2011 to 2014; the number of wheelchairs supplied to County Wicklow in 2012 and 2014; if he will provide a breakdown of the number of new wheelchair models and re-used wheelchair models supplied; and the number of clients that were referred to Seatech or the Central Remedial Clinic for specialised wheelchair or seating assessment. [5251/15]

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

### **Blood Donations**

219. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the reduction of the age of consent for blood donations to 16 or 17 years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5252/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The remit of the Irish Blood Transfusion Service (IBTS) is to provide a safe, reliable and robust blood service to the Irish health system. Blood, and the products derived from it, are an integral facet of healthcare delivery. A major objective of the IBTS is to ensure that it always has the necessary programmes and procedures in place to protect both the donors of blood and the recipients of blood and blood products.

The IBTS have no plans to reduce the age of consent for blood donations to 16 or 17 years due to a higher rate of adverse reactions, such as fainting, in younger donors.

### **Blood Donations**

220. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Health his plans for an information campaign on blood donation among secondary school students in order to increase awareness and support for blood donations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5253/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The IBTS has a schools information pack with leaflets, videos and CD content which it distributes to secondary schools to promote blood donation. The IBTS is currently reviewing this material with several parties, including input from Transition Year students. It is envisaged that this material will form part of a proposal to the Department of Education and Skills to include blood donation as part of the secondary school SPHE curriculum.

The IBTS also promotes awareness of blood donation through their presence at youth activities, such as the GAA and other sports clubs.

### Hospital Waiting Lists

221. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding surgery in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5264/15]

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

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

### Cancer Screening Programmes

222. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding breast cancer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5265/15]

**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.

The age extension will be implemented on an incremental basis, in line with the capacity of the system to manage the additional screening and follow up workload. The National Screening Service will need to recruit and train additional radiographers, medical consultants and administration support to accommodate the increased demand for the BreastCheck programme. Funding for this and for additional mobile units and medical equipment will be made available across the implementation period. The age extension will be fully rolled out by 2021.

Women of any age who have concerns about breast cancer should seek the advice of their GP who will, if appropriate, refer them to the symptomatic breast services in one of the eight



designated cancer centres.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances Provision**

223. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health when specialised equipment will be provided in respect of a child (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5279/15]

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

### **Autism Incidence**

224. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide, in tabular form, the number and age of persons diagnosed with autism, on varying levels of the spectrum, in 2013, 2014 and to date in 2015; and his plans to address access to appropriate support and medical services, as young persons with autism move into adulthood. [5281/15]

**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 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.

### **Mobility Allowance Review**

225. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the establishment of a travel subsidy scheme to replace the motorised transport grant and the mobility allowance scheme; when the new scheme will be put in place; his views on whether it is acceptable that a new scheme has yet to be put in place a full two years since the schemes were closed to new applicants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5295/15]

**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.

## Medicinal Products Prices

226. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if recent newspaper reports that he is to use the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013 to reduce the price of patented drugs are accurate; if so, the section of the legislation he will use to achieve the reductions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5300/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** In 2012 my Department and the HSE entered into an Agreement with the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association to deliver savings of over €400m. Over half of the savings to be delivered - €210m - were to be reinvested by the State into the provision of new and innovative drugs.

The State's investment in new drugs over the three-year lifetime of the Agreement is likely to exceed the €210m earmarked. Therefore in order to ensure that funding is available to enable patients to have access to new and innovative drugs, additional savings in expenditure on drugs and medicines must be achieved.

My Department and the HSE have been engaging with the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association on this issue as part of the Mid-Term Review of the 2012 Agreement.

Whilst the Government's preference would be for these additional savings to be delivered in co-operation with the pharmaceutical industry, agreement has not been reached in discussions to date.

Section 21 of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013 affords the HSE powers to review and alter prices. This is an option which the Executive is examining at present, having regard to all relevant factors, including the funding pressures that it faces in relation to new and innovative drugs.

## Medicinal Products Expenditure

227. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if full year savings of €330 million and 2013 savings of €160 million from reductions in the cost of drugs and other prescribed items as projected in the 2013 expenditure report have been realised; if not, the savings realised in 2013 and the full year savings realised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5301/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** Projected savings and the outturn for 2013 are as set out in the following table:

Measure	Projected savings in 2013 €million	2013 outturn €million
IPHA/APMI Agreements	120	125
Quality Prescribing Initiative	20	-
Delisting of Drugs from the GMS reimbursable drugs	15	11
Oral Nutritional Supplements price reductions	5	5.5
Total	160	141.5

The Medicines Management Programme of the HSE brought forward a series of measures

in 2013 to promote more cost effective prescribing practices. Preferred medicines were recommended for statins and PPIs (proton pump inhibitors) in April 2013 and for Angiotensin Converting Enzyme (ACE) inhibitors and Angiotensin II Receptor Blockers (ARBs) in September 2013. The evidence suggested increased prescribing rates for the preferred statin and PPI by the end of 2013 but this did not have a measurable financial effect in 2013. The final outturn for 2014 is not yet available.

### **Health Insurance**

228. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when the Voluntary Health Insurance Board must acquire the necessary capital reserves to make an application for authorisation by the Central Bank of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5302/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** VHI's application for authorisation was submitted to the Central Bank of Ireland (CBI) on 16 May 2014. VHI continues to engage closely with the CBI in respect of its application, and my Department has also provided a number of clarifications to the Bank to assist it in its understanding of the interaction between the private health insurance market and the health system.

Any capital requirement will be determined by the CBI, as the independent regulator, following its assessment of VHI's application. I expect that VHI will be authorised at the earliest opportunity, if approved by the Central Bank.

### **Hospital Services**

229. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will extend the operational hours of the dialysis unit in Kerry General Hospital to cater for all the 50 plus patients attending the unit to facilitate the three patients from Kerry who are currently attending Cork University Hospital for dialysis treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5308/15]

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

### **Hospital Equipment**

230. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address the safety and current design of mammogram machines; the number of mammogram machines available; and the age and lifespan of these machines [5313/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Safety is of paramount importance to the BreastCheck programme, which has high quality control standards in place for the management of its 30 screening mammography machines. These are set out in the Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Mammography Screening and are consistent with those of the European Reference Organisation for Quality Assured Breast Screening and Diagnostic Services (EUREF), the EU standard.

BreastCheck is voluntarily accredited and the entire BreastCheck programme is subject to external review by EUREF.

Routine quality monitoring and audits are performed including rigorous technical quality assurance by medical physicists, twice annually, to ensure conformance with EUREF quality standards. The machines are covered by comprehensive maintenance contracts, which ensure optimal operation according to specification.

BreastCheck have set out an optimal life span of eight years for screening mammography machines. The current age of mammography machines in place range from November 2007 to December 2014. BreastCheck commenced a rolling replacement programme in 2014 which will see all mammography machines refreshed by 2017.

### **Dental Services Provision**

231. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health his plans to improve dental service provision throughout County Cavan; if his attention has been drawn to the concern of parents of primary school-going children of the inadequate service at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5324/15]

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

### **Hospital Staff Data**

232. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide, in tabular form, the number of whole-time-equivalent nurses and midwives employed in the Midlands Regional Hospital, Mullingar, County Westmeath, every year since 2011; the number of agency nurses and midwives employed for the same period; the cost difference in employed whole-time-equivalent staff as opposed to agency staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5331/15]

**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 Appointments Administration**

233. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if an immediate appointment at Kilcreene Hospital, County Kilkenny, will be provided in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; and if physiotherapy will also be arranged at the hospital in view of their general practitioner deeming the request to be urgent. [5342/15]

**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.

### Patient Transport

234. **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. [5356/15]

**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.

### Prescription Charges

235. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the total amount raised from prescription charges in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5384/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** The total amount raised from prescription charges in 2014 is projected to be €120 million.

### Hospital Services

236. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the nature of the treatment received by the child of a person (details supplied) in County Meath; if the matter will be investigated with a view to resolution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5396/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** With regard to specific complaints in relation to experiences of individuals in our hospitals, there is a formal complaints policy, entitled “*Your Service Your Say*”, details of which are on the HSE website, at: <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/yourhealthservice/feedback/complaints/>.

In accordance with this procedure, a complaint must be made in the first instance to the hospital in which the incident causing the complaint occurred.

If an individual is not satisfied with the response from the hospital, a review can be sought from the HSE Director of Advocacy and the Ombudsman, whose details are set out below.

HSE Director of Advocacy

Oak House

Millennium Park

Naas

Co Kildare

Tel 1890 424 555

Office of the Ombudsman

18, Lower Leeson Street



Dublin 2

Tel 1890 223 030

Email: ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.ie

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.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

237. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff from his Department or agency under his remit working out of a Government building at a location (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5591/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** There are no staff from my Department or agencies under the aegis of my Department working out of Government Buildings at Abbeyleix Road, Portlaoise, Co. Laois.

### **Diplomatic Representation**

238. **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. [5353/15]

**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](http://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.

## **SOLAS Training and Education Programmes Provision**

239. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to continue the overseas graduate programme which was operated by FÁS; if 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 or value to them of the scheme; the reason it was discontinued; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5340/15]

**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 that 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.

## **Summer Works Scheme Applications**

240. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide details of funding for school sports programmes (details supplied) in Dublin 17; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5192/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The works referred to by the Deputy are appropriate to the Summer Works Scheme, the purpose of which is to devolve funding to individual school authorities to facilitate schools carrying out small and medium scale building works that will improve and upgrade existing school buildings.

Under the scheme, responsibility for identifying and prioritising the most urgently required project rests with the school authority. In that regard, while the school referred to did not apply for the works concerned under the 2014 scheme, it will be open to the school, if it so decides, to make an application under a future summer works scheme.

## **Institutes of Technology**

241. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the arrangements in place with regard to shared services in the Institute of Technology Tallaght, particularly with regard to shared library services with other institutes of technology; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5206/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** Increased collaboration be-

tween the libraries at the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown, Institute of Technology Tallaght and Dublin Institute of Technology has delivered a real practical benefit for all students and staff at the 3 Institutes. Students and staff from any one of the Institutes can visit any of the libraries at the other two Institutes with a minimum of fuss - by simply showing their 'home' ID card. No letter of introduction or other ID is required. All students and staff can use the study spaces and print materials at any of the libraries for reference purposes. Whilst there, they may also access online library journals and databases at their 'home' library by using the Eduroam service on their own mobile device, laptop, mobile phone etc. For more information see <http://www.heanet.ie/eduroam> and detailed instructions at each of the Institutes. It is expected that additional benefits will follow as further collaboration develops.

The Institute of Technology Partner Libraries Reader card (plus home Institute student/staff ID) facilitates reader access at any of the Partner institutions. More information on accessing other libraries [http://millennium.it-tallaght.ie/screens/otherlibraries\\_access.html#VNDiqWisUuc](http://millennium.it-tallaght.ie/screens/otherlibraries_access.html#VNDiqWisUuc)

### **Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board**

242. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of survivors who have accessed Caranua to date in 2015; the length of time their funding will remain; the length of time Caranua will remain in place as an organisation; the outcome for Caranua when the fund has been exhausted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5212/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** Caranua, the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board, is an independent statutory body established pursuant to the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012 to oversee the use of the cash contributions of up to €110 million, pledged by the religious congregations, to support the needs of survivors of institutional child abuse. To date a total of €81.44 million, including €80.06m in contributions and €1.382m in associated interest has been lodged to the special Investment Account managed by the National Treasury Management Agency for the Fund.

I understand that by 31st December 2014, Caranua had made payments of some €9m to 1,062 applicants of the total number of 3,829 applications received. The 2012 Act does not include provisions for the winding-up of the body. While it is envisaged that it will be dissolved when the moneys at its disposal are expended, the precise timing cannot be predicted and accordingly it was deemed preferable to introduce amending primary legislation to dissolve the body in due course and not anticipate in advance how long it will have to do its work.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

243. **Deputy Michael P. Kitt** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to the proposed new model, effective from September 2015, for the allocation of resource hours in schools; if her attention has been further drawn to the fact that the Irish National Teachers Organisation has stated these proposals will affect every child within the school environment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5221/15]

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

This Report was prepared by a Working Group, appointed by the NCSE and Chaired by Mr Eamon Stack, which included representatives from disability organisations and also parent representative bodies.

An extensive consultation process was undertaken by the Working Group with stakeholders to inform the development of its report. Consultation meetings were held with the Health Service Executive, teachers, principals, union officials, parents, school management bodies, National Educational Psychological Services, advocacy groups, the Inspectorate, and Special Educational Needs Organisers.

Subsequent to the publication of the NCSE working group report, my Department invited education partners, stakeholders, and parent representative groups to make written submissions in relation to the NCSE report. 29 such written submissions have been received to date, including a submission from the Irish National Teachers Organisation.

In October last year, officials at my Department held consultations with primary and post primary management bodies, teacher organisations, groups representing those with disabilities and parents' representatives. Officials again met with representatives from these groups on 20th, 22nd and 30th of January last in order to further consult with these bodies.

A decision has not been taken on the commencement date for the proposed new model. I can confirm that officials have advised all stakeholders that there will be ongoing consultation with them as the work on the development of the model progresses.

### **School Enrolments Data**

244. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide data in respect of schools (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5248/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** The number of pupils enrolled in individual schools is provided in the National School Annual Census. Results from the Census for the current school year (2014/2015) are being finalised at present. Publication of a provisional list of schools and their enrolments will be on my Department's website by the end of March and the finalised list will be available by July. The criteria used for the allocation of teachers to schools are published annually on the Department's website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing process also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

Preparation for the staffing and redeployment process for the 2015/16 school year is currently underway in my Department. The staffing arrangements for schools for the 2015/16 school year, including the appeals process, will be published in the coming weeks. The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the 2014/15 school year is included in the following table.

**Schools in Co. Kerry that lost a mainstream teaching post in the 2014/15 school year due to Budget 2012 measures**

School Name and Address
Lauragh National School, Killarney, Co Kerry
S N An Leana Mhóir, Béal Atha Longphoirt, Via Listowel, Co Chiarraí

School Name and Address
Naomh Charthaigh, Boys National School, Castleisland, Co Kerry

### School Enrolments

245. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills in view of Article 42.1 of the Constitution only allowing for parents to avail of exclusive religious schools where such schools are exclusively privately funded according to their means with no State funding, the reason her Department allows schools in receipt of State funding to exclude children on religious grounds. [5255/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** Article 42 of the Constitution provides for the right of parents to choose the form of education they provide or to have provided to their children. Primary legislation gives effect to this right and includes the Education Act 1998 and the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998. The enrolment policy must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants.

This Department’s main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking school places in the area. Parents have the right to choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available the pupil should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice.

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

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

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



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

### **School Accommodation**

246. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on the location occupied by a school (details supplied) in County Dublin, but which will be vacant in September this year, as a site which could be developed for special needs educational service education in the area. [5315/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** As the Deputy may be aware, the project for the school referred to is currently at Stage 3 (Tender Stage). Upon completion of the new school building for the school in question, the school will vacate its current accommodation. My Department is currently reviewing the options with regard to the future use of the accommodation concerned.

### **Summer Works Scheme Applications**

247. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans for remedial works to be carried out at a school (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5332/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application for funding under my Department’s 2014 Summer Works Scheme for the partial replacement of windows.

As the Deputy is aware funding in excess of €70m was approved to allow over 770 schools to undertake improvement works for applications received under categories 1 to 6, which cover gas works, electrical works, mechanical works, toilet facilities and roof works.

Schools which applied under categories 7 to 10 including the school in question were advised that their applications would be retained for prioritisation if funding for further summer works projects could be secured for 2015. The feasibility of making further funding available to facilitate the consideration of these applications is currently being considered.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

248. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the stage of a proposed building project in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Cavan; when this project will proceed to the next stage; the likely timeframe for construction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5346/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The project to provide permanent accommodation for the school to which the Deputy refers is currently at Stage 2a (Developed Design) of the architectural planning process. When that stage is complete, and subject to no other issues arising, the project will progress to Stage 2b (Detailed Design) which includes applications for Planning Permission, Fire Safety Certification, Disability Access Certification and the preparation of tender documents.

Due to competing demands on my Department's capital budget, imposed by the need to prioritise the limited funding available for the provision of additional school accommodation to meet increasing demographic requirements, it was not possible to include this project in the 5 year construction programme announced in March 2012.

School building projects, including the project referred to by the Deputy, which have been initiated but not included in the current five year construction programme will continue to be progressed to final planning stages in anticipation of the possibility of further funds being available to my Department in the future.

### **Schools Amalgamation**

249. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will examine the proposed amalgamation of schools (details supplied) in County Kerry as a matter of urgency due to these schools' continuous endeavours for same; and if she will expedite the necessary funding for refurbishment of the school which is required to ensure the amalgamation will proceed for September 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5358/15]

**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 being 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.

### **Education Welfare Service Provision**

250. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the options available to access a second level school place for the child of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5407/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** The Educational Welfare Service of the Child and Family Agency (EWS) is the statutory agency which can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child. The EWS may be able to offer assistance and advice on securing a school placement within the pupil's area. The contact details for the EWS is Educational Welfare Service of the Child and Family Agency, Tusla, Block 3, South Dublin County Council, Tallaght, Dublin 24, phone number 01-5313321.

The Deputy will be aware that the selection and enrolment of pupils in schools is the responsibility of the authorities of the individual school. My Department's main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking school places in an area. However, this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice. As schools may not have a place for every applicant, a selection process may be necessary. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. Under section 15 (2) (d) of the Education Act, 1998, each school is legally obliged to disclose its enrolment policy and to ensure that as regards that policy that principles of equality and the right of parents to send their children to a school of the parents' choice are respected. Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 provides for an appeal by a parent or guardian to the Secretary General of my Department, or in the case of an Educational Training Board (ETB) school to the ETB in the first instance, where a Board of Management of a school, or a person acting on behalf of the Board, refuses to enrol a student in a school, expels a student or suspends a student for 20 or more days in any school year. My Department has no authority to compel a school to admit a pupil, except in the case

of an appeal under section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 being upheld. Application forms for taking a section 29 appeal are available on my Departments website at the following link <http://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/Appeal-against-Permanent-Exclusion-Suspension-or-Refusal-to-Enrol/Section-29-Appeals-Application-Form.doc>, or by contacting Section 29 Administration Unit, Friars Mill Road, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath, phone 0761 108588.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

251. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of staff from her Department or agency under her remit working out of a Government building at a location (details supplied) in County Laois; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5588/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** There are no officials at my Department or staff at any of the bodies under its aegis based at the Government Buildings of-fices mentioned in the Deputy’s question.

### **Water Conservation Grant**

252. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the final date for eligibility to receive the water conservation grant applica-tion that persons must have registered with Irish Water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5348/15]

253. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the date the water conservation grant application deadline will be set; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5412/15]

254. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if applicants for the water conservation grant will have to supply their PPS number in order to receive the grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5416/15]

281. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the new deadline that has been put in place by which households must reg-ister with Irish Water to avail of the €100 water conservation grant; and if he will make a state-ment on the matter. [5349/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kel-ly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 252 to 254, inclusive, and 281.

I refer to my reply to Question No. 162 of 4 February 2015 which sets out the current posi-tion in the matter.

### **Data Protection**

255. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding the exchange of information between the Revenue Com-missioners and Irish Water regarding the registration for property tax and registration for water charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5182/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** Section 26 of the Water Services Act 2013 Act provides Irish Water with the power to obtain information from various sources, including the Revenue Commissioners, which is necessary for the performance of its functions. It is central to the e-Government strategy on improved data sharing and linking across the public service that data should be shared between Government Departments and Agencies, where such sharing is mutually beneficial. I have no function in relation to the performance by the Office of the Revenue Commissioners of its statutory functions.

### **Local Authority Housing**

256. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when the regulations to provide full effect to the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 regarding evictions from local authority homes will be published. [5220/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** I refer to the reply to Question No. 570 of 3 February 2015, which sets out the position in this matter.

### **Community Alert Programme**

257. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the funding allocated for community alert programmes in 2014; the funding provided for 2015; if his Department will continue to administer this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5224/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan):** My Department manages the Seniors Alert Scheme which encourages community support for vulnerable older people in our communities by providing grant assistance towards the purchase and installation of personal monitored alarms to enable older persons, of limited means, to continue to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind. The scheme is administered by local community and voluntary groups with the support of my Department. My Department undertook to consider new approaches to the Seniors Alert Scheme in 2014 and arising from this, it was decided that the scheme be managed by Pobal, given that organisation's significant experience delivering programmes on behalf of Government.

These new arrangements are designed to 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 2014 was €2.35m, of which €1.7m was drawn down. This met the needs of all 7,120 qualifying applicants under this demanded scheme during the year. The allocation for 2015 has been maintained at the 2014 level of €2.35m.

### **Legal Costs**

258. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans and discussions held in relation to recovering some of the extra costs that will now be incurred by the State as a result of the Mahon tribunal in relation to costs that will have to be paid to third parties; if he has examined the possibility of recovering some of these amounts from the professionals who were employed by the Mahon tribunal who should have had professional indemnity insurance in view of the fact that some important material relevant to the tribunal was wrongly withheld; the action he is taking to protect the taxpayer arising from this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5228/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** 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. Assessments, and reductions, of costs claimed by witnesses to the Tribunal are determined in the first instance by the Chairman of the Tribunal and subsequently by legal cost accountants and my Department has no role in these matters.

I have been advised by the Mahon Tribunal that the costs that now will be paid to a small number of third parties arising from issues that have arisen with certain adverse findings made by Mr Justice Flood in his Second and Third Interim Reports in 2002 and 2003, respectively, are costs which had these adverse findings not been made would have been properly payable to the said third parties at that time.

The implications of the outcome of the relevant legal challenges against the Tribunal are being considered by my Department. Legal advice is being sought with a view to informing that consideration.

### **Social and Affordable Housing Provision**

259. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the 2015 housing targets that have been agreed for each of the four Dublin local authority areas by the Dublin social housing delivery taskforce. [5233/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** Under the relevant actions of the Social Housing Strategy, national targets for delivery of social housing on a local authority by local authority basis are to be agreed for each year. Action 1 of the Strategy requires the agreement of national targets for delivery of social housing on a local authority by local authority basis this year and in subsequent years. Action 4 of the Strategy requires the 4 Dublin local authorities to agree similar targets. Action 1 will be delivered by the Project Board while Action 4 is the responsibility of the Dublin Social Housing Delivery Taskforce. Both actions will be delivered in quarter 1 2015.

### **Local Authority Funding**

260. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the funding allocations approved for each local authority in 2014 and the amount paid to each of these local authorities in 2014; the funding allocated to these local authorities in 2015; the amounts paid to the local authorities to date in 2015 following the Government decision of 11 February 2014 to allocate funding for the clean-up, repair and restoration works in relation to public infrastructure that was damaged in the period 13 December 2013 to 6 January



2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5244/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** The Government decided on 11 February 2014 to allocate funding of up to €69.5 million to local authorities in the areas worst affected by the first phase of severe weather in respect of the damage caused between 13 December 2013 and 6 January 2014. This was intended to support communities by restoring roads, coastal protection, amenities/facilities and other public infrastructure which had been damaged. It was agreed that the funding would be made available via the Votes of the appropriate Departments, viz Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport; Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine; the Office of Public Works and my own Department. While my Department had an initial role in collating details and costs of damage in the immediate aftermath of the severe weather, based on returns and estimates provided by local authorities, the other Departments and Offices listed above liaise directly with the local authorities on funding which falls under their remit.

In the case of funding requirements which fall under the remit of my Department, viz, tourism infrastructure funded by the local authorities, certain piers, harbours and other facilities in the charge of the local authorities, current costs totalling €4 million and capital costs totalling €13.1 million were originally estimated for the period in question. For the 2nd phase of severe weather, from 27 January to 17 February 2014, local authorities originally estimated current costs of €3.5 million and €8.5 million in capital costs. By year end €7.859 million was in fact disbursed by my Department to local authorities in respect of current costs and €5.994 million in respect of capital costs in 2014. Provision has been made in my Department's Vote for a further €10 million in respect of capital costs to be incurred by local authorities in 2015 on repair and remediation projects. No funding has been drawn down from my Department by the local authorities to date in 2015. The 2015 funding position will be kept under review over the course of the year.

Full details of the allocations and drawdowns by local authority are contained in the table.

Local Authority	Current Allocation	Current Drawdown 2014	Capital Allocation	Capital Drawdown 2014
Carlow	215,000	215,000	-	-
Cavan	65,021	65,021	-	-
Clare	1,388,748	1,388,053	6,279,248	1,020,928
Cork County	1,388,700	1,388,700	1,138,900	
Cork City	262,625	285,625	43,000	20,000
Donegal	235,500	150,000	678,750	115,171
Dublin City	180,000	57,802	-	-
Dun Laoghaire R/D	-	-	-	-
Fingal	5,000	-	-	-
Galway County	481,250	478,000	3,011,755	338,297
Galway City	221,000	220,698	612,875	1,134,825
Kerry	520,475	486,975	1,045,340	935,861
Kildare	2,174	-	-	-
Kilkenny	411,000	329,411	55,000	70,296
Laois	351,000	351,000	-	-
Leitrim	112,633	80,650	-	-
Limerick City & County	794,500	794,500	430,000	-
Longford	21,000	15,000	15,000	-
Louth	64,000	69,731	4,675	-

Local Authority	Current Allocation	Current Drawdown 2014	Capital Allocation	Capital Drawdown 2014
Mayo	509,000	509,000	784,000	189,900
Meath	113,121	113,121	2,500	2,500
Monaghan	-	-	-	-
Offaly	28,500	28,500	15,000	15,000
Roscommon	20,810	20,810	-	-
Sligo	174,350	174,290	397,700	230,686
South Dublin	-	-	-	-
Tipperary	896,069	45,503	-	-
Waterford	352,000	352,000	4,890,000	1,920,049
Westmeath	146,953	134,762	-	-
Wexford	33,500	33,500	2,222,000	-
Wicklow	49,329	71,727	61,168	-
Total	9,043,258	7,859,379	21,686,911	5,993,513

### Living City Initiative

261. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to introduce a scheme equivalent to the Living City Initiative to help sustain towns by encouraging persons to reside and invest in town centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5247/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** The Living City Initiative was introduced by my colleague, the Minister for Finance, in Budget 2014 as a targeted pilot tax incentive scheme aimed at: - encouraging people to live in older buildings in the centre of our cities; and incentivising the regeneration of central business districts.

The Initiative provides tax incentives targeted at owner/occupiers rather than property developers or the rental sector for works undertaken to refurbish residential and retail buildings, either to bring them up to a habitable standard or to make improvements to buildings which are currently inhabited, all with a view to helping to improve the vibrancy of city centre areas.

In addition, my Department has taken a number of initiatives in recent years in this vein:

- local authorities were requested to exercise restraint, or where possible, to reduce commercial rates and local charges to assist local businesses in the current economic climate - the vast majority of local authorities have responded positively to this request;

- revised development contribution guidelines were introduced in 2013 requesting planning authorities to put in place reduced development contributions to support town centre development and incentivise activity in the areas prioritised for development in relevant core strategies;

- new guidelines on retail planning were published aimed at promoting and supporting the vitality and viability of city and town centres. These guidelines retained the previous caps on store size in less populated and smaller towns, and were aimed at striking the right balance to ensure that local monopolies are not created in smaller towns which would be detrimental to competition;

- the publication of 2 new Planning and Development Bills which include a provision for a vacant site levy as an integral part of the development planning process to incentivise the

bringing into beneficial use of under-utilised urban land, vacant sites and buildings, thereby facilitating sustainable urban development and an efficient return on state investment in enabling infrastructure.

In terms of Government action other than by my Department in providing assistance to retail businesses and stimulating economic activity in local communities, a number of measures have been introduced since 2011, including:

- the introduction of the 9% rate of VAT on certain goods and services;
- the halving of the lower rate of employers' PRSI;
- the introduction of the Microenterprise Loan Scheme and Credit Guarantee Scheme, both of which schemes have had take-up from the retail sector; and
- the extension of seed capital and the employment and investment incentive scheme to the retail sector.

My Department remains committed to working with other Government Departments, with local government and with other community development and enterprise stakeholders with a view to providing a clear framework for addressing urban centre decline and its impacts on the retail sector, and will continue to explore appropriate options for further action in this regard.

### **Community Development Projects**

262. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update on the funding of community based women's networks which does valuable work in supporting disadvantaged women at national and local level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5254/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan):** My Department's Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP) is the largest social inclusion intervention of its kind in the State. The current Programme officially finished at the end of 2013 having operated for four years with funding of €281 million over that period. It is being implemented on a transitional basis until March 2015, pending the roll out of the new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) in April 2015 .

In accordance with the Public Spending Code, legal advice, good practice internationally and in order to ensure the optimum delivery of services to clients, SICAP is subject to a public procurement process, which is currently underway.

The public procurement process is a competitive process that is open to Local Development Companies, other not-for-profit community groups, commercial firms and national organisations that can provide the services to be tendered for to deliver the new Programme. In Stage one, joint applications were encouraged and organisations of varying sizes (for example smaller organisations working in consortia with larger organisations) were invited to submit joint applications. That said, I understand that some small groups, such as the groups under the remit of the National Collective of Community Based Networks (NCCWN) faced a number of challenges in competing in the Stage one process. The results of Stage one were released on 24 September 2014 and I can confirm that none of the NCCWN groups expressed an interest either as lead applicants or as part of a consortium. I am now considering the implications of that for NCCWN and my Department is liaising with other relevant Departments to find a workable

solution. My Department will be meeting the NCCWN shortly.

I should say that all groups who received LCDP funding in 2014 are being funded through LCDP interim arrangements until 31 March 2015, pending the outcome of the SICAP competitive process. I can confirm that interim LCDP funding, based on a small budgetary reduction in the order of 6.5%, on 2014 levels, is being provided to NCCWN up to end March 2015. In addition, my Department also supports a number of Women's Projects under the Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO). This funding scheme, which supports national organisations in the community and voluntary sector, aims to provide multi-annual funding towards core costs associated with the provision of services. A new round of funding under this scheme commenced on 1 July 2014, under which the NCCWN was allocated some €160,122 for the period 1 July 2014 - 30 June 2016.

### **Housing Adaptation Grant Data**

263. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when the housing adaptations for people with disabilities and housing aid for older person's funding will be made available to Meath County Council; and if he will provide details of the 2015 allocation for Meath. [5258/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** Allocations to all local authorities in respect of Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability, including to Meath County Council, will be made in the next few weeks. Funding of over €37 million was provided for these grants last year and I am pleased to confirm that amount will increase by some 10% in 2015 to €40.4 million, comprising both my Department's funding and a further amount being provided by certain local authorities themselves.

### **Social and Affordable Housing Provision**

264. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of social houses which will be built this year in County Louth by location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5263/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** Social housing is a key priority for Government, as evidenced by the increased provision made for the area in Budget 2015. The Social Housing Strategy 2020: Support, Supply and Reform builds on the provisions contained in Budget 2015 and sets out clear, measureable 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. The total targeted provision of over 110,000 social housing units, through the delivery of 35,000 new social housing units and meeting the housing needs of some 75,000 households through the Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Scheme, will address the needs of the 90,000 households on the housing waiting list, with flexibility to meet potential future demand. In committing to provide these 35,000 new social housing units, at a projected cost of €3.8 billion, the Strategy marks a fresh start for social housing in Ireland.

Actions 1 and 4 of the Strategy require the agreement of national targets for delivery of social housing across local authorities in 2015 and in subsequent years. The Project Board responsible for oversight of the delivery of actions and targets under the Social Housing Strategy, has agreed a process on setting social housing delivery targets and consultation with individual

local authorities in this regard is currently taking place. As always, the specific plans and locations under which social housing provision will be made in County Louth will be a matter for Louth County Council as the housing authority for the area. Each local authority has responsibility for identifying their area's social housing need and responding as required, including planning and undertaking new social housing developments to meet this need.

### **Local Authority Housing Data**

265. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown of the numbers of local authority dwellings by building energy rating in each local authority area in the State in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5271/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey):** My Department does not maintain a statistical database of the Building Energy Ratings of dwelling units owned by local authorities. The national database of building energy ratings is maintained by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland. I understand that the software used to maintain the database was modified in July 2012 to allow for the identification of BER certificates relating to dwellings used for social housing purposes.

I am advised that BER certificates will have been obtained by local authorities in respect of new dwellings commissioned since 1 January 2007 and in respect of dwellings offered for letting since 1 July 2009. In addition BER certificates are obtained when energy efficiency upgrade works are undertaken on existing units. Local authority dwellings falling outside of this set of circumstances are unlikely to have a BER certificate. BER Certificates also have a validity period of 10 years and will cease to be represented on the national database once this period has expired.

My Department continues to pursue an ongoing programme of investment in improving the energy efficiency of the existing stock of social housing owned by local authorities and has published the best practice design guidelines Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities which, among other things, promote higher standards of energy efficiency in new social housing. Local authorities are undertaking an ambitious programme of insulation retrofitting, with the support of my Department, on the least energy efficient social houses over a 3 year period. Funding of €50 million is being provided over the period 2013-2015 for improving the energy performance of older local authority housing stock. This programme will improve energy efficiency and comfort levels, and therefore BER ratings, in 25,000 local authority homes.

### **Local Authority Housing**

266. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide, in tabular form, the numbers of grant applications for home energy retrofit of local authority dwellings approved in each local authority area in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014; the total amount spent in each year towards these grants; the total contribution in each year from local authority resources; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5273/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** The information requested is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.



### Local Authority Staff Data

267. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide in tabular form the most recently available numbers of whole-time equivalent staffing in each local authority in the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5274/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** My Department gathers quarterly data on staff numbers in local authorities. The most recent data collected at the end of December 2014, are set out in the following table on a whole time equivalent basis (WTE).

LOCAL AUTHORITY	December 2014 Quarterly Return (Total WTE)
Cork City	1210.06
Dublin City	5445.70
Galway City	410.10
Limerick City & County	1008.14
Waterford City & County	773.13
Carlow	264.86
Cavan	360.55
Clare	712.81
Cork	1947.31
Donegal	832.33
Dun Laoghaire / Rathdown (DLR)	951.00
Fingal	1250.66
Galway	752.08
Kerry	1050.34
Kildare	793.70
Kilkenny	486.86
Laois	348.57
Leitrim	253.09
Longford	272.85
Louth	606.05
Mayo	927.01
Meath	621.98
Monaghan	362.74
Offaly	376.00
Roscommon	408.89
Sligo	414.44
South Dublin	1055.69
Tipperary	1002.33
Westmeath	458.54
Wexford	699.90
Wicklow	678.65
OVERALL TOTAL	26735.36

### Local Authority Housing Data

268. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government using the most recently available data, if he will provide, in tabular form,

the total number of local authority dwellings in each local authority in the State; the proportion of such dwellings in each area which are single bed, two-bed, three-bed, four-bed or more than four-bed; the proportion of such dwellings in each area which are detached, semi-detached, terraced, apartment or other; the proportion of such dwellings in each area which were built prior to 1930, between 1930 and 1949, between 1950 and 1969, between 1970 and 1989, between 1990 and 2000 and after 2000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5275/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** My Department publishes a wide range of housing and planning statistics, which includes aggregate data relating to local authority housing stock broken down by county. The statistics are available on my Department's website at: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/StatisticsandRegularPublications/HousingStatistics/FileDownload,15295,en.xls> by clicking "L.A. rented houses units by area 2003+" under the Social Housing Supports contents.

However, the detailed information requested on bedroom number, house type and year of construction is not available in my Department. It may be identified using the CSO 2011 Census data and can be found here: <http://www.cso.ie/en/census/index.html>.

### **Irish Water Consultative Group**

269. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for the Environment; Community and Local Government the persons who attended all meetings of the Irish Water consultative group SLA sub-group, including not just members of this group but also non-members; and if he will provide minutes of all these meetings. [5277/15]

270. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for the Environment; Community and Local Government the organisation that took the decision to extend the Irish Water SLA beyond 2017 that is Irish Water; Bord Gáis or his Department. [5278/15]

280. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for the Environment; Community and Local Government the names of all persons present at the 18 April 2013 meeting of the Irish Water consultation group; if he will confirm that the extension of the service level agreements with councils was a pre-condition for the councils to undertake the necessary fact finding mission as suggested in the memo for the 18 April 2013 meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5347/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 269, 270 and 280 together.

The meetings of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) sub group of the Irish Water Consultative Group was part of an industrial relations process to facilitate an exchange of views on issues surrounding the SLA. As was the agreed procedure for such meetings, minutes were not taken with the agreed outcome being communicated to the relevant parties by the Chair of the Irish Water Consultative Group, Mr Kevin Foley. This approach is adopted generally to meetings facilitated by the Labour Relations Commission. The agreed framework for SLAs is available on the Department's website at the following link <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/Environment/Water/FileDownload,35139,en.pdf>.

On the management side, my Department was represented along with the Local Government Management Agency, Local Authority Management, Irish Water and the Water Services Transition Office. The staff side was represented by ICTU and member unions.

The concept of a service level agreement (SLA) was an essential ingredient of the transition

plan proposed by the Independent Assessment conducted by PWC in 2011 on the question of establishing Irish Water. PWC recommended this approach over a “big bang” transfer of all staff and functions, taking account of relevant labour laws, as this would allow Irish Water to implement a fit for purpose organisation structure without the constraints of the existing local authority system. The Service Level Agreement would ensure continuity of service based on the local authority knowledge of assets and operations and would be most likely to deliver efficiencies earlier, reduce the risk of failure and maintain security of supply during the transition.

The unwinding of these interim arrangements were, in PWC’s view, a matter to be determined by Irish Water in consultation with my Department and local authorities. While they recommended that the SLA would conclude by the end of 2017, they acknowledged that Irish Water might wish to enter into longer term agreements with local authorities for specific purposes.

Following public consultation on this report, the Government agreed and published the implementation strategy for the water sector reform programme. This implementation strategy acknowledged the potential scope for local authorities to continue to act as agents of Irish Water beyond 2017. The strategy identified the need for engagement with staff on the reform programme, given its scale and complexity, and the implications for the staff concerned.

All discussions at the Irish Water Consultative Group were set in this context and were reflected in the positions adopted by the management side. The management side would not have agreed to the framework, unless the management side was satisfied that it would provide an appropriate mechanism to meet the Government’s objectives in reforming the water sector by improving its efficiency and effectiveness and increasing capital investment would be achieved.

The final proposition of a 12 year SLA was considered important in delivering on these aims and was balanced with providing greater certainty to local authority staff. The SLA term, within a broader framework, was an important backdrop to local authorities embracing the change required and investing time and effort in underpinning an enduring relationship with the new utility, whilst ensuring that accompanying measures provide for the establishment of a high performing water utility on a timely basis with benefits accruing to the customer. The SLA provides for the agreement of annual service plans which deal with issues such as transformational change and headcount. The number of staff employed under the SLA has decreased by 10% in the first year of operation of Irish Water.

### **Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists**

**271. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 224 of 15 January 2015 with regards to the awarding of medical priority for local authority housing lists and further to the reply received from Dublin City Council that priority status is only awarded in extreme circumstances and only if an applicant’s medical difficulty will be alleviated by a change in their current housing circumstances, therefore, many applicants have indeed serious medical problems but do not merit medical priority, as a change in their housing will not improve their health, the way it is determined that an applicant’s housing will improve their health, and the types of medical conditions that have merited being awarded medical priority. [5280/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey):** As I indicated in my reply to the Question referred to by the Deputy, decisions on granting priority to households in the allocation of dwellings are a matter for the housing authority concerned, in accordance with section 22 of the Housing (Miscella-

neous Provisions) Act 2009 and the associated Social Housing Allocation Regulations 2011 .

### **Water Charges Administration**

272. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the water charges pertaining to bed and breakfast operators who currently pay a premium to local authorities; if such operators are now expected to pay for the same water supply twice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5299/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** With effect from 1 January 2014, Irish Water is responsible for public water services. The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides that Irish Water shall collect charges from its customers in receipt of water services provided by it. The Act also provides that responsibility for the independent economic regulation of the water sector is assigned to the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) and the CER has been given statutory responsibility for protecting the interests of customers. Any business connected to a public water supply is liable for charges as a non-domestic customer. If the premises is also used for domestic purposes, such as a bed and breakfast, it is termed a mixed-use customer. Mixed-use customers will be billed separately for their domestic and non-domestic water services and will have a separate account number for each. Mixed-use customers will be charged for the domestic component of their usage based on occupancy. For the domestic component, single adult households will pay a maximum of €160 per year; multi-adult households will pay a maximum of €260 a year. Mixed-use dwellings that register with Irish Water will be eligible for the €100 water conservation grant.

It should be noted that the existing arrangements for all non-domestic customers are remaining in place with no changes for the time being. On this basis, the local authorities will continue to bill for non-domestic water services as agents of Irish Water and the non-domestic component of their consumption will continue to be charged according to the current non-domestic tariff arrangement. In the case of a metered customer, the volume to be charged at the non-domestic rate will continue to be the metered volume in excess of the current local authority domestic allowance. As part of the water pricing policy which provided for non-domestic water charges, local authorities were required to provide mixed-use customers with an allowance in respect of their domestic consumption.

The CER will be reviewing all aspects of non-domestic water tariffs under a series of public consultations and will publish the time-line for this process in the next few months.

### **Local Authority Staff Recruitment**

273. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the effect the present recruitment embargo has had over the past number of years upon the ability of local authorities to deliver their services effectively; if he will highlight the local authorities which have most suffered as a result of staffing shortages; the measures he has proposed to address these high-pressure areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5305/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** The moratorium on recruitment and promotion in the public service was introduced in March 2009 in response to the financial crisis. My Department operates a delegated sanction from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for implementation of the moratorium in relation to local authorities, and any exceptions to the moratorium in local authorities require

sanction from my Department. 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, it is a matter for each Chief Executive, in the first instance, to ensure that the moratorium is implemented while the appropriate service levels are maintained.

During the moratorium, local authorities had to reduce staffing numbers in order to balance their finances. This is reflected in the fact that local authority numbers started to reduce from June 2008. The number employed across all local authorities at the end of June 2008 was 37,243; by end December 2014, this had fallen to 26,735 representing a reduction of 10,508 or 28%.

Since the implementation of the moratorium, and the large staff reductions, local authorities have undertaken work force planning to identify how the remaining staff can be optimally deployed and where there are real vacancies that need to be filled. This process in turn informs the sanctioning process. Local authorities have re-deployed staff and re-allocated work to fill the gaps. Where the gaps can't be filled, local authorities apply to my Department seeking sanction to recruit.

The Department has carefully operated its delegated sanction from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to facilitate the targeted replacement of staff in key service areas where specific exemptions are available subject to appropriate applications being made. In this regard, over 7,200 local authority staff sanction requests have been approved by my Department since the moratorium was introduced in 2009.

As announced in the recent Budget, it is proposed that with effect from 2015, the moratorium and the Employment Control Framework for the Public Service will be lifted but recruitment/promotion will be subject to adherence to binding three year pay ceilings. Staffing resources must be managed within these overall ceilings. Detailed arrangements in terms of the local authority sector are currently being worked out between my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

### **Local Authority Housing**

274. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to re-introduce the scheme whereby older persons could give up their home to a local authority in order to be placed in housing for the elderly; and his plans for similar schemes to free up local authority or private housing while supporting care for older persons. [5318/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey):** I understand the scheme referred to was introduced by a local authority to enable older people to downsize from homes that may have become too large for them to more suitable accommodation, thus potentially freeing up homes for larger families. While I have no proposals to introduce a national scheme along these lines, it is open to housing authorities, in the context of implementing the Social Housing Strategy 2020, to explore the potential of such schemes to meet differing housing needs, having regard to local circumstances.

### **Wind Energy Guidelines**

275. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local



Government when his Department will publish the updated wind energy guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5333/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** In December 2013, my Department published proposed “draft” revisions to the noise, setbacks and shadow flicker aspects of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines. These draft revisions proposed:

- The setting of a more stringent day and night noise limit of 40 decibels for future wind energy developments;
- A mandatory minimum setback of 500 metres between a wind turbine and the nearest dwelling for amenity considerations: and
- The complete elimination of shadow flicker between wind turbines and neighbouring dwellings.

A public consultation process was initiated on these proposed draft revisions to the Guidelines, which ran until February 21 2014. My Department received submissions from 7,500 organisations and members of the public during this period. It is intended that the revisions to the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines will be finalised as soon as possible. In this regard, account has to be taken of the extensive response to the public consultation in framing the final guidelines. Further work is also advancing to develop technical appendices to assist planning authorities with the practical application of the noise measurement aspects of the Wind Guidelines. The revisions to the Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2006, when finalised, will be issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. In the interim, the 2006 Guidelines continue to apply to existing planning applications. Planning authorities, and, where applicable, An Bord Pleanála must have regard to guidelines issued under Section 28 in the performance of their functions under the Planning Acts.

### **Community Development Projects**

276. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will instruct his officials to carry out the final inspection on the Brownstown community project without delays as this community group has carried out all works as specified by Westmeath County Development and now want to draw down the remaining grant to clear bridging finance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5339/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan):** The pre-payment inspection on this project is now complete and a payment has issued from my Department.

### **Library Services**

277. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if County Cavan library headquarters will retain its current status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5343/15]

278. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if County Monaghan library headquarters will retain its current status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5344/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 277 and 278 together.

The report *Managing the Delivery of Effective Library Services* contains detailed arrangements for the planning and implementation of new structures in order to establish stronger, more effective and efficient public libraries and deliver better library services to local communities and citizens, in line with Government policy on public sector reform.

The initiative is the outcome of a considered and thorough review of the library service and in-depth consultation with stakeholders, which established the need for scale in the management of a modern library service. The increased capacity resulting from the new structures will increase the scope for developing and enhancing services to the public, providing a broader range of services to the same high standard across the country.

In this context, a central management team with an enhanced management structure will be established for Cavan and Monaghan. The new management structure will be led by one county librarian and will be based in a single library headquarters, the location of which will be a matter for local decision between the respective local authorities. The new management structure will facilitate a more efficient allocation of functions across senior management, will enable greater strategic planning and ensure a better focus on, and delivery of, an increased range of services to the public.

There will be no decrease in the number of library services or library branches. The role of each local authority and their public representatives will be safeguarded and there will be no erosion of either local authority's responsibilities. The provision of a library service will continue to be a core local authority function and each library service and library branch will continue to be locally branded and identified with the individual local authority. Each local authority will also continue to be responsible for policies, priorities and budgets for their library services to reflect local needs, priorities and resources. The county librarian for the new structures will be responsible to and available to each county council.

### **Fuel Laundering**

279. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the arrangements, that he has put in place to meet with the Minister for the Environment in the Northern Ireland Executive, Oireachtas Members from counties Cavan, Monaghan and Louth and Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly in County Armagh to meet in the Armagh-Louth-Monaghan area to discuss the ongoing damage caused by the illegal trade in fuel as requested by a number of Deputies during a Topical Issue debate on 21 January 2015; when this meeting will take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5345/15]

288. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the estimated cost of cleaning up each illegal plant; and the cost per annum for the cleaning up of illegal fuel laundering plants. [5428/15]

289. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the current arrangements for the cost of clean-ups; the person-body that pays, and to whom they pay for the clean up of fuel laundering plants. [5429/15]

290. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of illegal fuel-sludge dumps that have been uncovered in the past five years per annum and by county. [5430/15]

291. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the level of human and environmental damage and danger posed by fuel laundering plants and by illegal sludge dumps. [5431/15]

292. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount that has been paid to clean-up fuel sludge dumps, per annum and per county. [5432/15]

293. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to change the process of paying for the clean-up of fuel laundering plants and diesel and fuel sludge. [5433/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 279 and 288 to 293, inclusive, together.

Enforcement in relation to illegal diesel laundering activities is primarily a matter for the Revenue Commissioners from the point of view of avoiding loss of revenue to the Exchequer. My Department assists local authorities in carrying out their role as competent authorities under waste legislation, which is to take the necessary measures, on behalf of the State, to ensure that any waste generated and left abandoned by diesel launderers is disposed of without endangering human health and without harming the environment.

Approximately 1,200 incidents of diesel laundering waste dumping have been dealt with by local authorities to date and my Department has up to now reimbursed the costs associated with such disposal on a case by case basis. The majority of the clean-up operations have taken place in Louth and Monaghan with 596 and 509 sites, respectively. Similar clean-up operations have also been carried out in Counties Cavan, Donegal, Offaly, Meath and Waterford.

Details of the significant amounts provided by my Department from the Environment Fund since 2008 on a per county basis are set out in the table.

Year	Louth County Council	Monaghan County Council	Offaly County Council	Cavan County Council	Donegal County Council	Total
2008	€448,460	€109,615				€558,075
2009	€314,678	€45,632				€360,310
2010	€246,211	€28,414	€29,270			€303,895
2011	€939,315	€89,588				€1,028,903
2012	€1,452,267	€347,350		€23,458		€1,823,075
2013	€693,048	€150,946			€40,753	€884,747
2014	€ 706,159	€ 601,244				€1,307,403
Total	€ 4,800,138	€ 1,372,789	€29,270	€23,458	€40,753	€ 6,266,408

There is strong and active co-operation on this and other waste management issues between the relevant enforcement authorities on both sides of the Border, involving An Garda Síochána, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and other enforcement agencies. My own Department, as part of on-going cooperation on repatriation of illegally deposited waste in Northern Ireland, has held discussions with the Northern Ireland authorities on the need to develop a mechanism for dealing with waste from cross-border diesel washings which would be factored into the overall discussions on waste repatriation. These discussions are on-going.

As indicated previously, I have written to my counterpart in the Northern Ireland Executive, Minister Mark Durkan, to highlight again the problems being faced by border counties exposed to the consequences of environmental crime and I have signalled to him that this is an issue

that I will be raising at the next meeting of the North South Ministerial Council in May. The Council meets in the Environment Sector in order to make decisions on common policies and approaches in a cross-border context in areas such as environmental protection, pollution, water quality management and waste management and this is, I believe, the most appropriate forum to address this serious issue from a waste and water quality perspective.

The illegal deposition of waste material arising from diesel laundering activities presents the local authorities with major difficulties as the task of cleaning up the material needs to be dealt with to avoid threats to the environment. The laundering process requires the use of chemicals such as sulphuric acid and bleaching agents and results in a waste by-product, a tar-like chemical compound or sludge, with significant potential for environmental pollution, particularly in relation to watercourses.

I believe that a complete solution to this problem must necessarily involve effective and co-ordinated enforcement of the law from both a revenue and waste management perspective. In that context, my Department continues to liaise with representatives of the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, the local authorities concerned and the EPA's Office of Environmental Enforcement to seek to identify more effective enforcement solutions and these engagements will continue.

*Question No. 280 answered with Question No. 269.*

*Question No. 281 answered with Question No. 252.*

### **Local Authority Housing Mortgages**

282. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of local authority mortgages currently in existence; the total value of local authority mortgages outstanding; the number that are in arrears for more than 90 days; the total amount of arrears on local authority mortgages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5388/15]

283. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the actions that are being taken to assist persons who are in arrears to a local authority and the actions to be put in place to achieve a sustainable solution to their arrears; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5389/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 282 and 283 together.

My Department issued revised guidelines to local authorities for dealing with mortgage arrears within the local authority sector in June 2014. Dealing with Mortgage Arrears – A Guide for Local Authorities is available on my Department's website by clicking on the following link:

*<http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload,30943,en.pdf>.*

On foot of the recommendations of the Keane Report on mortgage arrears, my Department launched a Mortgage to Rent scheme on a pilot basis in February 2012. This scheme was extended nationally in June 2012, targeting those low income families whose mortgage situation is unsustainable and where there is little or no prospect of a significant change in circumstances in the foreseeable future.

It is fully recognised that people with mortgages borrowed from local authorities have been affected by issues such as unemployment and possible negative equity over the last number of years. The scale of the mortgage arrears problem amongst Local Authority borrowers necessitated introduction of a Local Authority Mortgage to Rent scheme in February 2014 in line with the MTR Scheme introduced nationally in June 2012.

The Local Authority Mortgage to Rent (LAMTR) scheme, which was rolled out nationally in February 2014, allows local authorities to offer the mortgage to rent scheme to local authority mortgage holders with unsustainable mortgages. This enables families to stay in their home and their established community. Surrendering the ownership equity in a home is a very difficult decision for a family; however, the mortgage to rent option does provide families with stability and continuity, after an often long period of financial turmoil. Ownership of the home transfers to the local authority and the family pays a differential rent.

LAMTR is just one of a range of short term and long term solutions available to local authority mortgage holders in arrears. The Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process, already in place in respect of commercial mortgages, is now being implemented across all local authorities. In cases of acute mortgage distress, homeowners also have the option of seeking to avail of the legal process now also in place to deal with personal insolvency. The most important step any family in arrears can take is to engage early with the Arrears Support Unit of the local authority. Solutions are available and advice should be sought as early as possible.

My Department publishes a wide range of housing statistics, including the number and value of local authority mortgages with a breakdown of those in arrears for more than 90 days. The most recent statistics in respect of Q2 2014 are displayed on my Department's website –<http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/StatisticsandRegularPublications/HousingStatistics/FileDownload,15295,en.xls> - by clicking "Mortgage Data/Arrears in Local Authorities" under the Housing Loans contents.

### **Water and Sewerage Schemes Funding**

284. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans for the future subsidy of group water schemes; the future subsidy per house supplied by local authority source; the future subsidy per house supplied by a private well source; the overall total estimated subsidy expenditure per annum in the future following changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5419/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** The Government, in the context of decisions taken on the financing of Irish Water, announced on 6 May 2014 its intention to adjust the subvention of the Group Water sector so that it is aligned with the approach for households on public water supplies. This is to ensure households in the Group Water sector receive equivalent support, while allowing for any transitional issues, to sustain improvements in quality in the sector. Following discussions between my Department and the National Federation of Group Water Schemes, it is proposed to revise the maximum subsidies. A circular letter detailing the revised subsidy rates will issue to local authorities shortly.

The Government remains committed to the continued support of the Group Water sector as an important element of the water industry in Ireland, founded on co-operative community and voluntary engagement, and to invest in the sector to sustain and improve quality standards and performance.



### Ministerial Meetings

285. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of meetings he has held with the national rural water services committee since coming into office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5420/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** The National Rural Water Services Committee, which has a role in advising me in relation to policy and investment in rural water services, is set up under Section 75 of the Water Services Act 2007. While I have not met the Committee, my Department is currently considering, in the context of the 2015 Rural Water Programme, a recommendation from it relating to new group water schemes. I will reach a decision on this recommendation as soon as possible.

### Ministerial Meetings

286. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of meetings he has held with the national federation of group water schemes since coming into office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5421/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** I met the Chairperson and officers of the National Federation of Group Water Schemes on 20 January 2015.

### Water and Sewerage Schemes Expenditure

287. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide in tabular form on a county basis the total amount of moneys spent on group water schemes per annum from 2011 to 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5422/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** Responsibility for the administration of my Department's Rural Water Programme has been devolved to local authorities since 1997. The selection, prioritisation and approval of individual scheme proposals for advancement and funding under the programme, within the overall priorities set by my Department and subject to the block grant allocations provided, is therefore a matter for the local authorities. Table 1 sets out the capital funding recouped by my Department, in respect of group water schemes, to local authorities while Table 2 sets out the amount recouped to them in respect of subsidies paid toward towards the operational costs of group water schemes.

**Table 1**

#### Group Water Scheme Capital Amounts Recouped to Local Authorities

County	2011	2012	2013	2014
-	€	€	€	€
Carlow	832,052	194,915	536,572	423,863
Cavan	782,703	200,000	500,000	588,673
Clare	2,385,239	368,893	274,585	33,651
Cork	900,028	ard	267,469	167,175

County	2011	2012	2013	2014
-	€	€	€	€
Donegal	900,000	ard	195,750	144,038
Galway	14,872,003	3,796,440	3,167,598	1,218,617
Kerry	578,166	849,419	824,724	497,640
Kildare	298,853	52,800	21,951	3,449
Kilkenny	366,028	390,392	445,968	335,378
Laois	778,532	473,253	810,548	488,574
Leitrim	2,710,308	1,603,234	465,027	153,470
Limerick	1,431,297	526,230	253,620	907,369
Longford	386,300	224,275	399,453	153,336
Louth	282,755	84,133	117,537	218,498
Mayo	9,472,415	3,977,080	1,079,728	1,588,696
Meath	193,360	75,200	21,100	37,065
Monaghan	1,005,903	-	644,930	611,821
North Tipperary	1,444,054	623,372	641,552	476,147
Offaly	989,605	183,994	275,865	454,622
Roscommon	1,709,643	426,229	378,703	1,530,873
Sligo	994,755	468,893	470,301	609,863
South Tipperary	-	25,868	41,778	110,694
Waterford	91,008	25,317	25,417	55,889
Westmeath	467,310	115,373	471,448	89,967
Wexford	979,242	585,050	413,000	24,477
Wicklow	527,103	594,780	14,974	159,743

**Table 2****Group Water Scheme Subsidy Amounts Recouped to Local Authorities**

County	2011	2012	2013	2014
-	€	€	€	€
Carlow	153,039.60	279,858.91	204,241.62	250,289.57
Cavan	4,407,204.11	2,787,668.89	3,520,600.31	3,775,414.89
Clare	853,095.57	1,648,738.36	914,710.16	1,194,208.88
Cork	69,874.10	109,958.17	98,138.23	115,207.43
Donegal	122,480.87	164,197.73	122,833.15	119,924.09
Galway	2,697,959.92	3,864,975.70	2,909,495.92	2,948,854.68
Kerry	283,477.19	274,194.97	211,799.26	199,164.76
Kildare	120,298.81	170,439.71	128,159.67	128,545.69
Kilkenny	334,065.70	223,443.12	305,872.04	258,185.47
Laois	306,390.15	507,338.86	291,709.53	469,311.69
Leitrim	277,979.72	343,565.99	297,833.50	397,761.98
Limerick	926,423.62	1,494,741.44	826,609.32	818,329.82
Longford	47,013.56	20,233.99	17,866.43	17,818.55
Louth	212,462.04	123,877.10	144,822.79	122,523.97
Mayo	4,207,739.92	4,008,104.12	3,592,249.65	3,688,812.80
Meath	64,418.30	151,575.44	91,276.82	120,739.48
Monaghan	3,910,892.65	3,261,213.07	2,351,184.38	3,039,970.98
North Tipperary	427,556.75	382,351.79	172,259.64	462,653.00

County	2011	2012	2013	2014
-	€	€	€	€
Offaly	377,324.61	1,064,553.77	571,306.60	553,071.30
Roscommon	830,824.70	685,229.34	532,485.62	676,925.00
Sligo	771,846.60	1,590,294.34	834,555.86	1,253,768.74
South Tipperary	21,476.82	24,402.88	24,407.27	24,039.49
Waterford	2,568.31	7,156.65	5,541.28	4,998.80
Westmeath	66,764.83	32,135.50	35,669.35	35,978.81
Wexford	595,341.59	565,159.37	377,782.69	305,651.56
Wicklow	129,320.96	75,430.34	69,055.86	72,602.79

*Questions Nos. 288 to 293, inclusive, answered with Question No. 279.*

### Departmental Legal Cases Data

294. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of cases, and the number of persons the cases were against that the Department has brought before the courts. [5438/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** The information requested is being compiled by my Department and will be sent to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### Building Regulations Compliance

295. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding water damage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5444/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey):** Under the Building Control Acts 1990 to 2014, primary responsibility for compliance with the requirements of the Building Regulations rests with the designers, builders and owners of buildings. Enforcement of the Building Regulations is a matter for the 31 local building control authorities who have extensive powers of inspection and investigation under the Acts.

While I appreciate and acknowledge the extremely difficult and distressing situations that householders have to deal with when faced with the consequences of the use of defective materials or poor workmanship, in general, building defects are matters for resolution between the contracting parties involved, i.e. the homeowner, the builder/developer and/or their respective insurers. Where a structural guarantee is in place, there may be obligations on the guarantee provider if the defects fall within scope of the structural guarantee. There may also be a role for the Management Company where structural defects arise in an apartment complex. In the event that the contracting parties cannot reach a settlement by negotiation the option of seeking redress in the Courts can be considered.

### Departmental Funding

296. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to provide a fund to help those home owners whose homes were not built to building standards quality; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5445/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey):** I have no proposals for the introduction of a fund along the lines suggested. The remediation of defects is a matter between the contracting parties, i.e. the homeowner, the builder/developer and/or their respective insurers. Where a structural guarantee is in place, there may be obligations on the guarantee provider if the defects fall within scope of the structural guarantee. In the event that the contracting parties cannot reach a settlement by negotiation the option of seeking redress in the Courts can be considered.

The Building Control Acts 1990 to 2007 set out a clear statutory framework for construction activity based on:

- clear legal standards as set out in the Building Regulations;
- detailed Technical Guidance Documents to outline how these standards can be achieved in practice;
- the burden and responsibility for compliance resting first and foremost with developers/builders;
- a statutory responsibility for professionals who are engaged by developers to ensure that construction at least meets the legal minimum standards; and
- the responsibility for enforcing compliance with the Building Regulations resting with the 31 local building control authorities.

In addition, the Building Control Amendment Regulations 2014 , which came into effect on 1 March 2014, now require greater accountability for demonstrating compliance with the Building Regulations in the form of statutory certification of design and construction, lodgement of compliance documentation, mandatory inspections during construction and validation and registration of certificates. I am satisfied that these measures are appropriate and will ensure a greater emphasis on competence, professionalism and quality in our construction industry into the future thereby ensuring that homeowners and construction clients can rely on getting the high quality homes and buildings they expect and deserve.

The online Building Control Management System (BCMS), which was developed by local authorities , also came into operation on 1 March 2014 in line with the commencement of the new regulations in order to provide a common platform for clear and consistent administration of building control matters across the local authority sector. The system will facilitate a risk analysis of all projects for which commencement notices are received, which will inform each building control authority's own inspection arrangements thus ensuring that available inspection resources are used to optimum effect.

The enhanced professionalism and accountability arising from the arrangements under the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014 will lead to improved quality and reduce risk within the construction sector. This will, in turn, lead to market conditions more conducive to insurers and a wider availability and use of latent defects insurance. Nevertheless, my Department has also undertaken to explore the potential for latent defects insurance on construction projects as a potential means of consumer redress as part of the wider reform of building control arrangements.

### **Insurance Coverage**

297. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his Department's role and oversight regarding HomeBond and other building guarantee companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5446/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey):** HomeBond is a private limited company providing structural guarantees for new houses and, since November 2008, the HomeBond Insurance scheme is underwritten by Allianz Insurance. As is the case for any private company, its operations are a matter for its management and Board of Directors. My Department understands that HomeBond Insurance Services Ltd is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland. As a private company, my Department has no role or function in its operations. I understand that other private companies are also offering structural insurance cover for new buildings in Ireland; similar to the position with HomeBond, my Department has no role or function in the operations of these companies.

### **Departmental Funding**

298. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the funding his Department has provided (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5453/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** Details of funding provided by my Department in respect of Stardust Memorial Park are set out in the reply to Question No.167 of 11 March, 1993. £100,000 was allocated by my Department to Dublin Corporation (now Dublin City Council) from National Lottery funding in 1992, part financing the initial construction cost of the Park. No details can be found from the available records of any further specific funding for the Park being provided by my Department in the intervening period. Responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of the Park is a matter for Dublin City Council.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

299. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of staff from his Department or agency under his remit working out of a Government building at a location (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5589/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** My Department and the agencies under my remit have no staff working out of the Government Buildings referred to in the Question.

### **Broadband Service Provision**

300. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the plans he intends to put in place to ensure that persons who have been discommoded since his decision to cut the rural broadband scheme will not be left without broadband until his Department has rolled out the national broadband scheme, which by his Department's own admission may not reach parts of the countryside until 2020; and if he will make a statement on



the matter. [5338/15]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White):** The National Broadband Scheme (“NBS”) was designed to provide access to basic broadband in parts of rural Ireland where broadband services were deemed to be insufficient. Contrary to the assertion in the Deputy’s Question, neither I nor the Government decided to cut or terminate the NBS.

In accordance with the EU State Aid clearance for the Scheme, the NBS contract was for a 68 month period and it expired in August 2014. The expiry of the NBS contract has not resulted in any switch-off of services and there are now commercial options, in terms of access to basic broadband, available to consumers in NBS areas.

The Government is now focused on the provision of high-speed broadband services in rural parts of the country where commercial operators are unlikely to invest due to poor commercial returns. 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.

The commercial telecommunications sector is currently investing approximately €2.5 billion in network upgrades. Approximately 1.6 million of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland are expected to have access to commercial high speed broadband services over the next two years. These very significant investments represent a step-change in the quality of broadband services available.

On 24 November last, a public consultation on a national high speed coverage map 2016 was launched. This consultation will close on the 12th February next. The map can be accessed at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://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.

The map allows all members of the public, be they business or residential, to see whether their premises or home will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016 or whether they will be included in the Government’s proposed intervention. It also provides detailed information on over 50,000 townlands throughout the entire country.

It is anticipated that speeds of at least 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.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

301. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of staff from his Department or agency under his remit working out of a Government building at a location (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5586/15]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White):** There are no staff from my Department or any of the agencies under the aegis of my Department working out of the building referred to in the Question.

### **Cycling Facilities Provision**

302. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the time-frame on the completion of the Dundalk to Newry greenway cycle route; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5215/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The proposed Great Eastern Greenway is an ambitious plan by Louth County Council (LCC) to construct a 44km cycleway stretching from Dundalk, Co Louth to Newry, Co Down. A Steering Group was established in late 2014, comprising representatives of LCC and the Newry and Mourne District Councils, to discuss the delivery of the 7.4km link to Newry City to which the Deputy is referring. I understand discussions were positive.

Phase 1 of the Great Eastern Greenway is a 5.6km off road greenway running from Carlingford to Omeath. This section was completed by LCC in 2014 with funding provided by my Department under the National Cycle Network (NCN) 2012-2013 programme, with additional funding from the Loughs Agency and LCC.

Separately, LCC submitted two applications for funding under the current NCN 2014-2016 funding programme for Phases 2 and 3 of this greenway but was unsuccessful. LCC applied for funding in respect of two short extensions at both ends of the current greenway, which would add, subject to funding, more value to the project and result in a continuous greenway of approx. 16km.

All current funding available to my Department for the delivery of greenways is fully committed to end 2016. However, given the success of greenways already delivered, I feel optimistic that funding may become available from other sources over the coming years. The EU Structural Funds Programme 2014-2020 is currently being finalised and there may be significant opportunities for cycle infrastructure development under Interreg and the Rural Development Programme. I understand that LCC is positioning itself to benefit from any possible opportunities that may arise.

Projects of the scale of the proposed Great Eastern Greenway are important to the development of the NCN given that while they cater for all levels of cyclists they present a real challenge to the more experienced cyclists both from home and abroad so adding to the valuable tourism product which cycling (and walking) routes have become.

I wish to assure you that my Department officials are monitoring the ongoing developments in relation to this project.

### **Local Improvement Scheme**

303. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide specific funding to reintroduce the local improvement scheme in view of the importance of this particular scheme to local communities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5272/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Local Improvement Scheme remains in place and it has not been abolished. The purpose of this Scheme is to provide funding for roads and laneways that Councils have not taken in charge. However, the maintenance and improvement of these is, in the first instance, a matter for the relevant landowner.

At present, 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.

Some local authorities want a ring-fenced LIS allocation for private roads while others prefer to put the funding into public roads. I think this decision is best made at a local level.

### **Parking Regulations**

304. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding parking; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5443/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Under regulation 36 of the Road Traffic (Traffic and Parking) Regulations 1997 (S.I. No. 182 of 1997), it is illegal to park on a grass margin.

A grass margin is defined in the regulations as ‘that portion of a public road situated on either side of a footway and which is provided for the growing of grass, trees or shrubbery of any kind.’

Enforcement of road traffic regulations in relation to illegal parking is a matter for both the local authority concerned and An Garda Síochána.

### **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

305. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide details of funding for school sports programmes (details supplied) in Dublin 17; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5191/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Sports Capital Programme, which is administered by my Department, allocates funding to sporting and community organisations, local authorities and, in certain circumstances, schools and colleges, throughout the country. I expect to be in a position to announce details of the 2015 Sports Capital Programme in the near future. The programme is open to all sporting organisations that fulfil the terms and conditions of the programme. A detailed guide to making an application will be available once the Sports Capital Programme has been announced. More details about the programme are available at <http://www.dttas.ie/sport/english/sports-capital-programme>.

I would advise any club or organisation that is interested in applying for funding to register on the Department's online system OSCAR at <https://www.sportscapitalprogramme.ie>.

### **Rail Services**

306. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the findings of the annual rail census that took place in November 2014, making particular reference to the DART; his views that the census findings indicate that current train set configuration on DART services is adequate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5208/15]

**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.

### **Driver Licence Renewals**

307. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views regarding facilitating persons who are ordinarily resident in the State, but are unable to renew their driving licence due to being outside the State for an extended period, by renewing driving licences with more than three months left to expire and allowing the licence to be renewed by correspondence or any other means. [5223/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The National Driver Licensing Service (NDLS) under the Road Safety Authority (RSA), normally requires attendance in person at an NDLS centre on one occasion for image capture when renewing a licence. This is part of the SAFE 2 (Standard Authentication Framework Environment) identity verification standard.

However, given the difficulty in cases where people ordinarily resident in Ireland are out of the country for some time, typically for work or study, it was agreed that the requirement to appear in person was an undue burden in these cases. This issue was addressed by a change in regulations last July under the Road Traffic (Licensing of Drivers) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 (S.I. No. 326 of 2014). As a result, people who are normally resident in the State but are abroad for an extended period may apply by post. It is expected that an Irish person residing outside the State for a prolonged period, greater than 1 year, will apply for a licence in the country in which they are living. I do not believe that any further change to the regulations is necessary.

### **Roads Maintenance Funding**

308. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding allocations approved for each local authority in 2014 and the amount paid to each of these local authorities in 2014; the funding allocated to these local authorities in 2015; the amounts paid to the local authorities to date in 2015 following the Government decision of the 11 February 2014 to allocate funding for the clean-up, repair and restoration works for public infrastructure that was damaged in the period 13 December 2013 to 6 January 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5245/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Details of the

2014 regional and local road grant allocations and payments to county councils are outlined in the regional and local road grant payment booklets which are available in the Dáil Library. Details of the 2015 regional and local road grant allocations to each county council are being provided to the Dáil library.

With regard to national roads, details of the allocations in 2014 and 2015 to each local authority are also available in the Dáil library. However, details of the actual drawdown of funding in 2014 for these roads are a matter for the National Roads Authority. Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

The Government approved funding of €16.2 million for the repair of damage caused by severe weather. €14.1 million was included in my Department's budget in 2014 to cover expenditure related to severe weather. In addition, works to the value of about €2.1 million from this funding stream are due to be undertaken in 2015.

### Road Traffic Offences

309. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for the introduction of on-the-spot fines or other such penalties for cycling on footpaths; his plans that such penalties would apply to children; if so, if the views of the Department of Health and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs were sought before making such a proposal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5276/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** In accordance with Action 92 of the Road Safety Strategy 2013-2020, it is my intention to extend the fixed charge notice system to road traffic offences by cyclists. This will offer a significant improvement to the mechanisms available to An Garda Síochána to enforce road traffic law in cases involving cyclists, and I believe it will improve safety for all road users, cyclists included.

However, I am very conscious of the use that children, on and off their bicycles, make of our footpaths and all of the safety issues that must be considered. I will consult with stakeholders in relation to this specific matter before deciding policy in this area.

### Cycling Facilities Funding

310. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will grant-aid community groups that wish to construct a spur off the new cycle way from Athlone to Mullingar in County Westmeath to encourage tourists using the track to explore different parts of the county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5337/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** All funding available to my Department for the development of cycleways/greenways is fully committed up to the end of 2016. However it is possible, given the success of the projects already delivered, that funding may become available from other sources over the coming years.

Westmeath County Council (WCC) were fortunate in securing substantial funding for two projects from the Government Stimulus Package for infrastructure development, €10m of which was earmarked for the development of greenways. The fund to WCC was €4m for the Athlone to Mullingar Greenway and €700,000 for a greenway from Coolnahay to the Westmeath County Boundary. WCC also completed the Mullingar to Meath Co Boundary greenway in



2013 using €629,000 received from my Department under the National Cycle Network Funding Programme 2012-2013.

The Community Group may wish to investigate the possibilities which exist under the LEADER programme. This may be a source of funding for progressing the initial stages of this project.

Finally, I always recommend that Community Groups work closely with the relevant local authority to continue to progress plans for suitable projects so that when funding does become available they are in a position to apply for that funding.

### **Road Improvement Schemes**

311. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if specific funding will be allocated to Monaghan County Council in 2015 to finalise the specific route in respect of improvement works on the N2 North of Monaghan town to the Border; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5341/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects (including the N2) 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 don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

312. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will support a local community club (details supplied); the position regarding funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5442/15]

**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.

No decision has been made on the timing of any future rounds of the Sports Capital Programme. Any future rounds of the Programme will be advertised in the national press.

Any interested group should register now on [www.sportscapitalprogramme.ie](http://www.sportscapitalprogramme.ie) as this will be the only way to apply under any future rounds of the Programme.

### **Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme Payments**

313. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the amount paid out under the turf cutting cessation scheme; the number of persons it has been paid

to; the total amounts paid out in the respective counties; the amount that has been ring-fenced by her Department to ensure that the scheme can continue to pay out over a 15-year period; if the scheme is still open; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5203/15]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** To-date 3,057 applications for compensation under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme for raised bog special areas of conservation have been received and acknowledged by my Department. A total of 6,437 payments and 650 deliveries of turf have been made in respect of the applications received. In addition, 1,330 once-off incentive payments of €500 have been made to applicants who have signed and returned legal agreements under the scheme to my Department. Details of the expenditure under the scheme for these sites, grouped by county, are set out in Table 1 SACs below. The total expenditure amounts to over €11.6 million. This expenditure is comprised of amounts paid in respect of annual payments, turf deliveries and once-off incentive payments.

My Department estimates that in the region of 2,300 individual applicants have received payments under the scheme for raised bog special areas of conservation. The cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme has been extended to land owners and turbary right holders affected by the restrictions on turf cutting in raised bog natural heritage areas. 164 applications have been received and payments have been made to 94 individual applicants at a cost of over €142,000. Details of the expenditure under the scheme for these sites, grouped by county, are set out in Table 2 NHAs.

The closing date for the receipt of applications generally has passed for raised bog special area of conservation sites. However, my Department will continue to accept late applications under the scheme for the time being.

As domestic turf cutting may continue with my consent, as Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, until 1 January 2017, no closing date has been set for the receipt of applications for raised bog natural heritage area sites.

I have ensured that sufficient funds are available in relation to the operation of this scheme for this year. Funding for future years will be made available from the financial allocations to my Department.

**Table 1 SACs**

Site Code	Name of raised bog special area of conservation	County	Expenditure under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme
000006	Killyconny Bog (Cloghbally)	Cavan/ Meath	€9,539
000231	Barroughter Bog	Galway	-
000248	Cloonmoylan Bog	Galway	-
000285	Kilsallagh Bog	Galway	-
000296	Lisnageeragh Bog and Ballinstack Turlough	Galway	
000301	Lough Lurteen Bog/ Glenamaddy Turlough	Galway	-
000326	Shankill West Bog	Galway	-
001242	Carrownagappul Bog	Galway	-
002347	Camderry Bog	Galway	-
002350	Curraghleanagh Bog	Galway	-
002352	Monivea Bog	Galway	-

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Site Code	Name of raised bog special area of conservation	County	Expenditure under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme
002356	Ardgraique Bog	Galway	€2,489,467
000297	Lough Corrib	Galway/Mayo	€624,583
000382	Sheheree (Ardagh) Bog	Kerry	-
002351	Moanveanlagh Bog	Kerry	€110,842
000391	Ballynafagh Bog	Kildare	-
002331	Mouds Bog	Kildare	€777,935
000440	Lough Ree	Roscommon/ Longford/ Westmeath	€1,364,343
000497	Flughany Bog	Sligo/Mayo	€65,896
000566	All Saints Bog and Esker	Offaly	-
000572	Clara Bog	Offaly	-
000575	Ferbane Bog	Offaly	-
000580	Mongan Bog	Offaly	-
000581	Moyclare Bog	Offaly	-
000582	Raheenmore Bog	Offaly	-
000585	Sharavogue Bog	Offaly	€479,957
000592	Bellanagare Bog	Roscommon	-
000595	Callow Bog	Roscommon	-
000597	Carrowbehy/Caher Bog	Roscommon	-
000600	Cloonchambers Bog	Roscommon	-
000604	Derrinea Bog	Roscommon	-
000614	Cloonshanville Bog	Roscommon	-
002338	Drumalough Bog	Roscommon	-
002339	Ballynamona Bog and Corkip Lough	Roscommon	-
002349	Corbo Bog	Roscommon	-
002354	Tullaghanrock Bog	Roscommon	€2,199,557
000641	Ballyduff/Clonfinane Bog	Tipperary	-
000647	Kilcarren-Firville Bog	Tipperary	-
002353	Redwood Bog	Tipperary	€440,829
000679	Garriskil Bog	Westmeath	-
002336	Carn Park Bog	Westmeath	-
002337	Crosswood Bog	Westmeath	€553,666
001818	Lough Forbes Complex	Roscommon/ Longford	€7,518
002110	Corliskea/Trien/Cloonfolliv Bog	Galway/ Roscommon	€437,193
002298	River Moy	Mayo/ Roscom- mon/ Sligo	€139,896
002332	Coolrain Bog	Laois	-
002333	Knockacoller Bog	Laois	€386,843
002340	Moneybeg and Clareisland Bogs	Meath/ West- meath	-
002342	Mount Hevey Bog	Meath/ West- meath	€568,474
002341	Ardagullion Bog	Longford	-
002346	Brown Bog	Longford	-

Site Code	Name of raised bog special area of conservation	County	Expenditure under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme
002348	Clooneen Bog	Longford	€215,305
002343	Tullagher Lough and Bog	Clare	€674,046

**Table 2 NHAs**

Site Code	Name of raised bog natural heritage area	County	Expenditure under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme
000985	Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough	Cavan, Longford and Westmeath	€1,521
000993	Ayle Lower Bog	Clare	€12,168
000229	Ballygar Bog	Galway	-
000281	Keeloges Bog	Galway	-
000307	Lough Tee Bog	Galway	-
000321	Raford River Bog	Galway	-
001227	Aughrim Bog	Galway	-
001254	Derrinlough Bog	Galway	€25,857
000333	Anna More Bog	Kerry	€10,647
001405	Cashel Bog	Leitrim	-
000422	Aghnamona Bog	Leitrim and Longford	€10,647
000691	Rinn River	Leitrim and Longford	€3,042
001450	Mount Jessop Bog	Longford	€3,042
000565	Clonydonnin Bog	Offaly and Westmeath	€3,042
001623	Carrickynaghtan Bog	Roscommon	€10,647
000640	Arragh More Bog	Tipperary	-
000937	Scohaboy Bog	Tipperary	€15,210
000674	Ballynagrenia and Ballinderry Bog	Westmeath	-
000677	Cloncrow Bog (New Forest)	Westmeath	-
000684	Lough Derravaragh	Westmeath	-
000694	Wooddown Bog	Westmeath	-
001812	Lough Garr Bog	Westmeath	€30,420
000221	Moorfield Bog/ Farm Cottage	Galway and Roscommon	€1,521
001580	Girley Bog	Meath	€15,210

### Appointments to State Boards

314. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the reason she refuses to publicly release the curricula vitae of successful candidates who have been appointed to State boards under her remit; if she will publicly release the curriculum vitae of each successful candidate in the future under the newly announced regime for State board appointments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5350/15]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Government has agreed a Revised Model for Ministerial Appointments to State Boards, which provides a more structured approach to ensure that vacancies on State Boards are populated in a transparent way by the high-calibre personnel required to successfully implement their man-

dates. My Department is now implementing this revised model in accordance with the Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards issued by my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, last November. The guidelines provide that: “At the time of the appointment of new members of State Boards, information shall be published by the relevant Department, for example in the press release announcing the new member(s), on the specific reasons the person(s) appointed meet the criteria determined by the relevant Minister for the role.”

The guidelines do not propose the publication of the Curricula Vitae of the successful candidates.

With regard to the specific issue referred to in the Deputy’s Question, I assume that this relates to a decision made by an official of my Department last year under the provisions of the Freedom of Information (FOI) legislation. I am advised that the decision, which was made independently by the official in question, took account of all relevant factors, including matters relating to personal information. I am also advised that the requester in that case did not avail of the option to appeal the decision. As Minister, I have no role in determining what information is released in response to FOI requests.

I should also add that board membership details are generally published on the websites of the relevant bodies operating under the aegis of my Department. In many cases, these include biographies of board members and I expect that this practice will continue.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

315. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of staff from her Department or agency under her remit working out of a Government building at a location (details supplied) in County Laois; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5584/15]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I am advised that no staff of my Department or any agency under its remit are currently working out of the location specified by the Deputy.