

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 12, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 13 to 129, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 130 to 141, inclusive, answered orally.

Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme Data

142. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of turf cutters who have made application under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme for raised bog special areas of conservation; the number of applications that were successful; the numbers that were not successful; and the number pending; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5530/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): 3,057 applications under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme for raised bog special areas of conservation have been received and acknowledged by my Department to date. A total of 6,437 payments and 650 turf deliveries 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. This equates to some 2,300 individual applicants having received payments under the scheme thus far.

The qualifying criteria for the scheme are that:

- The claimant must have a legal interest in one of the raised bog special areas of conservation – ownership or turbary right;
- The claimant must have been the owner or entitled to exercise turbary rights on the land in question on 25 May 2010;
- The turbary on the site must not be exhausted;
- The claimant must have been cutting turf on the land in question during the relevant five year period; and
- No turf cutting or associated activity is ongoing on the property.

I am advised that, at this stage, 138 applicants from raised bog special areas of conservation have been informed by my Department that they do not fulfil the qualifying criteria of the scheme.

While it may be anticipated that there will be further instances where applicants will be informed that they do not fulfil the qualifying criteria, current priority is being given to providing payments to those who clearly appear to fulfil the criteria on the basis of the information they have provided. In addition, establishing ownership rights is particularly complex and my Department is working with owners of land and turbary right holders to assist them in this regard.

A number of applicants are not being provided with compensation under the scheme as the areas on which they have been cutting turf are not within one of the designated sites.

Arts Funding

143. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views regarding plans she may have to change the way arts funding is organised. [5460/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Government's policy on the arts is to promote and strengthen the arts in all its forms, to increase access to and participation in the arts, and to make the arts an integral and valued part of our national life.

Under the Arts Act 2003, primary responsibility for the promotion of the arts at all levels throughout the country is devolved to the Arts Council. The Arts Council is the main channel of State current expenditure on the arts and will receive almost €59 million in 2015. Although the Council is funded through my Department, it is statutorily independent in its funding decisions, as provided by the Arts Act 2003.

I believe that the Arts Council serves the arts and this country well, and I have no plans to change the institutional arrangements, which encompass the arm's length approach to the distribution by the Council of Exchequer funding to the arts. Significant expertise on the arts resides in the Arts Council and I believe, therefore, that it is best placed to identify and fund excellence in the arts.

I am also committed to ensuring the delivery of the country's first ever national cultural policy - *Culture 2025* - which will set out the high-level aims and policies of the Government in the period up until 2025. I will shortly be initiating a wide-scale consultation process to ensure that all stakeholders and members of the public can make their views known on the various aspects of arts and cultural policy.

National Monuments

144. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, in view of the fact that she has previously stated in relation to Moore Street that her only responsibility is to protect the national monument, the steps she is taking to protect the national monument; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5520/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My function in this case relates to the buildings at Nos. 14-17 Moore Street, which are the subject of a Preservation Order under the National Monuments Acts because of their association with the events of Easter Week 1916. As a consequence of the Preservation Order, any works affecting Nos. 14-17 require the formal consent of the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht under the National Monuments Acts. After extensive deliberations, a final Ministerial consent was given to the owners in April 2014 for the creation of a 1916 commemorative centre in the

monument buildings, involving the full repair and restoration of the structures, both internally and externally.

Proposals that subsequently went before Dublin City Council late last year would have allowed the exchange of two modern 1990s buildings at Nos. 24 and 25 Moore Street, currently used as a cleansing depot, in return for full ownership of Nos. 14-17 being transferred to the City Council. The transfer would have been accompanied by NAMA funding to cover the full cost of the restoration project and the proposed commemorative centre.

I was disappointed that Dublin City Councillors rejected these plans, which I believe provided a real opportunity to have the restoration work completed and the commemorative centre open in time for the centenary of the Rising in 2016. Following the decision to reject the proposal, it is now a matter for the City Council and the monument owners to consider what the implications are for the national monument buildings, for the NAMA funding for the restoration project and for the centenary commemorations in 2016.

In the meantime, my Department continues to monitor the condition of the protected buildings, including undertaking regular site inspections. Works have been carried out by the monument owners from time to time, with my Department's formal consent, with the objective of preventing any deterioration in the condition of the structures.

Hare Coursing

145. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to change the approach her Department has made to the granting of licences to coursing clubs, in view of the growing concerns regarding the operation of these clubs. [5459/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The control of live hare coursing, including the operation of individual coursing meetings, is carried out under the Greyhound Industry Act 1958, which is the responsibility of the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine. Hare coursing is administered by the Irish Coursing Club, which is a body set up under the Greyhound Industry Act 1958. Licences were issued by my Department in August 2014 under the Wildlife Acts to the Irish Coursing Club, on behalf of their affiliated clubs, to facilitate the tagging and capturing of hares for the purpose of hare coursing for the 2014/15 coursing season.

Where resources allow, officials of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department attend coursing meetings, on a spot-check basis, to monitor compliance with conditions on the licences. My Department will review the operation of the 2014/15 coursing season following the end of the season. This review will take account of the inspections undertaken by National Parks and Wildlife Service officials at coursing meetings during the season. Any issues that may arise from these inspections will be pursued with both the Irish Coursing Club and the individual coursing clubs in question.

In addition, veterinary staff from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine carry out some monitoring inspections during the coursing season to verify compliance with the rules governing animal welfare. The Irish Coursing Club also ensures that a veterinary surgeon and a control steward are present at all coursing meetings. As a further control, a Monitoring Committee on Coursing, comprised of officials from my Department, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Irish Coursing Club, continue to monitor developments in coursing.

In that regard, the situation is kept under constant review to ensure that coursing is run in a

well-controlled and responsible manner, in compliance with the relevant licensing conditions.

Commemorative Events

146. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, in view of the fact that her Department recently rejected an Ireland Inspires proposal modelled on the success of *The Gathering 2013*, the reason trade and tourism are not among the priorities of the Ireland 2016 commemoration programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5463/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): While *The Gathering* initiative was successful in generating tourism and trade in Ireland, it is widely acknowledged that the commemoration of the events of 1916 should and will have a different focus. In this regard, I am committed, together with my Government colleagues, to ensuring that the commemorations to mark the centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising will be inclusive, appropriate and respectful.

The Ireland 2016 initiative, which I am leading, aims to develop, coordinate and deliver a programme to honour and remember those who fought and died in the Rising. It will also reflect on the legacy of that period and look towards our future, based around 5 themes, as set out in the Government's framework plan:

- Remembering the past
- Reconciling and respecting all traditions
- Presenting Ireland to the world
- Imagining our future
- Celebrating our achievements.

The Ireland 2016 initiative will, as did *The Gathering*, seek to build positive engagement with the citizens of Ireland across the Government, State agency and community sectors.

I have secured an allocation of €4 million in current funding to support the development of an integrated national plan focused on the commemoration of the centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising. This allocation will be used to engage with and support a wide range of activities and events by interested groups, including local community groups and the arts, as well as Irish language and educational projects. The allocation of €4 million is in addition to the capital provision of €22 million, which will be allocated in 2015 to a number of flagship commemoration projects.

I anticipate that the overall investment in the Ireland 2016 programme will have a positive impact in terms of employment, trade and tourism, as well as wider economic benefits, both locally and nationally.

I will continue to work with the Oireachtas All-Party Consultation Group on Commemorations, the Expert Advisory Group and a wide range of stakeholders over the coming 18 months to ensure that the events of Easter 1916 are marked in a fitting manner.

Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme Data

147. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of bog relocations that have been completed; the number where alternative locations have been sourced that will meet the demand for relocation; the number where alternatives have to be sourced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5461/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): 3,057 applications have been received under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme for raised bog special areas of conservation to date. Of these, 783 applicants have expressed an interest in relocation to non-designated bogs. Relocation is a complex process in terms of

- investigating suitable sites for turf quality and quantity;
- the infrastructure/drainage works required;
- establishing the number that can be accommodated on the site;
- the cost and feasibility of land purchase or lease; and
- possible planning and Environmental Impact Assessment requirements.

Notwithstanding this complexity, progress in relocating turf cutters to non-designated bogs is being achieved in a number of cases and arrangements have been made to date as regards:

- Clara Bog special area of conservation in Co Offaly, where 25 qualifying turf cutters have been accommodated on Killeranny Bog; and

- Carrownagappul Bog and Curraghlehanagh Bog special areas of conservation in Co Galway, where 23 qualifying turf cutters have been accommodated on the Islands Bog and Killa-solan Bog.

Works have been undertaken on Lemanaghan Bog in County Offaly with a view to facilitating turf cutters from Moyclare Bog. Works have also been completed at Cloonabricka Bog in County Galway to facilitate additional cutters relocating from Carrownagappul and Curraghlehanagh Bogs.

Potential relocation sites had been identified for each of the remaining raised bog special areas of conservation where relocation may be required. When relocation sites have been assessed as suitable, my Department has been seeking expressions of interest from turf cutters with a view to them moving to these sites. In 2014, the Department wrote to over 250 turf cutters, from 14 special areas of conservation, seeking expressions of interest in relocating to specific non-designated bogs.

Legislative Measures

148. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to revise the Wildlife Acts with a view to enhancing protection of certain species and increasing penalties for any contraventions of the Act; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5529/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I have a broad remit to protect Ireland's natural heritage and am of the view that the resources available to my Department for that purpose should be focused on

- raising awareness and a common understanding of the richness of that heritage and the

issues we face in protecting it; and

- securing compliance with EU Directives on nature conservation.

The Wildlife Acts, along with other nature conservation legislation in Ireland, particularly the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, provide a suite of protective measures for Ireland's biodiversity, habitats and species. The law provides for significant penalties for those that are found to breach those protective measures - for example, fines of up to €100,000 or imprisonment of up to two years can be imposed following convictions on indictment for cases involving the shooting of a Hen Harrier.

In that regard, I consider incidents such the killing of rare and protected species, as we have seen in recent weeks, to be completely unacceptable. They are damaging to our wildlife, to our reputation, to tourism-related business, and to the image generally of Ireland's healthy countryside.

I can assure the Deputy that the provisions of the Wildlife Acts are kept under continuous review and I remain open to introducing improvements to the law, where appropriate.

National Heritage Plan

149. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to the fact that there has been no national heritage plan in place since 2007; the reason this is the case; her views on introducing a new plan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5510/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Following on from the National Heritage Plan 2002-2007, and over the course of recent years, my Department's responsibilities for the development of policies for the protection and promotion of our built and natural heritage have been met by various ongoing policy developments, responding to the range of challenges in each of the sectoral areas within my heritage remit.

Whilst my Department has no specific plans at this stage to develop an overall heritage plan updating the National Heritage Plan 2002-2007, the situation will be kept under review in the context of competing priorities and ongoing policy developments.

Tourism Promotion

150. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the extent to which she anticipates the use of the arts and Ireland's heritage as a means of promoting the national image at home and abroad with consequent economic benefit throughout all aspects of the economy; her views on particular proposals or promotions in this regard such as the marketing of historic sites relating to events and encouraging a greater awareness of our rich culture and heritage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5481/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department has responsibility for the arts, film, built heritage, natural heritage, the Irish language and the islands. In addition to their great intrinsic value, these are central to promoting the image of Ireland and its perception as a rich cultural destination. My Department has taken a number of initiatives in that regard. In 2014, my Department appointed a Cultural Tourism Officer, who has been tasked with establishing and chairing a Cultural Tourism Working Group comprising representatives from across the Department. This working group assisted in the

formulation of a Cultural Tourism Working Action Plan, which focuses on identifying areas of potential collaboration, in my Department and its agencies, as well as with external partners such as the Office of Public Works and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

This initiative will enable the development of a more cohesive approach to the promotion of Ireland's culture and heritage at home and abroad by the relevant heritage and tourism bodies, for instance by encouraging the development of initiatives that help communities convey a distinctive, local cultural narrative and promote greater engagement with local cultural heritage. It will also facilitate the protection and delivery of the cultural and heritage experiences that citizens and tourists alike anticipate in Ireland. For example, consideration is being given to extending the reach of the Wild Atlantic Way tourism trail to incorporate visits to suitable national monuments that are in close proximity to the trail as currently configured.

A key objective of this initiative is to promote and realise the value of our cultural assets, both directly in terms of my Department's contribution to the development of cultural tourism, and indirectly in terms of promoting the development of cultural tourism initiatives across the wider public, commercial and community sectors in order to bring socio-economic benefits to local communities and assist in balanced regional development.

Another example in this area is the annual Heritage Week held each August, which is co-ordinated by the Heritage Council and funded by my Department. The main aims of Heritage Week are to promote awareness of our built, natural and cultural heritage, thereby encouraging its conservation and preservation. Heritage Week is designed to appeal to as broad an audience as possible and has proved very successful in doing so.

Through these and other initiatives, my Department will continue to encourage a greater awareness of our rich culture and heritage, both for their intrinsic value and for the associated economic benefits.

National Archives

151. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in view of the fact that the spend on the storage of records intended for the National Archives in 2013 was, at minimum, €1,227,807, her views on reviewing the current abilities of the staff of the National Archives of Ireland to properly catalogue, digitise and store these records, in an effort to reduce both pre-cataloguing storage costs and to reduce potential degradation of records; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5509/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am pleased that, after a number of years of funding reductions, I was in a position this year to increase the National Archives budget and, in addition, that sanction has been given to run a competition for additional archivists for the National Archives.

I am also very conscious that the storage capacity of the National Archives needs to be improved and, to that end, as part of its capital stimulus package, the Government agreed to provide funding this year for phase one of a development plan at the Archives headquarters in Bishop Street. The OPW will shortly go to tender for the project and it is anticipated that works could begin by mid-2015. This will greatly increase the storage capacity of the National Archives.

I am confident that the combination of both the increased resources and the commencement of the phased development plan will go a long way to addressing the long-standing difficulties at the National Archives.

Seirbhísí Aeir Fóirdheonaithe

152. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta cén treoir atá tugtha aici maidir le leibhéal na haerseirbhíse chuig Oileáin Árann sa chonradh nua atá le teacht i bhfeidhm an fómhar seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [5457/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Níl cinneadh críochnúil tógtha go fóill maidir leis an gconradh úr don tseirbhís aeir d'Oileáin Árann. Mar is eol don Teachta, d'fhostaigh mo Roinn na comhairleoirí EY chun athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an tseirbhís aeir agus foilsíodh tuarascáil chuimsitheach anuraidh ina raibh moltaí éagsúla ann. Tógfar moltaí na tuarascála san áireamh agus leibhéal na haerseirbhíse á shainiú sna doiciméid tairisceana.

Commemorative Events

153. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will inform the Irish people, both at home and abroad, when she will announce the date for the Ulster 2015 National Famine Memorial Day to remember all the victims of An Gorta Mór; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5517/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): While there has been a degree of continuity in the format and scheduling of the annual National Famine Commemoration ceremony, the date of the ceremony, as well as the artistic and cultural elements, may change from year to year. Although it has proved possible in most years to schedule the commemoration on the second Sunday in May, it has not been considered desirable to fix the same date each year, given the factors that may need to be considered, such as the site selection process, the availability of the lead person to officiate at the ceremony and the general arrangements at community level.

A primary objective of the National Famine Commemoration Committee is to ensure that the 2015 ceremony will be a fitting tribute to those who perished in Ulster during the Great Famine and my Department continues to work with the key stakeholders, North and South, within that framework. I hope to be in a position to announce details of the date and venue of the 2015 National Commemoration in the coming weeks.

Arts Council Funding

154. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her Department will provide financial and other support to the Artane School of Music; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5512/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Primary responsibility for the promotion and support of the arts at all levels, including musical performance, is devolved to the Arts Council. The Arts Council operates under the provisions of the Arts Act 2003, which provides, inter alia, that the Council is independent in the performance of its functions in funding the arts.

In addition, my Department funds targeted initiatives for music, which are channelled through the Music Network. These include the Music Capital Scheme, which is designed to assist individuals and groups to purchase musical instruments and is administered by the Music Network on behalf of my Department. Further details in relation to the Music Network and its

schemes are available at www.musicnetwork.ie

Census of Population Publication

155. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide an update on the digitisation project for the 1926 census which would deliver online access similar to the 1901 and 1911 records; the estimated cost involved; the specific challenges which must be overcome; the staffing required; if space will be provided at the National Archives of Ireland; if industry stakeholders have been consulted; when it is envisaged the project will be complete; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5508/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The *Programme for Government* contains a commitment to enabling the publication of the 1926 Census records in due course.

The digitisation of the 1901 and 1911 Census returns, which in relative terms was a simpler project than the proposed 1926 Census project, took over four years to complete. The 1926 Census is the next full set of Census records, after the 1911 returns, which is available to the State. However, current legislative provisions, as contained in the Statistics Act 1993, require that census data must be withheld for 100 years. Accordingly, it is not possible at this time to release the 1926 Census returns before the statutory period has elapsed in 2026. If the records were to be released before the expiry of 100 years, a major change in legislation and policy would be required to allow for the early release. This is not currently being proposed.

A 1926 Census Working Group has been formed, comprising officials from my own Department, the National Archives and the Central Statistics Office. The Group has examined this complex project and has assessed the significant resources - in terms of additional financial, staff and infrastructural resources - that will need to be in place to move the project forward to completion. I can say that, following discussions within the Working Group, I am of the opinion that the extensive preparatory work required to prepare the 1926 Census database for processing, and eventual digitisation to facilitate the release of the data into the public domain, should continue. It must be recognised, however, that, in light of the level of additional resources that will be necessary, and of the current engagement by the National Archives on a number of other important projects, including some that form a key part of the programme for the Decade of Commemorations, it will be necessary to work over time towards building the necessary capacity to undertake and oversee the 1926 Census project.

The cost to digitise the 1926 Census could be as high as €10m, as the Census has never been micro-filmed and the individual return sheets would need to be scanned and cross-indexed.

The Government agreed, as part of its capital stimulus package, to provide funding this year for phase one of a development plan at the Archives headquarters in Bishop Street. The OPW will shortly go to tender for the project and it is anticipated that works could begin by mid-2015. This will greatly increase the storage capacity of the National Archives. In addition, sanction has been given to run a competition for additional archivists for the National Archives, adding further to the capacity of the organisation.

Painéal na nAistritheoirí Gaeilge

156. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Michael P. Kitt** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cén fáth gur cuireadh scéal chuig níos mó ná céad aistritheoir atá ar Phainéal na nAistritheoirí

Gaeilge, agus a bhfuil an séala acu, á rá go mbeidh an cháilíocht atá acu mar aistritheoirí, an séala creidiúnaithe, á baint de gach duine a fuair an cháilíocht roimh 2013; cén fáth nach foláir do na haistritheoirí seo an scrúdú a dhéanamh arís agus cén uair a bheidh tuilleadh eolais ar fáil. [5525/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Mar a mhínigh mé i mo fhreagra ar Cheist Uimh 37 ón Teachta ar an 22 Deireadh Fómhair 2014, is ceist oibríochtúil í seo d’Fhoras na Gaeilge. Ní mór dom a threisiú arís nach cáilíocht san aistriúchán atá i gcóras creidiúnaithe Fhoras na Gaeilge ach dearbhú i ndáil le caighdeán oibre an aistritheora.

Tuigim ó Fhoras na Gaeilge gur cuireadh in iúl d’aistritheoirí a raibh an Séala Creidiúnaithe d’Aistritheoirí faighte acu roimh 2013 go rachadh an séala atá acu in éag ag deireadh na bliana 2015 ach go gcuirfí scrúdú athchreidiúnaithe ar fáil dóibh idir an dá linn.

Ag eascairt as plé idir Foras na Gaeilge agus na haistritheoirí, tuigim gur cuireadh ar ceal an scrúdú athchreidiúnaithe a bhí beartaithe do 2014 agus gur lorgaíodh moltaí maidir le bearta a chinnteoidh ardchaighdeán in earnáil an aistriúcháin sa todhcháí.

Tuigim ó Fhoras na Gaeilge gur reachtáladh cruinniú le hionadaithe de na haistritheoirí agus go bhfuarthas roinnt moltaí ó aistritheoirí aonair agus ó ghrúpa aistritheoirí fosta. Tar éis d’Fhoras na Gaeilge breithniú a dhéanamh ar na moltaí uile, cuirfear moltaí os comhair an bh-oird agus táthar ag súil le cinneadh roimh an gCáisc.

Hare Coursing

157. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to revoke hare coursing licences here, particularly in view of figures from the National Parks and Wildlife Service which indicate that during the 2013 coursing season over 100 hares required assistance, due to injuries sustained during races; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5523/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The control of live hare coursing, including the operation of individual coursing meetings, is carried out under the Greyhound Industry Act 1958, which is the responsibility of the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine. Hare coursing is administered by the Irish Coursing Club, which is a body set up under the Greyhound Industry Act 1958. Licences were issued by this Department in August 2014 under the Wildlife Acts to the Irish Coursing Club, on behalf of their affiliated clubs, to facilitate the tagging and capturing of hares for the purpose of hare coursing for the 2014/15 coursing season.

There is no current evidence that coursing has a significant effect on hare populations and the decision to issue licences took into consideration the favourable conservation status for the hare as detailed in the Report on “*The Status of European Union Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland*”, which was submitted to the EU in 2013. The full technical report is available on the website of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department at www.npws.ie. Hares can show significant inter-annual fluctuations in population and recent estimates indicate that the hare population varies from around 250,000 to over 500,000.

I am advised that during the 2012/13 coursing season some 107 hares were not released back into the wild after coursing meetings due to death arising from injury or natural causes. In overall terms, this represented about 2% of the total number of hares captured. The equivalent figure of hares not released for the 2013/14 season was 35 hares.

Irish Language

158. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide an update on the lifting of the derogation for Irish to be recognised as an official language in the European Union; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5511/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): As previously advised to the House, a decision on whether or not to extend the derogation for the use of Irish in the EU institutions for a further period of time is required by December 2015 at the latest.

In that context, my Department, in conjunction with the Department of An Taoiseach, continues to be actively engaged with the EU institutions in order to formulate specific proposals on the optimal approach to the derogation. Clearly, the outcome of that engagement will inform the proposals that will be brought to Government in due course, prior to a final decision being taken on this matter.

Commemorative Events

159. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to introduce a fixed day of remembrance for victims of the Irish Great Famine; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5527/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): While there has been a degree of continuity in the format and scheduling of the annual National Famine Commemoration ceremony, the date of the ceremony, as well as the artistic and cultural elements, may change from year to year. It has proved possible in most years it to schedule the Commemoration on the second Sunday in May. However, it has not been considered desirable to fix the same date each year, given the factors that may need to be considered, such as the site selection process, the availability of the lead person to officiate at the ceremony and the general arrangements at community level.

Arts Promotion

160. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the level of engagement between her Department and the arts officers in local authorities; her views that each local authority should employ an arts officer; and if there is scope for greater co-operation and collaboration between arts officers from different counties, in view of the benefits of the arts to local cultural life and also tourism. [5513/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Arts Council, which is the main channel of State current expenditure on the arts, provides significant support for local authorities, including the network of local authority arts officers. This network plays a major role in making the arts more accessible to everyone. I am also aware that the Association of Local Authority Arts Officers provides a forum for discussion and a support for the development of its members' work within local authorities.

In November 2014, I met with local authority arts officers as a group to discuss their views and their ideas for the future. I have also met many of the arts officers individually and I am constantly looking for ways which would improve communication and linkages between the arts officers and other stakeholder bodies.

Finally, I would like to state my commitment to ensuring the delivery of the country's first ever national cultural policy - *Culture 2025* - which will set out the high-level aims and policies of the Government in the period up until 2025, including the role that local authorities can play in promoting the arts.

EU Directives

161. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the extent to which she and her Department continue to receive submissions of concern arising from the operation of the habitats directive which, in some cases, appears to severely limit the extent to which traditional land use, such as farming and turf cutting, is permitted; if a means will be found whereby both environmental interests and traditional practices can be accommodated within reason; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5480/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Ireland, like all EU Member States, is bound by the requirements of the Habitats Directive. This Directive aims to ensure the protection of habitats and species which have been selected for conservation within Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). The Habitats Directive has been transposed into national law under the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011.

Landowners may object to the proposed designation of a site as an SAC. Following the completion of a Departmental review of an objection to the proposed designation, landowners may opt to take their cases to the Designated Areas Appeals Advisory Board, an independently chaired Board which makes recommendations to me, as Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, on such cases. The appeals process includes an oral hearing. The Board heard 17 appeals over the 2013-2014 period. In each case the recommendation of the Board was accepted.

It is recognised that the nomination of a site for designation as an SAC may have an impact on the manner in which certain lands may be farmed. The designation of lands does not mean that the lands are subject to blanket restrictions. However, they must be managed appropriately.

In accordance with the relevant legislation, certain activities in protected sites may only be undertaken with my consent, as Minister. Compensation may be payable where a person has been refused consent by me for a prescribed activity within a designated site that he or she had been undertaking in the five year period prior to the refusal. However, compensation schemes have generally been put in place, where required, without the need to undergo a formal process under the relevant legislation.

While my Department has the lead role in relation to the implementation of the Habitats Directive, significant funding is provided through the rural development programme, operated by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. This programme provides for a range of supports for farmers, including payments in respect of sites nominated for designation or designated in accordance with the Directive. I understand that, in future, EU financial supports for agri-environmental actions by farmers in SACs and SPAs will be made through the green, low carbon agri-environment scheme (GLAS), to be operated by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Since this Government has come into office, huge efforts have been made to engage with stakeholders with regard to the implementation of the EU Habitats Directive. My Department engages with stakeholders, including those from the farming sector, non-governmental organisations and other public authorities, on an ongoing basis in this regard. This has particularly

been the case in efforts to solve the issue of the protection of Ireland's raised bog SACs within the framework of the Habitats Directive. This has included intense engagement with turf cutting interests, farmers, non-governmental organisations and with the European Commission, as well as the putting in place of a long-term compensation scheme.

Commemorative Events

162. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide an update on discussions with the chief executive officers of local authorities regarding the commemoration of the Easter Rising in 1916 and the organisation of centenary events; and the strategies being developed at the local level for same.. [5514/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys)(Deputy Heather Humphreys): I have had very positive engagement with the local authorities in relation to the development of commemoration plans at local level for 2016. I have met with the County and Cities Management Association (CCMA) and have written to request each local authority chief executive to lead the development of 2016 initiatives in their own counties. The *Ireland 2016* Project Team in my Department has also met with local authority chief executives around the country to discuss their input. Local authorities are appointing steering groups to help to develop and drive their county programmes, as well as *Ireland 2016* co-ordinators, who will be the focal points of contact and co-ordination. Public meetings will be undertaken in each county where members of the public can come together to hear about *Ireland 2016*, meet those involved in their community, and explore and learn about how they can get involved.

Local authorities have been requested to consult widely with local interest groups and community organisations, historical societies, schools and youth organisations, other stakeholders and members of the authority in relation to the selection of initiatives and development of plans.

I have also provided an allocation of €1 million in 2015 to be distributed across all local authorities. The purpose of this funding allocation is to

- support engagement and facilitation within local communities to generate awareness of the *Ireland 2016* initiative and the commemoration of the centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising; and
- support each local authority in developing and delivering a plan for a suitable programme of events and initiatives to take place at a county level in line with the national plans for *Ireland 2016*.

Local authorities will be notified of individual allocations very shortly.

Ordúithe Logainmneacha

163. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta cé mhéad ordú logainmneacha atá deimhnithe ag an Aire le trí bliana anuas; cé mhéad ordú logainmneacha atá ag fanacht le bheith deimhnithe aici; cén beartas atá aici i leith ordúithe logainmneacha a dheimhniú; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [5458/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh) (Deputy Joe McHugh): Dirím aird an Teachta ar Cheist Uimhir 1056 a freagraíodh ar an 14 Eanáir 2015. Ón mbliain 2012 go dáta, tá Ordú Logainmneacha amháin déanta, is é sin Ordú Logainmneacha Chontae Chorcaí. Tá Ordúithe Logainmneacha le déanamh fós i gcás

17 contae, a bhfuil eolas maidir leis an staid reatha fúthu-san tugtha thíos.

Faoi láthair, tá dréachtorduithe logainmneacha ullmhaithe do chontaetha na Gaillimhe, Liatroma agus Longfoirt agus déanfar na horduithe sin chomh luath agus atá na leasuithe cuí ar Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla achtaithe.

Ós rud é go bhfuil na logainmneacha go léir i ndrúachtordú logainmneacha Chontae Mhaigh Eo scrúdaithe ag an gCoiste Logainmneacha anois, foilseofar ar shuíomh gréasáin na Roinne iad go han-luath chun tuairimí an phobail a fháil ina leith. Ullmhófar an dréachtordú nuair atá an próiseas sin curtha i gcrích.

Tá an obair thaighde ar chontaetha Cheatharlach, Loch Garman agus Shligigh críochnaithe agus cuirfear logainmneacha na gcontaetha sin faoi bhráid an Choiste Logainmneacha le linn na tréimhse 2015-2016.

Tá obair thaighde ghníomhach ar bun freisin i ndáil le contaetha Laoise, Chill Mhantáin, Chill Dara, an Chláir, Chiarraí agus an Chabháin. Ach an obair sin a bheith curtha i gcrích, rachfar i ngleic leis an taighde ar an gcuid eile de na contaetha, is iad sin Dún na nGall, Ros Comáin, an Mhí agus an Iarmhí.

Departmental Strategies

164. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide this Government's detailed plan for a national strategy for the for the areas within the remit of the Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht; and the funding that has been allocated for its implementation. [5516/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys)(Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am committed to the delivery of the country's first ever national cultural policy - *Culture 2025*- and will be initiating a wide-scale consultation process to ensure that all stakeholders and members of the public can make their views known. With this in mind, a draft discussion paper is currently being finalised, which I hope to publish shortly.

As the purpose is to set out the high-level aims and policies in the area of culture for the period up to 2025, the issue of funding does not arise.

Departmental Offices

165. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Taoiseach to detail the number of staff from his Department or any 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. [5708/15]

The Taoiseach: No staff from my Department or under the aegis of my Department are based in Government Buildings at Abbeyleix Road, Portlaoise, County Laois.

Social Insurance Rates

166. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to set down her views on re-instating the employer PRSI relief, that is, the 4.25% rate provided to businesses from 2011 to 2013, considering the risk to the future feasibility of smaller businesses

due to the return to the 8.5% rate; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5552/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Employer PRSI is payable on earnings at the rate of 10.75% in respect of weekly earnings in excess of €356 and at 8.5% on weekly earnings of €356 or less.

As part of the 2011 Jobs Initiative, the Minister for Finance announced the halving of the 8.5% rate of employer PRSI to 4.25%, as a means of helping job creation and improving labour cost competitiveness, particularly in the tourism and other employment-rich areas of the economy. This measure was implemented on a 2½ year limited time basis to apply from 1 July 2011 until 31 December 2013. The 4.25% employer PRSI rate reverted to the original 8.5% rate from 1 January 2014.

The reversion of the employer PRSI rate to 8.5% was provided for in legislation and was built into the PRSI income base for 2014 and subsequent years. Re-instating the 4.25% employer PRSI rate would reduce the annual PRSI yield to the Social Insurance Fund by an estimated €195 million in a full year.

Household Benefits Scheme

167. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to outline her views on providing free television licences for pensioners from the North who have homes here and contribute positively to the economy here, in line with pensioners from here, who are currently exempt from paying for the licence. [5627/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department will spend approximately €227 million this year on the household benefits package, including more than €54 million for the free television licence scheme, for approximately 415,000 customers.

Free television licences are available as part of the household benefits package for people who are permanently resident within this jurisdiction and who are over 70 or in receipt of a qualifying payment. People from Northern Ireland who live within this jurisdiction on a permanent basis are entitled to apply for the household benefits package.

The package is not available, however, in respect of houses which are not an applicant's principal residence. I have no plans to amend the scheme to provide for free television licences for holiday homes.

Pensions Reform

168. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to set out the average fees paid on the management of pension funds here and her plans to cap these fees; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6042/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Report on Pension Charges 2012, undertaken at my request, was the first comprehensive study of the area. The report, which can be accessed on the welfare.ie website, was undertaken by my Department working with the Central Bank and the then Pensions Board. It gathered information on the level of pension charges levied during the pension-saving cycle from initial set-up, to on-going maintenance and to the point of retirement. The focus of the report is on pension types utilised by the majority of pension savers in the Irish marketplace. This amounts to almost 750,000

people who have pensions across a wide range of pension vehicles, both employer-sponsored and individual arrangements.

The report shows that there are a wide range of different charges and their application can vary greatly, both in scale and complexity across the various pension arrangements. Charging structures are influenced by many scheme specific factors including scheme structure, type, age and size.

The report noted that unlike other pension structures, the cost structure in relation to Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (PRSAs) is regulated and considered whether similar regulation should apply for other pension vehicles. Having examined the issue in depth, the report concluded that the focus of recommendations should be on measures that would introduce clarity and consistency across the various products, and increase consumer/trustee understanding to provide a better result for the consumer. I have previously highlighted that the matter of pension charges will be kept under review with a view to considering more stringent options if necessary. In this regard I can confirm that I have asked that the matter of pension charges be a priority item for consideration by the Pensions Council. I recently established the Pensions Council to help strengthen the pensions environment by advising the Minister for Social Protection on policy matters of relevance to pensions and giving consumers greater input into pension policy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Eligibility

169. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will extend the tenant protection scheme being operated by Threshold and her Department to Cork county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5538/15]

174. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to set out the amount expended on rent allowance in each of the years from 2008 to 2014 and to date in 2015 in each local authority area in County Louth; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5636/15]

177. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to outline her plans and the progress made to provide young persons on a reduced rate of payment and trapped in homelessness with the support and financial means to exit homelessness; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5658/15]

207. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide the same support that is currently available to local authority housing applicants in County Dublin to local authority housing applicants in County Clare, who are living in private rented accommodation, or those who are seeking to secure private rented accommodation but are unable to meet the market-related rent demands, particularly in view of the growing problem of homelessness; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6138/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 169, 174, 177 and 207 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 70,700 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €298 million for in 2015. Rent supplement recipient numbers by county and information on expenditure since 2008 is provided in the attached tabular statements. Rent Supplement expenditure by local authority

is not available.

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 Cork and Clare. 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 in recent weeks. The Department's response will continue to be kept under review during 2015.

Where a person in receipt of rent supplement is at risk of losing their tenancy they should make contact with the Tenancy Protection Service provided by Threshold in Dublin or in Cork city or their local Community Welfare Service as soon as possible.

Concerns have been raised by advocacy groups regarding the reduced rates of jobseeker's allowance for younger persons and homelessness. The reduced rates encourage young jobseekers to improve their skills and remain active in the labour market in order to avoid the risk of becoming long-term unemployed and will help them to progress into sustainable employment. Where a person is in receipt of a reduced rate of jobseeker's allowance and he or she participates in a course of education or training a higher rate of €160 applies.

In addition to the measures in place under rent supplement, enhanced processes to provide earlier and more intensive engagement, additional places on a number of programmes and youth-oriented variants of existing schemes are being rolled out. This will help to ensure that all of those young unemployed people who need most support, those who are assessed as having a low to medium probability of securing employment in the absence of any support, will receive a Youth Guarantee offer within four months of an initial one-to-one interview.

The Department is also actively engaging with Tusla and non-government organisations in providing the necessary support to vulnerable young people leaving care who are experiencing homelessness or in insecure situations. These cases are managed on a case by case basis and the payment of deposits and rent in advance is considered. 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 a total of some 3,000 payments of rent deposits/rent in advance at a cost of €1.48 million throughout the country, of which some 850 payments at a cost of over €360,000 were made to persons aged under 25 years.

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

Year	Recipients	Cost €000
2008	74,038	440,548
2009	93,030	510,751
2010	97,260	516,538

Year	Recipients	Cost €000
2011	96,803	502,747
2012	87,684	422,536
2013	79,788	372,909
2014	71,533	338,135 [1]
2015	70,761 [2]	298,415 [3]

[1] 2014 Revised Estimate

[2] At end of January, 2015

[3] Rev 2015 Exp

Table 2: Rent Supplement End of Year Recipient Numbers per County

County	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	End Jan. 2015
Dublin	24,119	31,261	33,818	34,423	32,584	29,541	26,453	26,202
Cork	8,538	10,603	10,988	10,732	9,878	9,020	8,273	8,134
Kildare	3,275	4,161	4,409	4,447	4,338	4,135	3,698	3,717
Galway	3,733	4,989	4,829	4,615	4,134	3,983	3,591	3,576
Wexford	2,870	3,763	4,055	4,102	3,700	3,179	2,700	2,628
Limerick	2,942	3,669	3,896	3,833	3,323	2,984	2,461	2,374
Louth	1,887	2,426	2,563	2,734	2,549	2,422	2,211	2,189
Wicklow	2,066	2,699	2,613	2,719	2,495	2,381	2,130	2,145
Tipperary	2,082	2,572	2,680	2,609	2,199	2,094	1,961	1,943
Donegal	3,282	3,470	3,194	2,977	2,411	2,047	1,812	1,786
Meath	1,453	2,213	2,552	2,723	2,143	1,941	1,726	1,683
Kerry	2,252	2,398	2,339	2,278	2,037	1,888	1,736	1,702
Mayo	2,585	3,077	3,012	2,928	2,435	1,900	1,619	1,600
Westmeath	1,275	1,521	1,623	1,671	1,592	1,588	1,533	1,523
Waterford	2,126	2,267	2,332	2,098	1,773	1,556	1,443	1,432
Clare	1,441	1,780	1,937	1,961	1,722	1,547	1,336	1,319
Kilkenny	1,092	1,472	1,577	1,619	1,365	1,210	1,011	962
Carlow	1,161	1,498	1,484	1,440	1,239	1,108	1,086	1,094
Offaly	833	1,053	1,273	1,349	1,240	1,124	1,041	1,020
Laois	706	979	1,151	1,178	1,097	1,085	1,008	1,011
Roscommon	1,042	1,286	1,276	1,275	997	802	687	678
Longford	706	789	715	623	511	507	476	478
Sligo	733	822	787	698	591	542	451	460
Cavan	874	1,115	1,029	843	519	455	414	418
Monaghan	509	640	598	488	438	395	352	354
Leitrim	456	507	530	440	374	354	324	333
Total	74,038	93,030	97,260	96,803	87,684	79,788	71,533	70,761

Budget Measures

170. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to set out the basis of the claim by her Department, in its publication on the social impact assessment of the main welfare and tax measures for 2015, that the most significant improvements between budget 2014 and budget 2015 were for the poorest and richest households, in view of the con-

tradictory evidence published in its report. [5543/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department recently published the social impact assessment of the main welfare and tax measures for 2015, including the new water charges package. Social impact assessment is an evidence-based methodology which estimates the likely effects of welfare and tax policies on households across income levels and social groups.

The assessment was prepared by the Department, which is responsible for the welfare component of the Budget. It is based on the tax/welfare micro simulation model SWITCH developed by the Economic and Social Research Institute. Responsibility for the analysis rests solely with the Department.

One aspect of the assessment examines the distributive impact of the composite budgetary package for 2015 compared with the 2014 measures. Overall, there is a marked difference in the overall distributive impact: an average gain of 0.7 per cent in 2015 compared to an average loss of 0.8 per cent in 2014.

The contrast in distributive impact between 2015 and 2014 is greatest at the top and bottom of the income distribution, on the basis that these two quintiles experienced the greatest losses in 2014, which were then transformed into gains in 2015. Thus, a loss of 1.1 per cent for the bottom quintile in 2014 is replaced by a gain of 0.3 per cent in 2015 (a difference of 1.4 percentage points). Similarly, the top quintile goes from a loss of 1.1 per cent in 2014 to a gain of 1 per cent in 2015 (a difference of 2.1 percentage points). For middle income groups, the scale of the transformation is not as dramatic, given the smaller losses experienced in 2014. The report acknowledges that over the two years combined, many households will still show an overall loss in income.

It should be noted that certain items are not included in the assessment, for instance, additional expenditure on labour market initiatives (such as the back to work family dividend and the expansion of JobsPlus). In addition, the assessment also does not include non-welfare expenditure measures for 2015, such as healthcare, education, social housing, and the new housing assistance payments, which will remove the barrier to full-time work for long-term recipients of rent supplement. Work is ongoing to quantify these impacts as part of the ESRI SWITCH research programme.

Disability Allowance Appeals

171. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite an application for a disability allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5548/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeal from the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer who has decided to convene an oral hearing in this case.

Every effort will be made to hear the case as quickly as possible and the appellant will be informed when arrangements for the oral hearing have been made.

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.

One-Parent Family Payment Applications

172. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will arrange for an inspector to call on a person (details supplied) in county Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5558/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): As stated to the Deputy in my replies to Question No 182 on 27 January 2015 and Question No 76 on 5 February 2015, 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. A letter of invitation was posted to the person concerned a full week prior to her scheduled interview. The Social Welfare Inspector 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 by post. A copy of the invitation for interview and notification of the closure of the One Parent Family Payment application that were posted to the person concerned are retained on file.

The person concerned has recently submitted another One Parent Family Payment application and the Social Welfare Inspector will be in contact with her, in relation to this application, in due course.

Exceptional Needs Payment Applications

173. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) in County Kildare qualifies for a special once-off payment to alleviate hardship; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5623/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): According to the records of this Department, the person concerned has not submitted a recent application for an exceptional needs payment. It is open to the person concerned to make an application to her local community welfare service.

Question No. 174 answered with Question No. 169.

Question No. 175 withdrawn.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

176. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if an oral hearing can take place at an early date in respect of an application for a carer's allowance in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5651/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 1st December 2014. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will

be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements. *Question No. 177 answered with Question No. 174. Question No. 178 withdrawn.*

Gender Recognition

179. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if, under the proposed Gender Recognition Bill 2014, a person can have his or her birth certificate amended to reflect his or her preferred gender identity. [5675/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Gender Recognition Bill 2014 provides that, where a gender recognition certificate is issued to a person, the person's gender shall, from that date, become for all purposes the preferred gender so that if the preferred gender is the male gender the person's sex becomes that of a man and, if it is the female gender the person's sex becomes that of a woman.

A person who is issued with a gender recognition certificate and is registered on the register of births or adopted children register may apply to the Registrar General to have their required particulars entered on the gender recognition register which is being established under this legislation. They may then be provided with a birth certificate drawn from that register which will show the preferred gender and new names (if names are also changed).

The legislation also provides for similar arrangements for persons registered on the register of intercountry adoptions maintained by the Adoption Authority of Ireland and on the foreign births register maintained by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The Gender Recognition Bill 2014 was introduced as a Seanad Bill on 21 January 2015 and is currently progressing through that House.

Departmental Offices

180. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the serious concerns of stakeholders regarding the current location of the General Register Office, the unsuitability of the current facilities; the need to urgently relocate the office to a location that reflects its cultural and genealogical significance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5680/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Office of Public Works (OPW) has responsibility for the acquisition and maintenance of office accommodation for the Department of Social Protection. The research rooms were relocated from Irish Life Mall to Werburgh Street in September 2013. This was done as part of a cost saving, lease rationalisation programme undertaken by the OPW.

Customers seeking access to records for genealogical purposes are receiving the same high level of service at the facility in Werburgh Street as they received at the previous location.

There are no plans for the further relocation of the research rooms.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

181. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a carer's allowance appeal will be finalised in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary. [5687/15]

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

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

Departmental Communications

182. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the fact that her Department's helpline telephone number to validate a public service card is a 1890 number, which, despite being called a low-cost number, can result in high call charges to customers, depending on the service provider; whether she will take steps to resolve this issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5696/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Lo-call numbers have been in operation for the Department's scheme areas for a number of years. These have been coupled with Interactive Voice Response technology to facilitate customers making quick contact with the appropriate section of the Department at a low cost to the caller.

While 1890 numbers provide a cheaper means of communication for those who do not have free calls on landlines, it is acknowledged that they can, on occasion, be more expensive when called from a mobile. Accordingly, the Departments' website alerts the public to the fact that lo-call numbers can attract different tariffs depending on the operator of the phone service.

The Department is currently reviewing the use of lo-call telephone services which may not be available on certain telephone plans, with a view to improving access and associated costs for the public. The review is at an early stage.

Jobseeker's Allowance Appeals

183. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a social welfare appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath in relation to the refusal of their application for jobseeker's allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5700/15]

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

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in

relation to social welfare entitlements.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

184. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the mechanism in place to exclude a period of time when a person was forced to live outside the EU due to the lack of employment here from contribution averaging for the purposes of a State pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5720/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The State pension contributory is a very valuable benefit and is the bedrock of the Irish pension system. Therefore, it is important to ensure that those qualifying have made a sustained contribution to the Social Insurance Fund over their working lives. To ensure that the individual can maximise their entitlement to a State pension, all contributions paid over their working life from when they first enter insurable employment until pension age are taken into account when assessing their entitlement and the level of that entitlement.

To qualify for a state pension (contributory) a person must:

- have at least 520 paid contributions, and
- satisfy a yearly average condition (a yearly average of 48 contributions paid or credited is required for a full rate State pension (contributory), and reduced rates of payment may be payable for pensioners with lower averages).

Once over 16 years of age, the date a person enters into insurable employment is the date used for averaging purposes.

Where an applicant has also been insurably employed in another EU Member State, or in a country with which Ireland has a bilateral social security agreement, their insured periods in those countries may be combined with their Irish insurance to assess their entitlement to a pro-rata State pension (contributory). In addition to the general provisions under EU legislation (which apply to all EU Member States, EEA state Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, and to Switzerland), Ireland has bilateral agreements with the UK which also cover the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, USA, Australia, Canada, Quebec (which has a separate system from the rest of Canada), New Zealand, Japan, and the Republic of Korea.

EU legislation and bilateral agreements provide that comparative pension assessments (for standard-rate State pension contributory under Irish legislation alone, and for pro-rata State pension contributory under EU or bilateral agreement provisions) be undertaken, and whichever is the most financially beneficial pension entitlement for that pensioner is awarded to them.

National Internship Scheme Data

185. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide an update on the JobBridge education sector review; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5733/15]

195. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the application procedure for young persons for the new First Steps programme. [5980/15]

196. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if

there will be a financial consequence in respect of any failure to apply for, or refusal to agree to participate on the new First Steps programme. [5981/15]

202. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 184 of 3 February 2015, if she will provide, in tabular form, the dates on which all library and archiving related JobBridge positions in publicly funded bodies were advertised and the date on which employment in each of these positions commenced since the establishment of the JobBridge scheme. [6055/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 185, 195, 196 and 202 together.

JobBridge has made significant progress since its introduction in July 2011. At any one time, the scheme provides up to 8,500 work experience placements for jobseekers, in organisations in the private, public, community and voluntary sectors.

To date, over 37,000 internship placements having commenced, there are currently 6,194 interns on the programme and a further 1,386 positions are advertised on the JobBridge website.

In September 2014, the Department's attention was drawn to an unusually large number of cleaner/caretaker posts being advertised by schools, which raised concerns regarding the potential displacement of paid employees in the Education Sector. In light of such concerns, I asked for a report to be prepared on the use of JobBridge by the Education Sector with a view to establishing a set of guidelines to prevent inappropriate use of the scheme, and in particular to prevent displacement by interns of positions which should be filled by paid staff. This report has been finalised by the review group, and is currently under consideration.

There is no application procedure for jobseekers for the First Steps programme. Jobseekers will be selected, brought into the activation process and referred to the programme by their case worker based upon circumstances, activation needs and meeting the eligibility criteria.

Participation of jobseekers on the First Steps programme, once referred, will be non-discretionary and subject to conditionality and penalty rate legislation should they fail without good cause to attend in accordance with the activation process.

Further to Parliamentary Question No. 184 of 3 February 2015, statistics matching commencement dates with advertisement dates is not routinely prepared by the Department and so is not available at present, however, on this occasion, I have asked officials to collate the data requested and send it on to the Deputy. The Department will forward a reply directly to the Deputy as soon as possible. In the meantime, I am providing a table setting out details of the host organisations, internship role, start date and current status.

Table.

Host Organisation	As Advertised	Manco Code	Start Date	Status
Pearse College Of Further Education	Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2013-12-02	Finished - Early
Meath County Council	WPP Conversion Graduate Trainee Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2011-09-05	Finished - Full

Host Organisation	As Advertised	Manco Code	Start Date	Status
Dept of Environment, Community & Local Government	WPP Conversion Archivist	ARCHIVIST	2011-10-10	Finished - Early
Oireachtas Library & Research Service	WPP Conversion Library & Research Services Historian	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE	2011-08-22	Finished - Full
Carlow County Council	WPP Conversion Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2011-07-18	Finished - Full
Cavan Local Authorities	WPP Conversion Library Website Developer	I.T.- WEB DESIGN	2011-08-08	Finished - Full
Donegal County Council	Accounts Officer/ Book keeper - Clo & The Living Archive	CLERK - ACCOUNTS	2014-10-27	On Program
Monastery School	Administration/ Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2014-09-08	On Program
Coláiste Pobail Setanta	Administrator/ Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2012-11-12	Finished - Early
Royal Irish Academy	Archival Internships	ARCHIVIST	2014-07-21	Finished - Early
Limerick City Council	Archive Assistant	ARCHIVIST	2014-12-15	On Program
University College Dublin	Archive Assistant (In the Sound Archive of National Folklore Collection)	ARCHIVIST	2012-07-09	Finished - Full
Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	Archives Assistant (Data Entry of Catalogue Information)	ARCHIVIST	2013-02-04	Finished - Early
Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	Archives Assistant (Data Entry of Catalogue Information)	ARCHIVIST	2013-02-11	Finished - Early
Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	Archives Assistant (Data Entry of Catalogue Information)	ARCHIVIST	2013-02-04	Finished - Full
Sligo County Council	Archives Assistants	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2014-09-08	On Program

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Host Organisation	As Advertised	Manco Code	Start Date	Status
Sligo County Council	Archives Assistants	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2014-09-08	On Program
Kerry County Council	Archives Cataloguer - Local History & Archives	ARCHIVIST	2014-01-20	Finished - Early
Clare County Council	Archives Preservation Assistant	ARCHIVIST	2012-11-12	Finished - Full
Donegal County Council	Archives Research Assistant	ARCHIVIST	2013-06-24	Finished - Full
Office of Public Works	Archivist	ARCHIVIST	2013-12-02	Finished - Early
Cork City Council	Archivist	ARCHIVIST	2011-11-14	Finished - Full
Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses and Estates	Archivist	ARCHITECT - BUILDINGS	2014-02-17	Finished - Full
Office of Public Works	Archivist	ARCHIVIST	2013-05-13	Finished - Full
National Museum of Ireland	Archivist	ARCHIVIST	2013-10-14	Finished - Full
Defence Forces Ireland	Archivist - Military Archives	ARCHIVIST	2013-12-23	Finished - Full
Defence Forces Ireland	Archivist - Military Archives	ARCHIVIST	2012-12-03	Finished - Full
Defence Forces Ireland	Archivist - Naval Service	ARCHIVIST	2012-12-03	Finished - Full
Dept of Environment, Community & Local Government	Archivist - Valentia Observatory	ARCHIVIST	2012-04-16	Finished - Full
Trinity College Dublin (Head Office)	Archivist (Engineering)	ARCHIVIST	2012-03-12	Finished - Full
Trinity College Dublin (Head Office)	Archivist (Engineering)	ARCHIVIST	2012-03-26	Finished - Full
Defence Forces Ireland	Archivist- Air Corps Museum	ARCHIVIST	2012-03-12	Finished - Full
Defence Forces Ireland	Archivist- Air Corps Museum	ARCHIVIST	2012-03-12	Finished - Full
Defence Forces Ireland	Archivist- Air Corps Museum	ARCHIVIST	2012-03-12	Finished - Full
Defence Forces Ireland	Archivist- Air Corps Museum	ARCHIVIST	2012-03-19	Finished - Full

Host Organisation	As Advertised	Manco Code	Start Date	Status
Dublin City Council - Woodquay	Archivist Assistant	ARCHIVIST	2012-07-23	Finished - Full
Dublin City Council - Woodquay	Archivist Assistant	ARCHIVIST	2012-07-23	Finished - Full
Department of Justice and Equality	Archivist/Librarian - Irish Prison Service	LIBRARIAN	2013-05-27	Finished - Early
Department of Justice and Equality	Archivist/Librarian - Irish Prison Service	ARCHIVIST	2013-04-08	Finished - Early
Department of Justice and Equality	Archivist/Librarian - Irish Prison Service	LIBRARIAN	2013-05-27	Finished - Early
Department of Justice and Equality	Archivist/Librarian - Irish Prison Service	ARCHIVIST	2013-04-08	Finished - Early
Galway County Council	Archivist/Records Manager	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2014-01-20	Finished - Early
Galway County Council	Archivist/Records Manager	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2013-12-09	Finished - Full
Galway County Council	Archivist/Records Manager	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2014-05-12	On Program
Fingal County Council	Arts & Libraries Marketing Assistant	EXECUTIVE - MARKETING	2013-08-19	Finished - Early
Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	Assistant Archivist	ARCHIVIST	2012-07-30	Finished - Early
University College Cork	Assistant Archivist	ARCHIVIST	2013-01-28	Finished - Early
The Kylemore Trust	Assistant Archivist	ARCHIVIST	2012-03-12	Finished - Early
Limerick City Council	Assistant Archivist	ARCHIVIST	2013-02-18	Finished - Early
Waterford County Council	Assistant Archivist	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2011-10-17	Finished - Full
Limerick City Council	Assistant Archivist	ARCHIVIST	2012-10-15	Finished - Full
Defence Forces Ireland	Assistant Archivist	ARCHIVIST	2014-07-28	On Program

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Host Organisation	As Advertised	Manco Code	Start Date	Status
University College Cork	Assistant Archivist - Folklore & Oral History	ARCHIVIST	2013-01-07	Finished - Early
University College Dublin	Assistant Audio Technician (Sound Archive of National Folklore Collection)	AUDIO/ VIDEO TECHNICIAN	2014-01-13	Finished - Early
Holy Child Community School	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2014-01-27	Finished - Early
Scoil Mhichil Naofa	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2013-10-21	Finished - Early
Deansrath Community College	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2013-01-28	Finished - Early
Department of Education & Skills	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2012-07-23	Finished - Full
Cork Education and Training Board	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2012-09-10	Finished - Full
Cork Education and Training Board	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2012-09-10	Finished - Full
Food Safety Authority of Ireland	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2012-09-03	Finished - Full
Holy Child Community School	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2014-11-10	On Program
Institute of Technology Carlow	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2014-05-26	On Program
Food Safety Authority of Ireland	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2014-06-23	On Program
Revenue	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2011-10-10	Finished - Full
Pearse College Of Further Education	Assistant Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2012-03-12	Finished - Full
Kildare Wicklow ETB	Assistant Librarian (Bray Institute of Further Education)	LIBRARIAN	2013-10-21	Finished - Early

Host Organisation	As Advertised	Manco Code	Start Date	Status
Kildare Wicklow ETB	Assistant Librarian (Bray Institute of Further Education)	LIBRARIAN	2013-11-04	Finished - Full
Kildare Wicklow ETB	Assistant Librarian in Bray Institute of Further Education, Co. Wicklow	LIBRARIAN	2014-09-15	On Program
Boyne Community School	Assistant School Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2012-10-15	Finished - Early
St. Josephs National School	Assistant School Librarian	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2014-09-29	On Program
St. Josephs National School	Assistant School Librarian	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2014-09-01	On Program
Radio Telefis Eireann	Cataloguing Assistant - RTE Archives	ARCHIVIST	2014-08-18	On Program
Radio Telefis Eireann	Cataloguing Assistant - RTE Archives	ARCHIVIST	2014-08-11	On Program
St. Peters National School	Classroom/Library Assistant	ASSISTANT - CLASSROOM	2013-10-14	Finished - Full
Dunboyne Junior Primary School	Clerical/Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2013-11-18	Finished - Early
Dunboyne Junior Primary School	Clerical/Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2013-10-21	Finished - Full
Waterford County Council	Community Project Assistants (Library Service)	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2011-10-03	Finished - Full
Waterford County Council	Computer Archiving Assistant -Housing Department Construction Contracts/Drawings	ARCHIVIST	2013-06-03	Finished - Full
Longford County Council	Coordinator - Library Service	LIBRARIAN	2014-01-13	Finished - Full
NUI Galway	Cúntóir(i) Cartlannaíochta/ Archival Archivist(s)	ARCHIVIST	2014-02-03	Finished - Full
Dundalk Institute of Technology	Digital Archivist	ARCHIVIST	2012-03-12	Finished - Early

Questions - Written Answers

Host Organisation	As Advertised	Manco Code	Start Date	Status
Dundalk Institute of Technology	Digital Archivist	ARCHIVIST	2012-03-12	Finished - Full
Dundalk Institute of Technology	Digital Archivist	ARCHIVIST	2012-03-12	Finished - Full
Kerry County Council	Digital Content Archivist	ARCHIVIST	2011-11-28	Finished - Full
Cavan County Council	Digital Content Library Support Officer	I.T.- NETWORK ADMINISTRATION	2013-02-11	Finished - Early
Cavan County Council	Digital Content Library Support Officer	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2013-09-30	Finished - Early
Cavan County Council	Digital Content Library Support Officer	I.T.- NETWORK ADMINISTRATION	2013-03-04	Finished - Full
Cavan County Council	Digital Content Library Support Officer	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2013-06-10	Finished - Full
University of Limerick (1)	Digital Librarian/ Archivist (UL 40 Digital Library)	ARCHIVIST	2012-12-10	Finished - Early
University of Limerick (1)	Digital Librarian/ Archivist (UL 40 Digital Library)	ARCHIVIST	2012-12-10	Finished - Early
Cork County Council	Genealogy Assistant (Library)	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2013-06-24	Finished - Early
Cork County Council	Genealogy Assistant (Library)	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2013-02-11	Finished - Early
Cork County Council	Genealogy Assistant (Library)	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2013-02-11	Finished - Full
St. Kevin s Boys School	Historian/ Archivist	ARCHIVIST	2014-09-08	Finished - Early
Limerick City Council	History/ Archive Person	ARCHIVIST	2011-09-05	Finished - Full
St Dominics Secondary School	Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2013-10-07	Finished - Early
Waterford College of Further Education	Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2012-10-01	Finished - Early
Offaly County Council	Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2012-02-20	Finished - Early

Host Organisation	As Advertised	Manco Code	Start Date	Status
Cork City Council	Librarian	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE	2012-01-16	Finished - Early
Beneavin De La Salle College	Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2013-11-11	Finished - Early
St. Josephs Primary School	Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2013-12-02	Finished - Early
Kilkenny and Carlow ETB	Librarian	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2014-02-24	Finished - Early
St. Louis Secondary School Dundalk	Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2012-03-05	Finished - Full
Scoil Mhuire Community School, Clane	Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2013-10-07	Finished - Full
Naas CBS Secondary School	Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2012-12-17	Finished - Full
Offaly County Council	Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2012-02-20	Finished - Full
Firhouse Community College	Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2013-12-16	Finished - Full
St. Leos College (Carlow)	Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2012-11-26	Finished - Full
Cork City Council	Librarian	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE	2011-09-12	Finished - Full
Cork City Council	Librarian	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE	2012-01-16	Finished - Full
Beneavin De La Salle College	Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2012-04-09	Finished - Full
Limerick College of Further Education	Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2013-09-23	Finished - Full
Limerick College of Further Education	Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2013-09-23	Finished - Full
Old Bawn Community School	Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2013-09-23	Finished - Full
Old Bawn Community School	Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2012-09-24	Finished - Full
St. Joseph s National School	Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2013-08-26	Finished - Full
Waterford College of Further Education	Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2014-09-22	On Program

Questions - Written Answers

Host Organisation	As Advertised	Manco Code	Start Date	Status
Mount Bruis N.S.	Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2015-01-19	On Program
Donegal Education & Training Board	Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2014-12-15	On Program
Donegal Education & Training Board	Librarian	LIBRARIAN	2014-10-06	On Program
Donegal Education & Training Board	Librarian - Coláiste Ailigh	LIBRARIAN	2014-09-01	On Program
University College Cork	Librarian - Special Collections & Archives	LIBRARIAN	2012-10-01	Finished - Early
University College Cork	Librarian - Special Collections & Archives	LIBRARIAN	2012-10-01	Finished - Early
Wicklow County Council	Librarian (Bray)	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE	2011-10-03	Finished - Full
Wicklow County Council	Librarian (Wicklow Town)	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE	2011-09-26	Finished - Full

Tables continuing

Host Organisation	As Advertised	Manco Code	Start Date	Status
Gaelscoil na Cruaiche	Librarian Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2013-11-18	Finished - Early
CBS Secondary School Tralee	Librarian Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2013-09-09	Finished - Full
Gaelscoil na Cruaiche	Librarian Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2013-09-02	Finished - Full
Gaelscoil na Cruaiche	Librarian Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2013-09-02	Finished - Full
Liberties College	Librarian in Further Education	LIBRARIAN	2014-11-10	On Program
Donegal Education & Training Board	Librarian, Errigal College, Letterkenny	LIBRARIAN	2012-11-05	Finished - Early
Donegal Education & Training Board	Librarian, Errigal College, Letterkenny	LIBRARIAN	2013-09-30	Finished - Full
St. Josephs Primary School	Librarian/Assistant Secretary	LIBRARIAN	2011-10-10	Finished - Full

Host Organisation	As Advertised	Manco Code	Start Date	Status
Donegal Education & Training Board	Librarian/ Homework Club Supervisor	LIBRARIAN	2013-03-04	Finished - Early
Faithlegg N.S.	Librarian/ Literacy Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2011-09-19	Finished - Full
Coláiste Pobail Setanta	Librarian/ Literacy Leader	LIBRARIAN	2014-09-01	On Program
Scoil Chearbhaill Uí Dhalálaigh	Librarian/ Resources Administrator	LIBRARIAN	2013-09-02	Finished - Early
The Honorable Society of Kings Inns	Library & Conservation Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2014-11-10	On Program
The Honorable Society of Kings Inns	Library & Conservation Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2014-11-10	On Program
The Honorable Society of Kings Inns	Library & Conservation Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2014-12-08	On Program
Institute of Technology Blanchardstown	Library & Information Desk Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2011-11-14	Finished - Full
Clare County Council	Library & Theatre Attendant	AGENT - THEATRICAL	2012-02-20	Finished - Early
St Ultans	Library Administrator		2011-12-05	Finished - Full
St. Malachy's Girls School	Library and IT Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2014-09-01	On Program
Scoil Cholmáille	Library and Reading Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2014-10-20	On Program
Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2012-02-06	Finished - Early
Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2012-02-06	Finished - Early
Clare County Council	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2012-01-16	Finished - Early
Scoil Thomais	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2013-01-28	Finished - Early
South Tipperary VEC	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2012-10-29	Finished - Early

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Host Organisation	As Advertised	Manco Code	Start Date	Status
Pobalscoil Inbhear Scéine	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2013-01-28	Finished - Early
County Tipperary Joint Libraries Committee	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE	2013-08-26	Finished - Early
County Tipperary Joint Libraries Committee	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2014-03-03	Finished - Early
Teagasc (Head Office) Carlow	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2013-09-02	Finished - Early
Department of Social Protection	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2013-02-25	Finished - Early
Dundalk Institute of Technology	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2011-09-19	Finished - Early
Cork Education and Training Board	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2014-11-24	Finished - Early
Co. Meath VEC	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2013-01-14	Finished - Early
Irish Management Institute	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2012-03-26	Finished - Early
Carlow County Council	Library Assistant	MANAGER - ADMINISTRATION	2011-12-19	Finished - Early
Tipperary ETB - Nenagh Office	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2013-11-04	Finished - Full
Holy Child Secondary School	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2012-03-12	Finished - Full
County Tipperary Joint Libraries Committee	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2012-01-09	Finished - Full
County Tipperary Joint Libraries Committee	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2012-02-13	Finished - Full
Department of Social Protection	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2013-03-11	Finished - Full
Fingal Community College	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2011-12-05	Finished - Full
University College Cork	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE	2012-08-27	Finished - Full

Host Organisation	As Advertised	Manco Code	Start Date	Status
Royal Irish Academy	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2013-12-09	Finished - Full
Louth Meath ETB	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2013-10-07	Finished - Full
Royal Irish Academy	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2012-05-14	Finished - Full
Royal Irish Academy	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2012-01-23	Finished - Full
Ratoath College	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2013-09-09	Finished - Full
St. Wolstan's Community School	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2012-09-10	Finished - Full
Carlow County Council	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2012-05-21	Finished - Full
Tipperary ETB - Nenagh Office	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2014-10-13	On Program
Tipperary ETB - Nenagh Office	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2014-10-20	On Program
Naas CBS Secondary School	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2014-11-10	On Program
Loreto Abbey Secondary School	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE	2014-12-01	On Program
Cork Education and Training Board	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2014-11-10	On Program
St. Senan's N.S.	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2014-09-15	On Program
Cavan & Monaghan Education & Training Board	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2015-01-05	On Program
St Malachys Infants School	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2014-09-08	On Program
Kildare Wicklow ETB	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2012-09-03	Finished - Early
Cork County Council	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE	2012-02-06	Finished - Full
Scoil Eoghain Moville	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2012-12-24	Finished - Full
Royal Irish Academy	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2013-02-18	Finished - Full
Carlow County Council	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2013-10-28	Finished - Full

Questions - Written Answers

Host Organisation	As Advertised	Manco Code	Start Date	Status
Galway County Council	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2014-06-30	On Program
Galway County Council	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2014-05-19	On Program
Galway County Council	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2014-05-19	On Program
Galway County Council	Library Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2014-05-12	On Program
Galway County Council	Library Assistant - Ballinasloe Branch Library	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE	2012-02-27	Finished - Full
Galway County Council	Library Assistant - Ballinasloe Branch Library	LIBRARIAN	2013-04-29	Finished - Full
Galway County Council	Library Assistant - Ballybane Library, Galway	LIBRARIAN	2012-10-08	Finished - Full
Kildare Wicklow ETB	Library Assistant - Bray	LIBRARIAN	2012-12-03	Finished - Early
Kildare Wicklow ETB	Library Assistant - Bray	LIBRARIAN	2012-12-03	Finished - Early
Galway County Council	Library Assistant - Carraroe Branch Library	LIBRARIAN	2012-01-23	Finished - Full
Limerick Institute of Technology	Library Assistant - Clare Street Campus	LIBRARIAN	2013-02-04	Finished - Early
Limerick Institute of Technology	Library Assistant - Clonmel Campus	LIBRARIAN	2013-02-04	Finished - Early
Cavan & Monaghan Education & Training Board	Library Assistant - Monaghan	LIBRARIAN	2013-09-30	Finished - Early
Cavan & Monaghan Education & Training Board	Library Assistant - Monaghan	LIBRARIAN	2013-11-18	Finished - Early
Limerick Institute of Technology	Library Assistant - Thurles Campus	LIBRARIAN	2013-02-04	Finished - Early
South Tipperary VEC	Library Assistant - Tipperary Town	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE	2014-10-06	On Program

Host Organisation	As Advertised	Manco Code	Start Date	Status
Offaly County Council	Library Assistant - Tullamore Library	LIBRARIAN	2013-09-09	Finished - Early
Galway County Council	Library Assistant - Westside Library	LIBRARIAN	2011-09-12	Finished - Full
Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies	Library Assistant (Cataloguing)	LIBRARIAN	2012-07-30	Finished - Full
Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies	Library Assistant (Cataloguing)	LIBRARIAN	2012-07-30	Finished - Full
South Tipperary VEC	Library Assistant (Coláiste Dún Iascaigh, Cahir)	LIBRARIAN	2013-10-07	Finished - Early
Defence Forces Ireland	Library Assistant (Curragh)	LIBRARIAN	2013-01-28	Finished - Full
Laois & Offaly Education & Training Board	Library Assistant (Portlaoise)	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2013-09-30	Finished - Full
Offaly County Council	Library Assistant/Birr Library	LIBRARIAN	2013-09-23	Finished - Full
Lisboduff National School	Library Assistant/Primary School	LIBRARIAN	2014-10-06	On Program
Royal Irish Academy	Library Assistant -Cataloguing	LIBRARIAN	2014-10-27	On Program
Royal Irish Academy	Library Assistant -Cataloguing	LIBRARIAN	2014-10-20	On Program
Galway County Council	Library Assistant -Galway City Library	LIBRARIAN	2013-01-14	Finished - Full
Galway County Council	Library Assistant -Galway City Library	LIBRARIAN	2012-10-15	Finished - Full
Galway County Council	Library Assistant -Loughrea Library	LIBRARIAN	2011-08-29	Finished - Full
Galway County Council	Library Assistant -Tuam Library	LIBRARIAN	2012-04-23	Finished - Full
Saint Eunans College	Library Assistant/Archivist	LIBRARIAN	2014-09-22	Finished - Early

Questions - Written Answers

Host Organisation	As Advertised	Manco Code	Start Date	Status
Saint Eunans College	Library Assistant/Archivist	LIBRARIAN	2014-09-22	Finished - Early
Saint Eunans College	Library Assistant/Archivist	LIBRARIAN	2014-11-17	On Program
Saint Eunans College	Library Assistant/Archivist	LIBRARIAN	2014-09-29	On Program
Saint Eunans College	Library Assistant/Archivist	LIBRARIAN	2014-11-17	On Program
Saint Eunans College	Library Assistant/Archivist	LIBRARIAN	2014-09-29	On Program
Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology	Library Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2012-04-09	Finished - Full
Waterford Adult Education Centre	Library Attendant	LIBRARIAN	2012-09-17	Finished - Full
Waterford City & County Council	Library Attendant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2014-11-10	On Program
Waterford City & County Council	Library Attendant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2014-11-17	On Program
Carlow County Council	Library Catalogue Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2012-11-26	Finished - Full
Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	Library Cataloguer	LIBRARIAN	2012-08-20	Finished - Full
Westmeath County Council	Library Cataloguer (Aidan Heavey Public Library, Athlone)	LIBRARIAN	2011-11-21	Finished - Full
Waterford City Council	Library Cataloguing Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2013-01-07	Finished - Early
Sligo County Council	Library Children's Literature & Activities Programme Assistant - Sligo	GROUP FACILITATOR	2014-10-06	On Program
Sligo County Council	Library Children's Literature & Activities Programme Assistant - Sligo	GROUP FACILITATOR	2014-08-04	On Program

Host Organisation	As Advertised	Manco Code	Start Date	Status
Monaghan County Council	Library Computerisation Project Phase 2 - Backstock Cataloguer	LIBRARIAN	2013-09-16	Finished - Early
Monaghan County Council	Library Computerisation Project Phase 2 - Backstock Cataloguer	LIBRARIAN	2013-09-30	Finished - Full
St Patricks College	Library Conversion/Cataloguing Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2013-11-18	Finished - Full
Carlow County Council	Library Desk Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2013-06-24	Finished - Full
Cavan County Council	Library Information Officer	OFFICER - INFORMATION	2013-06-24	Finished - Early
Leitrim County Council	Library IT Assistant.	I.T.- DATABASE ADMINISTRATOR	2014-04-14	Finished - Early
Carlow County Council	Library Office Manager	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2012-02-13	Finished - Full
St. Leos College (Carlow)	Library Organiser/Researcher	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2013-09-02	Finished - Early
Institute of Technology Tallaght	Library Post-graduate Trainee	LIBRARIAN - PUBLIC SERVICE	2011-09-26	Finished - Early
Carlow County Council	Library Processing Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2014-03-24	Finished - Full
Carlow County Council	Library Project Assistant	CLERK - GENERAL ADMIN	2013-10-28	Finished - Full
Mayo County Council	Library Research Assistant	HISTORIAN	2014-09-22	On Program
Cork Education and Training Board	Library Resource Administrator	LIBRARIAN	2013-12-23	Finished - Full
Cork Education and Training Board	Library Resource Administrator	LIBRARIAN	2013-11-04	Finished - Full
The Honorable Society of Kings Inns	Library Services Officer	LIBRARIAN	2014-02-10	Finished - Early
The Honorable Society of Kings Inns	Library Services Officer	LIBRARIAN	2014-01-27	Finished - Early

Host Organisation	As Advertised	Manco Code	Start Date	Status
The Honorable Society of Kings Inns	Library Services Officer	LIBRARIAN	2014-01-27	Finished - Full
St Vincents Secondary School	Library Supervisors Administrative Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2014-10-27	On Program
St Vincents Secondary School	Library Supervisors Administrative Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2014-10-27	On Program
Ballyfermot College of Further Education	Library Technical Assistant	LIBRARIAN	2014-02-24	Finished - Early

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

186. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will review a domiciliary care allowance application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Wicklow; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5759/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance was received from the person concerned on the 22nd August 2014. This application was not allowed as the child was not considered to satisfy the qualifying conditions for the allowance. A letter issued on the 11th November 2014 outlining the decision of the deciding officer to refuse the allowance.

A review of this decision was requested on 25th November 2014 and additional information on this child's condition/care needs has been supplied. The application together with the new information supplied has been forwarded to another medical assessor for their professional opinion. Once this opinion is received the application will be re-examined by a deciding officer and a revised decision will be made if warranted. The person concerned will be notified of the outcome of this review as soon as it is completed.

Exceptional Needs Payment Applications

187. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will allow an exceptional needs payment in respect of a person (details supplied) to pay for an outstanding deposit for their current accommodation in order to ensure they are not made homeless. [5792/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The application for an exceptional needs payment from the person concerned is currently being considered by a designated person and a decision will issue to the person concerned shortly. *Question No. 188 withdrawn.*

Fuel Allowance Eligibility

189. **Deputy Seán Conlan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a person

who is 70 years of age or older is entitled to fuel allowance regardless of their means; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5835/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The fuel allowance is a payment of €20 to low income households to assist them with their energy costs. The allowance is paid for 26 weeks from October to April, at cost of approximately €195 million in 2015. The payment represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household.

The fuel allowance is a means tested payment, targeted at those who are more vulnerable to energy poverty, including those reliant on social protection payments for longer periods and who are unlikely to have additional resources of their own. Age is not a qualifying factor for this scheme.

Social Welfare Code

190. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding means testing calculations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5894/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): In assessing means for social assistance payments, account is taken of the income and the value of capital and property of the claimant and their spouse/partner.

Social welfare legislation provides that the yearly value of property (including capital) owned but not personally used or enjoyed is assessable for means testing purposes for social assistance payments. Such property includes all monies held in financial institutions or otherwise, the market value of shares and houses and premises owned by a claimant which may or may not be put to commercial use. However, it does not include property such as the family home or, for example, a premises used by the claimant in carrying out a business.

For assessment purposes, the current market value of the property is established as well as the amount of any outstanding mortgages on that property. The balance (market value less outstanding mortgage) is assessed by reference to the following formula in the case of most schemes (including jobseeker's allowance and one parent family payment), as follows:

Capital – Assessment Formula

AMOUNT OF CAPITAL	WEEKLY MEANS ASSESSED
Up to €20,000	Nil
€20,000 - €30,000	€1 per each €1,000
€30,000 - €40,000	€2 per each €1,000
Over €40,000	€4 per each €1,000

For the purposes of the State pension non-contributory and carer's allowance the amounts above are doubled in the case of a couple. The amount disregarded in the case of disability allowance is €50,000 while €5,000 is disregarded in the case of supplementary welfare allowance.

The assessment formula is not designed to reflect interest or annuity rates available to investors and no account is taken of interest or dividend payments received in the means assessment.

Similarly, the formula does not reflect rental or other income derived from the ownership of property.

The assessment formula reflects the fact that there is an expectation that persons with reasonable amounts of capital and property are in a position to use that capital or to realise the value of property to support themselves without having to rely solely on a means tested welfare payment.

Any changes to the current arrangements would have to be considered in a Budgetary context.

Questions Nos. 191 and 192 withdrawn.

Social Insurance

193. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on further supports for self-employed persons who have lost their business and become unemployed; if an opt-in higher rate of pay related social insurance for self-employed persons will be considered so as to allow greater social welfare protection in the event the business fails; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5945/15]

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

Self-employed workers who have lost their business and become unemployed may access social welfare supports by establishing eligibility to assistance-based payments such as jobseeker's allowance. In the case of jobseeker's allowance they can apply for the means-tested jobseeker's allowance if their business ceases or if they are on low income as a result of a downturn in demand for their services. As in the case of a non-self-employed claimant for jobseeker's allowance, the means of husband/wife, civil partner or co-habitant will be taken into account in deciding on entitlement to a payment.

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

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

In September 2013, I published the report of the Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare

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

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

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

In general the current system of social insurance operates on a mandatory basis and therefore contributors pay PRSI contributions at the rate appropriate to their PRSI class. Allowing people a facility to opt in or opt out at their own discretion could lead to the selection of bad risks. The whole principle of social insurance is social solidarity where everybody pays in and, if needed, cover is available.

Pensions Council

194. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if the newly established Pensions Council will be monitoring the implementation of the recommendations in the report on pension charges 2012; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5971/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I recently established the Pensions Council to help strengthen the pensions environment and give consumers greater input into pension policy. The function of the Pensions Council is to advise the Minister for Social Protection on matters of relevance to pensions, with a particular focus on policies to support the sustainability and adequacy of pension provision. It will ensure that the system has a far stronger consumer focus. Mr Jim Murray, former Director of the European Consumers Organisation (BEUC), who has a notable record as a consumer rights advocate, will chair the Pensions Council.

The work of the Pensions Council will be advanced through research on pensions policy development, either in terms of significant reports on the overall direction of pension policy, or more discrete pieces of work examining particular subject areas. Whilst the Pensions Council's inaugural meeting has yet to take place, I have asked that the matter of pensions charges be a priority item for consideration. I have also asked that the pension gender gap and the gender-proofing of the pensions reform programme be considered.

Questions Nos. 195 and 196 answered with Question No. 185.

Household Benefits Scheme

197. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her plans to re-introduce a type of payment to assist persons (details supplied) who are living in fear

in their communities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5989/15]

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.

The decision to discontinue the telephone allowance provided annual savings of €48 million and meant that the Department was able to retain the other elements of the household benefits package such as the electricity and gas allowance and the television licence. These are valuable supports for recipients. The fuel allowance scheme and the free travel pass were also protected for older people and people with disabilities. As the Deputy is aware, in Budget 2015, we partially restored the Christmas Bonus and increased the living alone allowance. In these circumstances, I have no plans to restore the telephone allowance, which would cost in the region of €48 million per year. Any decision to increase the household benefits package would have budgetary consequences and would have to be considered in the context of budget negotiations.

The Department of Environment, Community and Local Government operates the seniors alert scheme which provides grant support for the supply of equipment such as personal alarms, smoke detectors and security lighting to enable older people without sufficient means to continue to live securely in their homes. Funding for this scheme will continue in 2015.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

198. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a carer's allowance application will be finalised in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6007/15]

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

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

Disability Allowance Appeals

199. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a disability allowance appeal will be finalised in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary. [6008/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeal from the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer who has decided to convene an oral hearing in this case.

Every effort will be made to hear the case as quickly as possible and the person concerned will be informed when arrangements for the oral hearing have been made.

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.

State Pensions Payments

200. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the measures her Department are putting in place, with respect to the implementation of the increase in the statutory retirement age, as it pertains to current contracts issued to workers, whereby the retirement age is listed as 65 years of age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6010/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): In relation to the issue of retirement age, I would like to clarify that there is no statutory compulsory retirement age for employees in Ireland. The setting of retirement age is a matter for agreement within the employer/employee relationship and the contract of employment.

In relation to the age at which a State pension may be payable, the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011 provides that State pension age will be increased gradually to 68 years to make the pension system sustainable in the context of ever increasing life expectancy. This began in January 2014 with the abolition of the State pension (transition), thereby standardising State pension age for all at 66 years. State pension age will increase further to 67 in 2021 and 68 in 2028.

All short term social welfare schemes are payable to age 66. The main social welfare payment available to those who leave employment before pension age is jobseeker's benefit. Persons aged between 65 and 66 years who qualify for a jobseeker's benefit are generally entitled to receive payment up to the date on which they reach pensionable age (66 years).

I was happy to be able to introduce new arrangements in Budget 2014 for older jobseekers, i.e., those aged 62 and over who have left work before reaching the State pension age of 66 and who wish to claim a jobseeker's payment. With effect from 1 January 2014, fully unemployed jobseekers aged 62 or over will be placed on yearly signing and will be given the option of transferring to EFT payments. Furthermore, they will not be subject to mandatory activation measures or activation-related sanctions but may avail of employment support.

Social welfare supports will continue to be available to those who need it most and where a person fails to meet the qualifying conditions of an insurance based scheme, a means tested assistance payment may be available provided they satisfy the qualifying conditions.

Rent Supplement Scheme Payments

201. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will support a matter (details supplied) regarding rent increases; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6024/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Rents Unit which administers the claim for rent supplement for the person concerned received a letter from him on 4 February 2015, which stated that his rent has increased from €880.00 per calendar month to €1280.00 per calendar month. This rent is above the maximum rent rate of €950.00 per calendar month for his family circumstance. The person concerned has been advised to contact the National Housing Charity, Threshold, under the Interim Tenancy Sustainment Protocol (ITSP). The purpose of the ITSP, which involves this Department, the 4 Dublin Local Authorities and Threshold, is to ensure a speedy intervention preventing families who are in receipt of rent supplement from losing their tenancies and becoming homeless.

Following his engagement with Threshold, it will submit a recommendation to this Depart-

ment regarding the rent supplement claim for the person concerned. This may involve a temporary uplift in the his rate of payment for a period of 13 weeks while the Local Authority and Threshold are considering alternative housing options for his family. Following this his claim would be further reviewed.

In the meantime payments of rent supplement for the person concerned will continue at the present rate pending the Department receiving contact from Threshold.

Question No. 202 answered with Question No. 185.

Employment Support Services

203. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on a technical assessment and training to avail of an incentive scheme (details supplied); if consideration will be given to reverting to the terms of the old scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6057/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): A Departmental review of employment support schemes made a range of recommendations, including the need for a rationalisation of current schemes to support jobseekers. The schemes reviewed included the training employment support grant (TESG) and the technical assistance and training scheme (TATS). Further work undertaken took account of developments in the supports available to jobseekers and changes in the services offered by Solas and the newly created Education and Training Boards.

Two new schemes of supports for jobseekers have been introduced in recent months, replacing the above mentioned schemes. A new enterprise support grant has been put in place to offer specific supports to jobseekers starting their own business and who have been approved for income support under the back to work enterprise allowance scheme. A training support grant (TSG) has also been developed to support the Department's activation objectives.

Like the former TESG, the new TSG is designed to fund quick access to short-term training where this cannot be provided by a state provider within a reasonable time or where an intervention is identified that can support individual jobseekers to access work opportunities. Like the old scheme, the TSG is not designed specifically to provide general training for jobseekers. Access to the new scheme is via the Department's case officers who are tasked with identifying the most support intervention for jobseekers, particularly where a job opportunity has been identified.

The maximum fund available to jobseekers under the scheme is €500 p.a. TSG is designed to be a more activation focused grant than TESG. The training sought by the jobseeker must form part of the agreed personal progression or action plan to enter/re-enter the labour market.

The operational guidelines for the scheme were drawn up to ensure a consistent approach nationally and set out clearly defined criteria for eligibility. As with all new schemes, the Department will closely monitor implementation and the guidelines will be reviewed over time, if this is found to be necessary.

Employment Support Services

204. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the specific supports available to unemployed taxi drivers who wish to return to the taxi indus-

try. [6088/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): A range of supports are available to jobseekers from the Department. A jobseeker who is available for and genuinely seeking work can apply for the contribution-based jobseeker's benefit or the means-tested jobseeker's allowance, depending on their previous employment history. While the Department does not provide any specific supports for those wishing to join or return to the taxi industry, a jobseeker may avail of any of the following supports to aid their return to employment/self-employment:

Information on accessing schemes and supports for jobseekers is available from DSP Intreo centres with further information available on the Department's website www.welfare.ie.

Question No. 205 withdrawn.

Community Employment Schemes Operation

206. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on extending the length of a community employment scheme in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6114/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): It is the policy of the Department that a person under 55 years of age can only participate on a Community Employment (CE) scheme for a maximum of 3 years.

The person concerned commenced on the CE scheme on 12th September, 2011 and was due to finish on 5th September 2014. Her contract was extended by 11 weeks at the request of the scheme supervisor to allow her to access Level 5 FETAC training. A further request was granted in November 2014 to extend her contract by 7 weeks to allow the position to be advertised and filled.

This position has been advertised and will be filled by a suitable eligible candidate.

Officers from my department will continue to work with the person concerned in identifying other suitable employment and training options for her.

Question No. 207 answered with Question No. 169.

Community Services Programme

208. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when the community services programme will be re-opened to new applications; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6156/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): The community services programme (CSP) is designed to address gaps in the delivery of key local services, to tackle disadvantage and to ensure that community facilities are utilised. It provides valuable resourcing for service delivery undertaken by not-for-profit companies and cooperatives in communities around the country. Some 2,800 people are supported in employment by the programme across approximately 400 not-for-profit companies and co-operatives. Funding of €46m has been provided for the programme in 2015 which will maintain the current level of activity.

Service providers must operate community or social enterprises that are able to deliver tangible services and are capable of generating non-public revenues from their operations by way of charging fees, sales and/or fundraising. The programme is not intended to represent full funding for any operation. Rather, funding is provided on the basis of a contribution to the cost of full-time staffing positions to support the delivery of the service and can include management and non-management elements.

Given the restrictions on resources, the Department has been unable to make an open call for new proposals to the programme for a number of years. However, from time to time and as resources allow, the Department does process new applications received from organisations that have expressed an interest in and are considered eligible under the programme. Any not-for-profit company wishing to express an interest to be considered for the programme can send an expression of interest and its proposals to the Department by email to cspinfo@welfare.ie.

Tax Forms

209. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding a P45 in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5933/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that in view of the passage of time since the employment concerned, Revenue is not in a position to readily confirm any of the relevant details. However, archive records will be examined and Revenue will be in direct contact with the person concerned with the outcome of that examination as soon as possible.

Illicit Trade in Tobacco

210. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the health issues and legal issues arising from the sale of illegal cigarettes in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6027/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that they are very conscious of the threat that the illegal importation of cigarettes poses to the Exchequer and to legitimate business and they have adopted a comprehensive strategy to tackle the problem throughout the country, including Co Louth. Intensified targeting, in co-operation with other law enforcement agencies on both sides of the border, of enforcement action against suspected cigarette smuggling operations has already yielded significant results.

A total of 44 cigarette seizures in County Louth in 2014 yielded 33,350,192 illicit cigarettes. Drogheda market is closely monitored and 5 of the seizures in Co Louth in 2014 were made at that market, yielding 5,360 cigarettes and 1.7 kgs of illicit tobacco.

In line with best practice in tax and customs administration worldwide, Revenue regards the development of information and intelligence as critical to the detection of evasion and smuggling, including cigarette smuggling. Revenue will maintain its approach of seizing illicit cigarettes and, where possible, prosecuting those who do not comply with the legislation in relation to the illegal importation of cigarettes. In this regard, if the Deputy has further intelligence which would be helpful, the Revenue Commissioners would welcome it.

The Commissioners appreciate the efforts made by the person (details supplied) in report-

ing his concerns about illicit cigarettes on sale at Drogheda market and regret that he had some difficulty in locating a contact point for his call. The Commissioners operate a confidential Freephone for Drug and Tobacco Smuggling. This dedicated telephone number (1800 295 295) is available on a 24/7 basis to members of the public who wish to pass on information or suspicions about illicit activity. This number is promoted on the homepage of the Revenue website at www.revenue.ie under Drugs and Tobacco Smuggling Hotline. It is also available in the current telephone directory where it is the first listed under “Frequently Used Numbers” in the Revenue part of the State Directory pages. In addition, a direct contact number for Revenue’s anti evasion teams in the Border Midland West Region (in which Co Louth is situated) may be found on the Revenue website under the heading “Contact Details, Special Compliance District, Revenue Anti- Evasion Team North East”, telephone number 042 9331606 or by email to scdnortheast@revenue.ie. I am assured by the Revenue Commissioners that calls to both the Illegal Cigarettes Hotline and the Anti Evasion Team are monitored at all times.

Mortgage Lending

211. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Finance his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding the Central Bank of Ireland restrictions on mortgage lending; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6111/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank of Ireland is the authority for the formulation of macro prudential regulations in respect of regulated financial service providers. In that regard, the Central Bank has now announced the introduction of new regulations which will apply proportionate limits to mortgage lending by such institutions in the Irish market. The key objective of these regulations is to increase the resilience of the banking and household sectors to the property market and to reduce the risk of bank credit and house price spirals from developing in the future. However, it should be noted that there are some exemptions to the rules in certain circumstances. For example, the principal home loan to value (LTV) ratio restriction will not apply to a borrower in negative equity who wishes to obtain a mortgage for a new home. Additionally, in the case of principal dwelling loans, lenders can exceed the LTV threshold in respect of up to 15% of loans advanced for such purposes and can exceed the loan to income ratio in respect of up to 20% of such loans. These macro prudential measures are supplementary to individual banks’ credit policies and are not designed as a substitute for lenders’ responsibilities to assess affordability and lend prudently on a case-by-case basis.

Job Initiatives

212. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance his views that to combat unemployment, initiatives should be taken to encourage self-employed persons and start-up business to take on further employees, for example, by a reduction in the early-stage business rates of 12.5% PRSI, as well as an overhaul of the tax system, which sees a sole trader who earns €18,000 per annum paying considerably more income tax than a person who is employed on the same salary; and his further views on possible changes that will prove beneficial to all parties and encourage employment. [6140/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy will be aware that it is the Government’s view that a fair, efficient and competitive income tax system is essential for economic growth and job creation.

While it is the case that some self-employed people can pay more tax than a PAYE worker on similar incomes, it is important to understand that PAYE workers and the self-employed are taxed in different ways to reflect their differing circumstances.

Employees in the PAYE system benefit from a PAYE income tax credit worth €1,650 per annum, to which the self-assessed are not entitled. The PAYE allowance, as it was then, was introduced in 1980 to improve the tax progression of PAYE taxpayers and to take account of the fact that the self-employed generally then had the advantage of paying tax on a preceding year basis. The argument was also made at the time that the general scheme of allowances for expenses discriminated against employees and in favour of other taxpayers.

There have been some changes since 1980. For example, the self-employed now pay tax on a current year basis. In addition, the PAYE allowance has become a tax credit. However, there are other aspects to how the self-assessed are taxed which can be beneficial to them. For instance, there are significant timing benefits, depending on the accounting period used by the taxpayer, which are available to the self-assessed but which are not available to PAYE workers. In addition, the expenses regime for self-assessed taxpayers remains somewhat more liberal than that afforded to employees and therefore the self-employed can actually pay less tax when compared to a PAYE worker on the same income.

It is important to note that the changes to the Income Tax system introduced in Budget 2015 will benefit all those who pay income tax and or USC equally, regardless of whether they are PAYE or self-assessed taxpayers.

As regards PRSI, I assume the Deputy is referring to the 10.75% rate of employers PRSI, which is payable once an employee's income exceeds €356 per week. I would point out that a lower rate of employer PRSI of 8.5% applies where weekly income is €356 or lower. These rates of employer social insurance contributions are very low when compared internationally.

As regards the encouragement of employment by the self-employed and start-up businesses, I would draw the Deputy's attention to the JobsPlus scheme operated by the Department of Social Protection. This scheme provides cash grants to employers where they employ an individual who is classified as being long-term unemployed. The Government has made additional funds available for this scheme for 2015.

European Central Bank

213. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report to Dáil Éireann on the proposed quantitative easing operation by the European Central Bank, including the inflation rate targets and the method or risk-sharing between the European Central Bank and the Irish Central Bank; and the reason risks in the European Central Bank operation are not shared equally shared by the Irish Central Bank and other eurozone Central Banks. [5561/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Inflation in the euro area has been below levels consistent with price stability for some time and, in fact, moved into negative territory in December and continued this downward trend in January. The fall in inflation combined with the fact that inflationary expectations have begun to drift downwards poses a risk to price stability.

As a result, and with policy rates effectively at zero per cent, the ECB announced an expanded asset purchase programme on January 22nd to include bonds issued by euro area central governments, agencies and European institutions. Under this expanded programme, the combined monthly purchases of public and private sector debt securities will amount to €60 billion.

These monthly purchases are intended to be carried out from March 2015 until end-September 2016 and will, in any case, be conducted until inflation moves onto a path consistent with price stability. Price stability in the euro area, in turn, has been defined as annual inflation of close to but below 2 per cent (inflation being measured by the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices).

Decisions on and the implementation of monetary policy in the euro area are entirely a matter for the Governing Council of the ECB, which is independent in these matters. I note, however, that there is some mutualisation: the Governing Council decided that 20 per cent of the additional asset purchases under the programme will be subject to risk sharing. Moreover, the scale of the asset purchase programme is rightly seen as being the more important issue, as well as the fact that it is potentially open-ended.

Vehicle Registration Data

214. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide details, in tabular form and by county and year, of the total number of new vehicles registered during the month of January in each of the following years, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5612/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the total number of new vehicles registered for Vehicle Registration Tax by county during the month of January in the years 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 is shown in the table.

January	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Registrations					
Carlow	307	345	269	396	465
Cavan	295	299	224	319	440
Clare	573	610	479	631	881
Cork	3,056	3,219	2,679	3,547	4,929
Donegal	540	593	527	690	874
Dublin	8,027	7,977	6,871	8,677	12,071
Galway	1,028	1,089	840	1,122	1,506
Kerry	566	634	481	650	848
Kildare	1,022	1,050	886	1,279	1,583
Kilkenny	562	558	539	651	815
Laois	333	388	315	395	473
Leitrim	126	122	83	128	159
Limerick	961	987	812	1,065	1,409
Longford	171	176	122	148	193
Louth	623	590	435	600	883
Mayo	461	534	452	581	734
Meath	756	867	596	852	1,186
Monaghan	253	264	195	278	356
Offaly	349	404	284	425	557
Roscommon	245	321	219	296	380
Sligo	263	309	208	287	316
Tipperary	879	905	714	990	1,180

January	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Registrations					
Waterford	669	589	482	731	901
Westmeath	400	415	380	461	628
Wexford	713	680	601	857	1,009
Wicklow	531	551	428	618	820
TOTAL	23,709	24,476	20,121	26,674	35,596

Pension Provisions

215. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Finance the reasons for the changes to the standard fund threshold regime; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5630/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I assume the Deputy is referring to the significant changes announced in Budget 2014 and provided for in Finance (No 2) Act 2013 to the maximum allowable pension fund at retirement for tax purposes (the Standard Fund Threshold SFT).

The main changes made can be summarised as follows:

As occurred on the occasion of the introduction of the SFT regime in 2005, and again when the value of the SFT limit was reduced to €2.3m in 2010, the legislation contained in Finance (No 2) Act 2013 provides for an individual who has pension rights on 1 January 2014 in excess of the new lower SFT limit of €2m, to claim a Personal Fund Threshold (PFT) from Revenue in order to protect or grandfather the value of those rights on that date. This is subject to a maximum PFT of €2.3m, and individuals with PFTs from 2005 or 2010 retain those PFTs.

The primary purpose of the changes made to the SFT regime is to further restrict the capacity of higher earners to fund or accrue large pensions through tax-subsidised sources in line with the commitment made in the Government programme for National Recovery 2011-2016. In addition, the introduction of higher age-related factors to value DB pension entitlements significantly improves the equity of the SFT regime as between DB and defined contribution (DC) pension arrangements and between those who retire at younger ages and those who retire later in life.

The SFT regime addresses the problem of pension overfunding and excessive pension accrual by dealing with it at the point of pension drawdown in retirement rather than by applying restrictions to pension savings or accrual upfront. The regime achieves this by imposing a significant tax charge on the value of retirement benefits above set limits (the SFT or PFT, as appropriate) when they are drawn down. In this way it acts to discourage the building up of large pension funds in the first place or unwinds the tax advantage of such overfunding by clawing back, through the tax charge, the tax relief granted.

In Finance Act 2014, I introduced further amendments to the SFT regime to deal with issues arising in cases involving Pension Adjustment Orders (PAOs) the purpose of which is to provide for a more equitable sharing of the chargeable excess tax between the parties to PAOs in affected cases where the SFT or PFT, as appropriate, is exceeded.

Debt Conference

216. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to support a Euro-

pean debt conference; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5635/15]

221. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Finance if he will request the European Union to chair a European debt conference in Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5753/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 216 and 221 together.

My view is that when countries encounter difficulties, a process of negotiation is always better than one of conflict.

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

VAT Rate Application

217. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of revenue is collected from VAT on public service obligation levies in energy bills; and if it is possible to remove this VAT. [5709/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the information furnished on VAT returns does not require the yield from particular activities or sectors of trade to be identified. The amount of VAT collected in respect of public service obligation levies cannot be identified in the overall yield of VAT.

I am further advised by the Revenue Commissioners that VAT is an EU-wide tax and Irish VAT law must comply with the EU VAT Directives. Article 78 of EU Council Directive 2006/112/EC provides that the taxable amount shall include “taxes, duties, levies and charges, excluding the VAT itself”. This is transposed in section 37(1) of the Value-Added Tax Consolidation Act 2010 which provides that the amount on which Value-Added Tax is chargeable is the total consideration receivable by the supplier, “including all taxes, commissions, costs and charges whatsoever” but not including the Value-Added Tax itself. Accordingly, it is not possible to change Irish VAT law to exclude the public service obligation levies from the application of VAT.

Property Tax Exemptions

218. **Deputy Helen McEntee** asked the Minister for Finance if he will amend the criteria for those seeking an exemption from the property tax due to pyrite in their homes (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5727/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The exemption from Local Property Tax (LPT) based on “significant pyritic damage” was comprehensively dealt with in a number of Parliamentary Questions last year, including Questions no. 217 (8212/14) on 18/2/14, no. 121 (19698/14) on 30/4/14, no. 43 (26462/14) on 19/6/14, no. 14 (37016/14) on 2/10/14 and no. 38 (41718/14) on 5/11/2014.

Section 10A of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) provides for a temporary exemption of at least three consecutive years from the charge to Local Property Tax for residential properties that have been certified under Regulations made by the Minister for the

Environment, Community and Local Government (S.I. No. 147 of 2013) as having “significant pyritic damage”. These Regulations describe the methodology that must be used when a property is being assessed for pyrite damage.

Revenue has an obligation to act in accordance with section 10A of the LPT legislation which requires that an LPT exemption can only apply where the residential property has been assessed and a certificate confirming “significant pyritic damage” has been issued.

However, officials of my Department, together with officials of the Department of Environment, Community & Local Government, are examining the alternatives other than testing that may be available in order to confirm entitlement to an LPT exemption.

My officials continue to examine this issue and how it can be resolved satisfactorily. That may necessitate a change in the relevant provisions of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) and/or the Finance (Local Property Tax) (Pyrite Exemption) Regulations. When I have made my decision I will communicate it to the Deputy immediately. If it is the case that legislative change is required, I will examine with the Revenue Commissioners the possibilities for applying any changes on an administrative basis, in advance of such legislative changes.

I am conscious that the issue to which the Deputy refers needs to be addressed. I want to reassure her, and homeowners affected, that the situation is receiving attention.

Universal Social Charge Application

219. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Finance if a person (details supplied) in County Limerick is being charged universal social charge at a reduced rate. [5750/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been advised by the Revenue Commissioners that details of the 2015 tax credits and of the reduced rates of Universal Social Charge payable were issued to the person’s pension provider in December 2014.

Mortgage Lending

220. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for Finance when he will introduce the necessary regulations to implement the recent guidelines for mortgage lending issued by the Central Bank of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5752/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the Governor of the Central Bank of Ireland has signed the macro prudential regulations on residential mortgage lending. The signed regulations were received by my Department yesterday (9 February) and will, as soon as possible, be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Question No. 221 answered with Question No. 216.

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland

222. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Finance when the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland will be fully operational; the total amount of funds available from the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland; the retail banks it will have a relationship

with; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5789/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) will be operational in Q1 2015 and this is a key deliverable as detailed in the Government's Action Plan for Jobs 2015.

I incorporated the SBCI in September 2014 and since then the SBCI has made considerable progress in building relations with lending partners and in constructing the complex operational capability required to bring products to market. These include establishing operational capability with funders and lending partners, building internal systems and business processes, and establishing a team to safely and effectively manage the funding provided on behalf of the State. In that regard, it is worth pointing out that both the CEO of KfW and the President of the European Investment Bank have complimented the Government's work on the establishment of the SBCI noting that the project from concept to establishment was achieved much more promptly than similar initiatives in other countries.

Both Bank of Ireland and Allied Irish Banks Plc. are the first SBCI's lending partners. The SBCI will leverage these banks' extensive distribution networks to reach as many prospective SME borrowers as possible. The SBCI is also working with other traditional banks as well as non-bank providers of finance such as providers of invoice discounting, leasing and asset based finance to broaden the funding options available to the SME sector through the availability of SBCI monies.

The SBCI is funded to the value of €800m, of which €150m is from KfW, €400m from the European Investment Bank and €250m sourced from the National Pension Reserve Fund, which has since become the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund - [ISIF]. The ISIF funds are broken down further into a repayable loan from the ISIF of €240m and an equity investment in the name of the Minister for Finance to the value of €10m. After the initial period of operations, the SBCI in conjunction with its funders, will review its funding requirements for its further development.

The SBCI drew down €200m of its funding from the European Investment Bank during December 2014 so that funds could be borrowed by its lending partners to be distributed to SMEs.

The SBCI is preparing for a nationwide launch of its products shortly. The Government's aim for the SBCI is to change the range and profile of SME finance providers in Ireland. The SBCI are achieving this by working with existing and new providers to develop enhanced products and by supporting new entrants to the SME lending market.

VAT Exemptions

223. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding musicians; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5794/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that a business providing services, including a musician, is obliged to register for VAT only where the annual turnover of that business exceeds €37,500. In instances where the annual turnover of a business is less than that, there is no obligation to register for VAT.

I am further informed that given the wide variety of persons and entities (including musical bands) that are within the 'performing arts' category of trade descriptions, it is not possible to identify the number of musical bands that are registered for VAT.

If the Deputy has information relating to specific individuals or groups in the music industry who are operating within the shadow economy, he may pass this directly to Revenue. Revenue has provided a specific template on its website at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/business/shadow-economy/index.html> which facilitates anyone who wishes to report instances of shadow economy activity.

European Central Bank Interest Rates

224. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he is taking to compel the banks and financial institutions to pass on European Central Bank interest rate cuts to customers with standard variable rate mortgages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5814/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Firstly, I must confirm to the Deputy that the lending institutions in Ireland - including those in which the State has a shareholding - are independent commercial entities. I have no statutory role in relation to regulated financial institutions passing on the European Central Bank interest rate change or in relation to the mortgage interest rates charged. It is a commercial matter for each institution concerned.

The Central Bank has responsibility for the regulation and supervision of financial institutions in terms of consumer protection and prudential requirements and for ensuring ongoing compliance with applicable statutory obligations. The Central Bank has no statutory role in the setting of interest rates by financial institutions, apart from the interest rate cap imposed on the credit union sector in accordance with the provisions of the Credit Union Act, 1997 and the requirement to be notified of penalty or surcharge interest imposed in respect of arrears.

The mortgage interest rates that financial institutions operating in Ireland charge to customers are determined as a result of a commercial decision by the institutions concerned. This interest rate is determined taking into account a broad range of factors including European Central Bank base rates, deposit rates, market funding costs, the competitive environment and an institution's overall funding.

However, as part of the Central Bank's work on mortgage arrears, lenders were asked to consider all avenues to help customers in arrears, including interest rate reductions.

Tax Code

225. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the effect the reduction in the threshold for capital acquisitions tax (details supplied) is having on persons' lives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5815/15]

227. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to change the threshold for the capital acquisitions tax (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5829/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 225 and 227 together.

Capital Acquisitions Tax (CAT) is the overall title for both Gift and Inheritance Tax. The tax is charged on the amount gifted to, or inherited by, the beneficiary of the gift or inheritance.

For the purposes of CAT, the relationship between the person who provides the gift or in-

heritance (i.e. the disponer) and the person who receives the gift or inheritance (i.e. the beneficiary), determines the maximum life-time tax-free threshold known as the “Group threshold” below which gift or inheritance tax does not arise.

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

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

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

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

Where a person receives gifts or inheritances in excess of their relevant tax free threshold, CAT at a rate of 33% applies on the excess over the tax free threshold. It should also be noted that the thresholds apply on an individual basis so that, for example, where there are two children the current Group A threshold of €225,000 applies individually to each child in respect of gifts and inheritances from their parents.

The Group thresholds have been reduced over recent years, as asset prices have fallen, in order to maintain the yield from capital taxes as part of the effort to restore the public finances. Taxes on capital are less harmful from an economic perspective than taxes on employment.

The property market continues to improve with positive developments which had been restricted to the Dublin area now manifesting in other areas of the country though not to the same extent in terms of price rises. I recognise, of course, that there are supply issues in certain areas of the Dublin property market.

The Group tax-free thresholds are kept under review, in the same way as other relevant tax provisions, and in this regard I will bear the Deputy’s comments and concerns in mind for the future.

In the details supplied with his first question, the Deputy refers to a constituent who is concerned about the CAT implications arising from being bequeathed the family home, in which I understand from the details that the constituent still resides. I would point out to the Deputy that Section 86 of the Capital Acquisitions Tax Consolidation Act 2003 provides for a specific exemption from CAT in respect of a gift or inheritance of a dwelling house.

This exemption was introduced to cater for persons who had been living in the disponer’s house for a substantial period prior to the gift or inheritance and who might otherwise be faced with having to sell the house (their home) to pay the CAT liability. This would apply in particular to children who continued to reside with their parents into their old age very often to care for them. The following are the main conditions to be satisfied in order to benefit from the dwelling house CAT exemption:

- The recipient must have occupied the dwelling house continuously as his or her only or main residence for a period of three years prior to the date of the gift or inheritance
- The recipient must not, at the date of the gift or inheritance, be beneficially entitled to any other dwelling house or have an interest in any other dwelling house

- The recipient must continue to occupy the dwelling house for a period of six years commencing on the date of the gift or inheritance, except where the recipient was aged 55 years at that date or dies in this period.

The Deputy's constituent may wish to contact her local Revenue Office if she needs to clarify any issue in relation to this exemption.

Tax Credits

226. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance why a person (details supplied) in County Dublin was told that their full tax credits would be restored, but subsequent to that, their credits were actually reduced, as was initially indicated. [5820/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that a certificate of tax credits issued to the person concerned on 28 January 2015, which incorrectly included a deduction from the tax credits entitlement. This error was immediately rectified and a new certificate issued on 30 January 2015 restoring the person's full entitlement of tax credits. The person concerned has been in direct contact with Revenue and the position has been explained to him.

Question No. 227 answered with Question No. 225.

National Debt

228. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide, in tabular form, the amount of the national debt outstanding at the end of each year from 1970 to 2014; the amount of additional borrowing; the amount of debt repaid; the interest charged on the debt in respect of each year; the gross domestic product for each year; the percentage of debt to gross domestic product outstanding at the end of each of year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5896/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The data for 36 of the 45 years requested by the Deputy is included in the table following. Unfortunately, it was not possible to collate all the information required for this answer in the time allowed.

Audited data for 2014 will not be available until after the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General completes the audit of the public finances and the Finance Accounts are published later this year. Provisional data is available from the end 2014 Exchequer Statement, which is published on my Department's website. The Budget 2015 forecast GDP for 2014 was €183,800 million. I will provide the Deputy with the remaining data in writing shortly.

Year	National Debt €m	Interest €m	Amount Borrowed €m	Amount Repaid €m	GDP €m	Debt to GDP %
1978	€6,561	€459	€3,553	€2,441	€9,316	70.42%
1979	€8,304	€571	€5,790	€4,411	€11,036	75.24%
1980	€10,026	€740	€6,549	€4,878	€13,097	76.55%
1981	€12,945	€1,010	€9,404	€7,089	€15,892	81.46%
1982	€14,817	€1,451	€13,261	€10,643	€18,853	78.59%
1983	€18,274	€1,689	€12,000	€9,612	€20,780	87.94%
1984	€21,358	€1,988	€15,761	€13,035	€23,013	92.81%

Year	National Debt €m	Interest €m	Amount Borrowed €m	Amount Repaid €m	GDP €m	Debt to GDP %
1985	€23,492	€2,320	€18,776	€15,551	€24,998	93.98%
1986	€27,440	€2,308	€17,084	€13,794	€26,625	103.06%
1987	€30,085	€2,457	€16,780	€13,955	€28,451	105.74%
1988	€31,250	€2,491	€19,384	€17,829	€30,389	102.83%
1989	€31,525	€2,484	€13,863	€12,692	€33,706	93.53%
1990	€31,849	€2,676	€15,066	€14,381	€36,541	87.16%
1991	€32,223	€2,722	€18,677	€17,762	€38,018	84.76%
1992	€33,450	€2,673	€26,803	€26,512	€40,489	82.61%
1993	€36,006	€2,636	€41,580	€39,757	€43,605	82.57%
1994	€37,111	€2,653	€46,071	€46,078	€46,864	79.19%
1995	€38,358	€2,656	€50,054	€49,163	€54,704	70.12%
1996	€37,980	€2,811	€120,978	€120,535	€60,072	63.22%
1997	€38,967	€3,136	€135,851	€135,325	€69,232	56.28%
1998	€37,509	€2,662	€127,244	€127,755	€80,084	46.84%
1999	€39,849	€2,351	€176,793	€178,383	€92,491	43.08%
2000	€36,511	€2,069	€85,336	€88,423	€107,799	33.87%
2001	€36,183	€1,875	€89,899	€90,619	€121,199	29.85%
2002	€36,361	€1,660	€145,411	€145,591	€135,179	26.90%
2003	€37,610	€1,764	€155,999	€154,825	€144,840	25.97%
2004	€37,846	€1,677	€216,213	€215,908	€155,470	24.34%
2005	€38,182	€1,721	€285,245	€284,625	€169,153	22.57%
2006	€35,917	€1,860	€234,647	€235,507	€183,759	19.55%
2007	€37,560	€1,619	€155,822	€153,304	€196,749	19.09%
2008	€50,398	€1,544	€214,454	€184,167	€186,870	26.97%
2009	€75,152	€2,535	€278,170	€253,773	€168,114	44.70%
2010	€93,445	€3,492	€172,614	€160,122	€164,928	56.66%
2011	€119,082	€4,548	€101,199	€74,153	€171,042	69.62%
2012	€137,632	€5,679	€268,580	€248,447	€172,755	79.67%
2013	€173,947	€7,324	€157,432	€121,144	€174,791	99.52%

From 1995 to 2013, GDP is calculated on an ESA 2010 basis.

Data prior to 2000 has been converted to euro.

The Deputy may wish to note that much of the data for recent years and other related data are available on my Department's website in the Budget and Economic Statistics publication and the Annual Finance Accounts.

Property Tax

229. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding a property tax issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5917/15]

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

sioners that Section 11 of the Finance Local Property Tax Act 2012 (as amended) sets out the rules for determining the person who is liable for the payment of Local Property Tax (LPT) in relation to a property.

Generally, the owner of the property, with the right of immediate possession, is deemed the person liable for LPT. However if a person, other than the owner, has an exclusive right of residence in a property, the Act provides that that person is the liable person.

The specific case to which the Deputy refers was previously dealt with in Revenue in 2014, when correspondence was received from the owner of the property seeking clarification regarding the liable person. The owner was advised at that time that he is not liable for LPT in this instance. Revenue's records were adjusted accordingly and the occupier, as the liable person, received a payment reminder for LPT for 2015. Following receipt of the Deputy's Question, direct contact was made by the office of the Collector-General with the occupier of the property, and I am advised that she now understands and accepts that she is the person liable for LPT in respect of the property.

Tax Code

230. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance the reason self-employed persons are paying substantially more income tax than employees (details supplied); his plans to make changes to the income tax system to make it fairer for the self-employed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5924/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): A fair, efficient and competitive income tax system is essential for economic growth and job creation. While the figures quoted by the Deputy are accurate, it is important to understand that PAYE workers and the self-employed are taxed in different ways to reflect their differing circumstances.

As the Deputy is aware, employees in the PAYE system benefit from a PAYE income tax credit worth €1,650 per annum, to which the self-assessed are not entitled. The PAYE allowance, as it was then, was introduced in 1980 to improve the tax progression of PAYE taxpayers and to take account of the fact that the self-employed generally then had the advantage of paying tax on a preceding year basis. The argument was also made at the time that the general scheme of allowances for expenses discriminated against employees and in favour of other taxpayers.

There have been some changes since 1980. For example, the self-employed now pay tax on a current year basis. In addition, the PAYE allowance has become a tax credit. However, there are other aspects to how the self-assessed are taxed which can be beneficial to them. For instance, there are significant timing benefits, depending on the accounting period used by the taxpayer, which are available to the self-assessed but which are not available to PAYE workers. In addition, the expenses regime for self-assessed taxpayers remains somewhat more liberal than that afforded to employees and therefore the self-employed can actually pay less tax when compared to a PAYE worker on the same income.

It is true that employees are exempt from the charge to PRSI if their income does not exceed €18,304. However, once PAYE income exceeds this threshold they are liable to pay PRSI on the full amount at 4%, thus equalising the treatment of personal PRSI contributions, on all of the income, for PAYE and self-assessed workers on incomes above that level.

In the case of employees, their employers are required to pay a PRSI charge in respect of each employee. Thus the contribution made to the Social Insurance Fund in respect of employees is usually higher than that made by a self-assessed individual. For instance, at an income

level of €100,000, an employer would typically be required to pay PRSI of €10,750 in respect of the employee, in addition to the €4,000 payable by the employee. Total PRSI of €14,750 is payable in respect of a self-employed individual with the same income. Entitlement to social welfare benefits is primarily a matter for the Minister for Social Protection. However, it is worth pointing out that for individuals with incomes in excess of €18,304 the total PRSI payable in respect of an employee is 14.75% of salary, while the total payable by a self-employed individual is 4%.

It is important to note that the changes to the Income Tax system introduced in Budget 2015 will benefit all those who pay income tax and or USC equally, regardless of whether they are PAYE or self-assessed taxpayers.

Health Insurance

231. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Finance the action his Department is taking in view of the provisions of the Health Insurance (Amendment) Act 2014 which allows insurers discretion to provide a discount to young adults in the age 18 to 25 age range, but which has apparently resulted in a discrepancy; the level of tax relief at source which needs to be applied to those persons who receive the discount; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that if a person is a student, dependent on the policy holder, under 23 years of age and in receipt of a student discount, that person's tax relief is capped at the child rate of a maximum of €100, but that student rates will disappear with the introduction of young persons' discounts, but tax legislation has not been amended to reflect this; if his attention has been further drawn to a technical issue (details supplied) relating to an apparent discrepancy in health insurance payment plans; the guidance his Department or the Revenue Commissioners have provided to insurers in this regard; if his attention has been drawn to the issue that is now causing concern as systems need to be changed to accommodate this change and with renewals-new business being able to be bought six weeks in advance, this means there is just over a month to resolve the problem; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that it also leaves the insurers open to regulatory problems with the Central Bank of Ireland, as insurers may not be providing the correct net premium to customers and that notifications will need to be made to the Health Insurance Authority on what premiums are correct 30 days in advance of 1 May 2015 and it is again not clear what net premium is correct or whether the intention is that two 20 year olds are to be treated differently, based on whether they are students or not; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5952/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I can assure the Deputy I am fully aware of the provisions in the Health Insurance (Amendment) Act 2014, relating to premiums for young adults, which are due to come into effect on 1 May 2015.

The Deputy will be aware that tax law follows general law and that the Health Insurance (Amendment) Act 2014, was signed into law on 25 December 2014, at which stage the last Finance Bill had already been passed by the Oireachtas.

My officials in consultation with the Revenue Commissioners are considering advice from the Attorney General's office in this matter, with a view to assessing the options available to me in advance of the next Finance Bill.

I am aware of the time constraints under which insurers must operate and I hope to be in a position to make an announcement in the matter very soon.

NAMA Investigations

232. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Finance the amount being spent by the National Asset Management Agency, on a yearly basis to date, on surveillance of debtors both inside and outside this jurisdiction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5967/15]

233. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Finance if the National Asset Management Agency or its agents have ever used the services of a private investigator (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6001/15]

234. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Finance if the National Asset Management Agency or its agents have ever used the services of a private investigator (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6002/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 232 to 234, inclusive, together.

I am advised by NAMA that it carries out asset searches in certain circumstances with a view to compiling full information on a debtor's assets and liabilities and to maximising recovery for taxpayers on any assets that debtors may have failed to disclose in their Statement of Affairs to the Agency. NAMA operates a Credit Verification Services Panel, established after a public procurement exercise, from which it procures such asset search services. Details on the Credit Verification Services Panel, including the names of the appointed firms, are available on the NAMA website at <https://www.nama.ie/about-us/our-work/procurement/>. I am advised by NAMA that the firms referenced by the Deputy in her question are not on this panel and that, accordingly, NAMA has not engaged the services of either firm.

NAMA has incurred the following asset search costs:

YEAR	AMOUNT
2014	€389,000
2013	€782,000
2012	€496,000
2011	€176,000

At 31 December 2014, through these asset searches, NAMA had identified previously undisclosed assets with a value in excess of €42 million.

Tax Code

235. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Finance the reason a person (details supplied) in County Kildare is being taxed as a married person even though that person is separated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6021/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the person concerned is taxed as a married person on the basis of information provided to them by the person concerned. I am advised by Revenue that they have now written to the person concerned to confirm her status and if necessary will review her tax liability, as appropriate, in the light of any change in circumstances confirmed to them.

VAT Exemptions

236. **Deputy Áine Collins** asked the Minister for Finance if there is a value added tax exemption for charities who purchase medical equipment for children with cystic fibrosis. [6054/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that VAT is a tax on consumption and is applied to supplies being made by a person and not to supplies received by them. In this context, it is not possible under EU VAT law, with which Irish VAT law must comply, to introduce VAT exemption based on services received, nor to introduce an exemption based on the recipient of a service.

Non-profit groups engaged in non-commercial activity are exempt from VAT under the EU VAT Directive. This means that they do not register for VAT and cannot recover VAT incurred on goods and services that they purchase. This non-entitlement to VAT deductibility is a general feature of VAT exemption.

There is no provision in either European law or Irish VAT law to allow a zero-rating or exemption for supplies of this nature. However, there is a specific VAT Refund Order (SI 58 of 1992) that provides VAT incurred on the purchase or importation of new medical instruments and appliances (excluding means of transport), which is purchased through voluntary donations, may be refunded to hospitals or donors, as appropriate, subject to conditions. Further information on the Refund Order, its conditions and the refund claim form VAT 72 is available on the Revenue website www.revenue.ie.

VAT Payments

237. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of revenue raised in 2013 and 2014 from value added tax charged on newly constructed and sold residential properties; the number of new residential units involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6061/15]

238. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for Finance the likely cost, in terms of tax foregone, of reducing the rate of value added tax on newly constructed and sold residential properties from 13.5% to 9%, based on the number of these units on which value added tax was charged in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6062/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 237 and 238 together.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the total yield of domestic VAT revenue attributed to the construction industry as a whole in 2013, which is the latest year for which the necessary detailed data are available, is estimated to be of the order of €72 million. It should be noted that this receipt figure is net of any refunds of tax that were repaid during the year. Equivalent figures for 2014 are not yet available.

I am also informed by the Revenue Commissioners that, as the information furnished on VAT returns does not require the yield from particular activities or sectors of trade to be identified, it is not possible to estimate the VAT yield for the specific activities mentioned by the Deputy in his questions. Accordingly, nor am I in a position to provide the projected figures for the reduction of the VAT rate applicable.

Central Bank of Ireland

239. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the new Central Bank of Ireland's loan-to-value and loan-to-income limits (details supplied). [6113/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank of Ireland has now announced the details of its new macro prudential regulations for residential mortgage lending. These provide for the following measures;-

Principal dwelling house (PDH) mortgages are subject to a Loan to Value (LTV) limit of 80% of the value of the property;

- For first time buyers, the LTV limit in respect of a PDH mortgage is 90% up to a value of €220,000 and 80% on any excess value over that amount;

- Buy to Let (BTL) mortgages are subject to an LTV limit of 70%;

- PDH mortgage loans are also subject to a loan to income (LTI) limit of 3.5 times gross income.

The central Bank has informed me that lenders, however will have a certain limited discretion to exceed these limits if they so choose. These macro prudential measures are complementary to existing micro-prudential supervision and to lenders' own risk management practices. They are not intended to capture credit risk associated with a particular loan or borrower, nor to replace or substitute for a lender's existing internal credit assessment policies and procedures, but rather to reinforce and strengthen the existing suite of credit risk mitigation tools employed by prudent lenders. Credit institutions will have internal policies in relation to specific risks or products and individual banks are free to adopt stricter measures as part of their underwriting decisions and their individual risk management practices.

Greek Government Bonds

240. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance, further to Parliamentary Question No. 234 of 4 February 2015, if he will provide in tabular form, the expected repayments of capital from Greece of the €347,437,121.03 owed to Ireland. [6134/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The first capital repayment on the loan to Greece is scheduled for 15 June 2020 for €2,998,730.51. Thereafter capital repayments of €4,342,989.01 are scheduled to be repaid at three-monthly intervals, the first one scheduled for 15 September 2020 and the last one scheduled for 15 March 2040. A final payment is scheduled for 15 June 2040 of €1,344,258.73.

EU-IMF Programme of Support

241. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the total contribution of Greece to the European Union loans Ireland has availed of. [6135/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Ireland's programme funding did not include any element of bilateral or guaranteed loans from Greece.

Ireland's three-year €85 billion EU/IMF financial support programme was comprised of €67.5 billion in external support, and €17.5 billion from its own resources.

The external support under the programme was provided by a number of lenders:

- €22.5 billion from the IMF Extended Fund Facility;
- €22.5 billion from the European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism (EFSM);
- €17.7 billion from the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF); and
- €4.8 billion in the form of bilateral loans from the United Kingdom (€3.8bn), Sweden (€0.6bn) and Denmark (€0.4bn).

All programme funding was drawn down.

Of these, the EFSM and EFSF are EU and Euro-area instruments respectively.

The EFSM is an EU 28 facility established under Council Regulation 407/2010 of 11 May 2010. It is a funding facility amounting to €60 billion which is guaranteed by the EU budget. There is therefore no individual Member State guarantee.

The EFSF was incorporated on 7 June 2010 for the purpose of providing stability support to Euro Area Member States in the form of guaranteed loans of up to €440 billion within a limited period of time. It includes a provision that countries in receipt of support may step out as guarantors.

The EFSF has provided programme assistance to Greece, Ireland and Portugal. The assistance was financed by the EFSF through the issuance of bonds and other debt instruments on capital markets.

Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Cyprus stepped out as EFSF guarantors when they entered their own programmes. On that basis, Greece is not one of the guarantors of Ireland's EFSF loans.

Consumer Protection

242. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the concerns that while hire purchase agreements have been regulated under Irish law since 1946, the providers of such agreements and the general activity is not regulated, and as a result, the consumer is placed in an invidious position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6139/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Both the Central Bank and the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) (formerly the National Consumer Agency) have certain functions and legal powers in relation to the provision of hire-purchase agreements.

The CCPC has specific responsibility for the authorisation of credit intermediaries under the terms of the Consumer Credit Act 1995. This includes those who act as an agent for undertakings providing hire purchase agreements. The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission further regulates the advertising of credit facilities by authorised credit intermediaries. To obtain an authorisation, the intermediary must hold a letter of recognition for each undertaking for which he is an intermediary, a current tax clearance certificate, and be a fit and proper person to carry on the business of a credit intermediary. All credit intermediaries must display an authorised copy of their authorisation prominently in their premises and they appear in the CCPC's online register.

There are no legislative requirements that oblige hire purchase providers to seek an authorisation from the Central Bank for the provision of hire purchase agreements to consumers and or to small businesses. Notwithstanding this, hire purchase providers are required to comply with the relevant provisions of the Consumer Credit Act 1995 when providing hire purchase agreements to consumers acting outside their business. Research is currently being carried out on behalf of the Central Bank in order to obtain information on the hire-purchase market, such as information about the number and identities of firms providing hire purchase agreements, the purpose and features of the agreements, the level of commitment by the consumer, the level of arrears and default, and the level and type of complaints.

In the case of small and medium enterprises, where hire purchase is provided by a bank under its banking license, the bank is required to comply with the Central Bank's Code of Conduct for Business Lending to Small and Medium Enterprises.

The remit of the Financial Services Ombudsman includes complaints in relation to the providers of hire purchase agreements under Regulation 2 of the Central Bank Act 1942 (Financial Services Ombudsman) Regulations 2005 (SI 191 of 2005). The Financial Services Ombudsman is a statutory officer who deals independently with complaints from consumers about their individual dealings with financial service providers that have not been resolved by the providers after they have been through the internal complaints resolution systems of the providers.

GDP-GNP Levels

243. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the way the liquidation process of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation has affected Ireland's debt to gross domestic profit ratio in general terms, and in figures, for 2013 and 2014; and a prediction for the effect in 2015. [6144/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Under ESA 2010, the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation (IBRC) was reclassified as being within general government as of July 2011 and its debt was consolidated into general government debt. This resulted in an increase of 12.2% to the general government debt to GDP ratio in 2011. The table below sets out the impact of the reclassification of IBRC on the general government debt to GDP ratio for the years 2011 - 2015.

Impact of reclassification of IBRC on debt (% of GDP)	2011	2012	2013	2014f	2015f
IBRC debt (% GDP)	12.2%	10.3%	7.2%	0.8%	0.3%
Source: CSO, Department of Finance	-	-	-	-	-

Due to the liquidation process, the impact of IBRC on the general government debt to GDP ratio declines in the outer years, to a forecast of 0.3% of GDP in 2015.

State Publications

244. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if there is a minimum allowable font size for type in State publications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5489/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): There is no minimum point size used in printed State publications. The readability of Acts; Statutory Instruments and Reports published by Government Departments; Offices and Agencies is enhanced by the use of twelve point font or greater.

Public Sector Pensions

245. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if public servants on the new personal pension contribution salary scale will be considered for pay restoration and increases, in the event of discussions with unions on pay increases. [5619/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): There are two measures which currently underpin public service pay and pensions policy: the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts (or FEMPI) and the Haddington Road Agreement (HRA). The nature of the Financial Emergency Measures legislation is that the powers granted by the Oireachtas under the legislation are temporary in nature and are predicated on the continuing financial emergency in the State. The HRA is due to last for three years from 1 July 2013 and, in the Government's view, sets the parameters for pay policy in the public service for that period.

The public service unions have indicated their intention, should the State's financial circumstances permit, to lodge a pay claim. If such a claim is made the Government will of course have to consider it, in line with the prevailing fiscal position. Any ensuing discussions will encompass all public servants across all salary scales, including those paying a personal pension contribution which has been required of public servants appointed since the mid-1990s. The legal position concerning the financial emergency legislation, which has underpinned the public service pay and pension reductions to date, will also have to be addressed in that context while ensuring that this country has a sustainable pay arrangement over the longer term.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

246. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the difference between the higher scale and the standard scale in the public service; and the way an employee is assigned to either scale. [5620/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Higher pay-scales were developed under the Programme for Competitiveness and Work 1994 to 1996 which allowed civil service Departments/Offices to expend 1% of their payroll costs for purposes of achieving greater organisational productivity. The 1% may be applied either by way of an enhanced payscale on the existing standard one or the payment of an allowance to individual officers. Departments/Offices have flexibility in the application of this arrangement having regard to certain criteria being met on the part of the individual officers concerned and which may include: contribution to the Department or Office, experience and suitability.

Civil Service payscales can be accessed via my Department's website at www.circulars.gov.ie.

Flood Relief Schemes

247. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform

further to Parliamentary Question No. 209 of 21 October 2014, if he will provide the details of works that have been carried out by the Office of Public Works around the flood risk area of the Tolka river in Dublin Central; if he will provide an update on the discussions between his Department, the OPW and the Insurance Federation of Ireland with regard to the problems residents are still having with insurance companies in flood risk areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4706/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): A flood relief scheme which included works in the local authority areas of Dublin City, Fingal and Meath County Councils was carried out on the River Tolka over the period 2003 to 2012. Works in the City area were completed by 2009 with approximately €7.5m expended in the City area out of a total of €19.3m. In general, the works were carried out directly by the Office of Public Works (OPW) with some aspects being undertaken by external contractors who were employed by the relevant Local Authority who acted as the Contracting Authorities in their area.

The works undertaken were as a result of the recommendations of the River Tolka Study completed in 2003. The recommendations were made in order to provide the standard 1 in 100 year level of protection for properties against extreme flood events which applies to the OPW flood relief schemes, i.e. a flood with a 1% probability of occurring in any given year.

The works carried out in the City area included:

- Replacement of Woodville Road footbridge,
- Replacement of Distillery Road Bridge,
- Construction of walls
- Construction of embankments
- Widening of River channel
- General River cleaning
- Lowering of Weirs
- Construction of Fish passes
- Capping of walls
- Construction of pumping station

The OPW is satisfied that the works carried out fulfil the intention of providing the standard flood protection to all properties in the City area highlighted in the Study.

In March 2014, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Insurance Ireland, the representative body for the insurance industry in Ireland, and the Office of Public Works. This Memorandum sets out principles of how the two organisations will work together to ensure that appropriate and relevant information on completed OPW flood defence schemes is provided to insurers to facilitate, to the greatest extent possible, the availability to the public of insurance against the risk of flooding. The Memorandum came into effect on 1 June, 2014 with an initial tranche of data provided by the OPW to Insurance Ireland in respect of 12 completed flood defence schemes (including the Tolka scheme in Dublin city) and showing the design, extent and nature of the protection offered by these works. Since then, data on a further four completed flood relief schemes has been communicated to Insurance Ireland in the agreed for-

mat and data on further completed schemes will be provided in due course. The arrangements set out in the Memorandum represent an ongoing process which, over time, should lead to an improvement in the availability of flood insurance cover. The text of the Memorandum of Understanding and further information on the process is available on the OPW website at <http://www.opw.ie/en/completed/>.

Since the signing of the Memorandum, contact has continued between OPW and Insurance Ireland. The implementation of the Memorandum has been discussed at a number of meetings at both official and Ministerial level involving Insurance Ireland, the Office of Public Works and the Department of Finance.

Early indications are that flood risk insurance is widely available in areas where flood relief schemes have been completed by the OPW. A definitive breakdown on the provision of flood risk insurance will not be available until after June of this year, when a full renewal cycle has been completed following the coming into effect of the Memorandum.

The OPW and the Department of Finance will continue contact, including meetings, with Insurance Ireland to review the operation of the Memorandum of Understanding.

Public Sector Pensions

248. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will report on the size of the fund that would be required to finance all Exchequer funded pensions currently in payment if they had been financed on a funded basis rather than on a current account basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5748/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): An actuarial valuation was carried out last year by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to estimate the accrued liability in respect of Public Service occupational pensions. A report on the actuarial exercise carried out last year is contained on the Department of Public Expenditure web site at <http://www.per.gov.ie/public-service-pensions-accrued-liability/>.

The key result of the exercise is that the total accrued liability in respect of Public Service occupational pensions is now estimated at €98bn as at December 2012. This compares with the previous estimate of €116bn for 2009 which was arrived at by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG). Therefore, over the three years from 2009 to 2012 the liability has fallen by €18bn or by 16%. The main reasons for the reduction were the pay and pension cuts since 2009 and the freeze in pay and pension rates until after the Haddington Road Agreement.

This figure of €98bn represents the present value of all expected future superannuation payments to current staff and their spouses in respect of service to December 2012, plus the liability for all future payments to current and preserved pensioners and to their spouses. The pension payments to discharge this liability will therefore be spread over the next 70 years or so.

Historically Public Service pension increases were on the basis of pay parity i.e. in line with the pay of the grade from which the public servant retired. The figure of €98bn above was based on pay parity applying in future. An alternative accrued liability figure was also estimated; this was based on pension increases in line with CPI (after 2016) and the associated accrued liability figure was €82bn.

The accrued liability figures set out above provide a broad indicator of the size of fund that would be needed to provide for Public Service pension benefits in the event that a fund were to be established for public service occupational pensions. In contrast, future pension payments

will be paid for on an ongoing basis from the State's income, which also includes the employee pension contributions made by serving public servants. In assessing the affordability and sustainability of public service pension costs met on a "pay as you go" basis, a key measure in addition to the overall liability is the expected level of actual total annual spending on pensions in future years relative to an indicator of income like GDP. Latest projections are for the total expenditure on public service pensions, if the link to pay is maintained, to increase from 2.3% of GDP in 2015 to 2.9% in 2030 and then to fall steadily to 1.5% of GDP by 2060. This reduction in annual costs in the longer term is largely due to the introduction by the current Government of the new Single Public Service Pension Scheme, which changed the benefits for public servants appointed from 1 January 2013.

Public Sector Pensions

249. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will report on the level of funding that would be required to fund the pension entitlements of departmental Secretaries General, assistant secretaries, principal officers and heads of State agencies, if their pensions were being financed on a funded basis rather than a current account basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5749/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Public Service superannuation schemes are funded on a pay as you go basis and therefore my Department does not have the information sought by the Deputy.

An actuarial valuation was carried out last year by my Department to update the accrued liability in respect of Public Service occupational pensions generally. The calculation underpinning this exercise was carried out on an aggregate basis. There was no estimation of, accrued liability or funding requirements in respect of individual grades.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

250. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of young unemployed persons who participated in fixed-term contracts through PeoplePoint; the number who were successful in obtaining permanent positions thereafter or who have been placed on a panel; the number of unsuccessful participants; the extent to which their future employment prospects can be enhanced as a result of their participation in the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5765/15]

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

Wherever possible, staff already employed on a permanent basis across the Civil and Public Service were transferred into posts in PeoplePoint. Since 2012, 172 fixed-term contracts were issued to Temporary Clerical Officers to work in PeoplePoint. This was necessary to ensure that rapidly emerging business needs were met.

Last year, as there was a wider need for Clerical Officers right across the Civil Service, the Public Appointments Service (PAS) conducted an open recruitment competition to establish a panel of candidates for permanent Clerical Officer posts. Anyone, including staff assigned to PeoplePoint, was entitled to apply for Clerical Officer posts. This process was fully transpar-

ent. 18 Temporary Clerical Officers working in PeoplePoint were successful in this competition and have been appointed on the usual probationary basis. Only one candidate working in PeoplePoint declined the offer of a permanent post.

PeoplePoint is currently in the process of transitioning this temporary structure to a permanent Clerical Officer structure. This process will take six months in order to ensure business continuity and to assist with the integration of new clerical staff. Consequently some longer serving Temporary Clerical Officers will remain in their positions until 28 August 2015. For those staff on fixed-term contracts who are leaving, structured support is being offered to assist them with future employment, including guidance on CV and interview preparation. The skills and experience gained while working in PeoplePoint can be added to their curriculum vitae.

Some staff who are leaving have already been offered other roles.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

251. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding a project (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5770/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Office of Public Works assessment of the application from Clare County Council for funding under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme to carry out works at this location has been ongoing and I am advised that the OPW expects to be in a position to notify the Council of its decision very shortly.

Parliamentary Party Allowances

252. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason political parties are entitled to keep the allowances for Deputies who have lost the party Whip and left those parties; if he will estimate the current, total amount of those allowances since the Deputies concerned discarded or lost their party Whip; if there are instances where parties have returned these moneys; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5877/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): This issue was debated extensively in both Houses last year during the various stages of the Oireachtas (Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices) (Amendment) Act 2014. I set out the position very clearly at the time regarding the rationale underpinning the allowance and those reasons have not changed.

My Department does not routinely monitor the number of members of the Houses of the Oireachtas who have lost or regained a parliamentary party whip during a Dail session, and therefore does not have the information necessary to prepare the estimate sought by the Deputy. One parliamentary party currently does not claim the full amount provided for under the legislation.

Public Sector Reform Implementation

253. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason he has not sought the opening of formal negotiations on giving effect to the various

elements of the Civil Service renewal plan with the public service unions; if his attention has been drawn to the unions that have indicated their willingness to participate when his Department issued the prerequisite invitation to discussions; the delay in opening implementation negotiations on this priority issue (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5962/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I published the Civil Service Renewal Plan along with the Taoiseach on 30 October last. The Plan was informed by a year-long engagement and consultation process which involved some 2,000 staff and stakeholders. It brings together the work of the Independent Panel on Strengthening Civil Service Accountability and Performance and the work of the Civil Service Renewal Taskforce, an internal group of senior managers. Members of the civil service trade unions attended various engagement events and in addition my officials briefed trade union officials about the renewal work. As implementation of the ambitious programme of change in the Plan proceeds over its three year timeframe there will be further engagement with the civil service trade unions as and when appropriate.

Office of Public Works Projects

254. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount of funds that will be allocated this year for the continuing programme of storm damage remediation and prevention work in 2015; the amount of this that relates to work sanctioned in 2014 but not completed; if he will provide details of these projects; when details of the projects to be approved in 2015 will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6033/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government Decision of 11 February 2014 allocated total funding of up to €69.5 million for clean-up, repair and restoration works in relation to public infrastructure that was damaged in the period 13 December 2013 to 6 January 2014. Of this sum of €69.5 million, up to €19.6 million was allocated for repair of existing coastal protection and flood defences based on submissions and cost estimates made by the local authorities concerned to the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (DoECLG). This funding for repair of damaged coastal protection and flood defence infrastructure is being made available to the local authorities via the Office of Public Works (OPW) based on programmes of works submitted by the local authorities. The Departments of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Transport, Tourism and Sport and Agriculture, Food and the Marine are responsible for the approval of programmes of work and the disbursement of funding for repair of other damaged public infrastructure such as roads, piers, harbours and other community facilities and amenities, and would be in a position to provide information to the Deputy in that regard.

Based on the programmes of works of repairs to coastal protection and flood defence infrastructure that were submitted by local authorities, total funding of €19.070 million was approved by the OPW for 176 projects that were deemed to be within the scope of the works covered by the Government Decision. The prioritisation and progression of projects is entirely a matter for the local authorities concerned.

To the end of 2014, OPW paid local authorities a total €7.675m of the total allocation based on draw down claims submitted by the local authorities for funding in respect of projects that have been completed, are under construction, or where contracts for the works have been placed. A substantial part of the approved funding was not drawn down in 2014 due to a variety of factors. The local authorities are continuing to progress with works and further draw down

requests are expected to be submitted and processed in 2015. Provision has been included in the OPW's 2015 Vote to allow local authorities to draw down the unexpended balance of funding this year. The remaining total funding available for draw down by local authorities in 2015 is €11.395m for projects approved for funding by the OPW in 2014 but for which no funding or partial funding has been drawn down to date by local authorities. As all programmes of works were approved for funding in 2014 there is no requirement for a further approval process in 2015.

Details of projects approved by OPW in 2014

Local Authority	Project Location
Clare County Council	New Quay
	R477 Ballyvaughan
	Doolin
	Clahane, Liscannor
	Liscannor
	Lahinch
	White Strand, Miltown Malbay
	Spanish Point
	Seafield Pier
	Carrowmore
	Rhynagonnaught, Doonbeg
	Whitestrand/ Doonmore, Doonbeg
	Baltard(south of Doonbeg)
	Kilkee
	Ross Bay
	Kilbaha
	Cloughansavan/Kilclogher
	Fodra
	Rinevella Beach
	Rinevella
	Kilcredaun Irish College
	Carrigaholt
	Cappagh, Kilrush
Carrowdotia, N67 Moneypoint	
Knock	
Labasheeda	
Cork County Council	Durrus-Ahakista Road- Phase 1
	Point Road, Crosshaven
	Belvelly, Cobh
	Summercove Kinsale
	Gerahies Sea Wall- Phase 1
	Ballydonegan Beach
	Red Strand, Ardfield, Clonakilty
	Garryvoe, Midleton
	South Harbour, Cape Clear Island
Pier Road, Rosscarbery	

Questions - Written Answers

Local Authority	Project Location
	Hare Island
	Cow Strand Wall Sherkin Island
	Saleen- East Ferry, Midleton
	Garrahies Sea Wall- Phase 2
	Durrus- Ahakista Road- Phase 2
Donegal County Council	Inver
	Ards, Creeslough
	Shore Road, Mountcharles
	Shore Road, Killybegs
	Buncrana Shore Walk
	Creey Pier
	Bundoran West end Carpark
	Bundoran Main Beach
	Aranmore
	Tory Island
	Moville Shore Path
	Mill Bay, Inch Island
	Keadue Bridge
	Melmore
	Maghery/Termon Road
	White Strand
	Rossbeg Pier Road
Fingal County Council	Portmarnock Beach
	Strand Road, Sutton
	Portrane Beach
	Sea Wall Barnageera, Skerries
	South Strand Street, Skerries
	Burrow Beach, Portrane
Galway City Council	Silverstrand/Blackrock to Birdoo/Blackrock to Southpark
Galway County Council	Causeway at Lettermore, Gorumna, Béal an Daingean & Eanach Mheáin
	Trá Mor
	Trá Heuston, Lettermullen
	Ceann Golam, Lettermullen
	Aird Mhóir, Carna
	Duibhitir, Carna
	Ce Loughan Beag, Inverin
	Inish Mór, Killeany Road
	Foot causeway to Inis an Ghainnimh
	MweenishIsland
	Inisbofin
	Aillebrack
	Mainistir Kilmurvey, Inis Mór

Local Authority	Project Location
	Frenchman's Strand, Inis Mór
	Ervallagh Roundstone
	South Facing Shore, Inishbofin
	Galway approach to An Spideal & Trá na mBan
	Inis Oirr
	Keerhaun North Errislannin
	Sky Road Loop, Clifden
	Sean Céibh Area, An Spideál
	Ardnagreeva, Clifden
	Renvyle Seafront Walk, Oranmore
	Beach Road, Cleggan
	Streamstown
	Ballyconeely, Clifton
	Dolan, Roundstone
	Dogs Bay, Roundstone
	Inis Mheain
	Errisbeg/Gurteen Graveyard, Roundstone
	Cloonisle Coastal Road
	Road at Church between piers, Inisboffin
	East End Inisboffin
	Mairos Graveyard at Cloch Mór, Baile na Habhain
	An Spideál linking Trá na mBan to An Ceabh Nua
	Access road to Loughan Beag Pier, Inverin
Kerry County Council	Fahamore
	Bunanear
	Ceann Trá
	Kenmare
	Kenmare
	Cromane Lower
	Cockleshell Road
	Barrow
	Kells Beach
	Renard
	Valentia Island
	White Strand
	Waterville
	Coonanna
	Ballinskelligs
	Cooscrome
	Bunavalla
	Brackaharagh
	Cush
	Maulagullane
	R573 Coast Road

Questions - Written Answers

Local Authority	Project Location
	Rossbeigh
	Fenit
Louth County Council	Salterstown
	R172, Blackrock Sea Wall
	Giles Quay
	Cruisetown, Clogherhead
	Roadstown
	Ballagan, Greenore
	Corstown, Dunany
	Domor's Green, Drogheda
Mayo County Council	L-1833 Bertra Beach
	Bertra Beach
	L-54462 Road to Dooagh Pier
	L-54442 Road at Dooagh
	L-5437 Road to Roigh Pier
	L 5283 Road to Fahy Graveyard
	L- 54398 Road to Mallaranny Pier
	Newport Quay Wall
	Innisbiggle
	Faulmore, Blacksod
	Cartron, Clogher
	Uisce
	Bayview, Binghamstown
	Bindoola on R313 at Belmullet
	School Road, Belmullet
	Shore Road, Belmullet Town
	Doohoma South Coast
	Carrowholly, Westport
	R335 at Deerpark,
	L-801 Quay Road, Westport
	L-5839 Rosbeg Road
	Carpark at the Point on Roman Island
	L-18012 Rosmalley Road
	L-5841 Sunnyside, Rosbeg
	L-1801 Quay Road, Ardmore
	Devlin
	Inishnakillew
	L-1802 Carrowholly, Rusheen
	Carrowholly Lower
	Dooagh Carpark
	Keel Sandybanks
	L-54443 Road at Dooega Pier
	Foxpoint
	Ballina Quay Wall

Local Authority	Project Location
	Bull's Mouth Slipway, Achill
Meath County Council	Laytown
Sligo County Council	Enniscrone
Waterford County Council	Back Strand, Tramore
	Sea Wall Dunmore East
	Cunnigar, Dungarvan
Wexford County Council	Clones Road
	Ballyhack to Arthurstown
	Courtown
	Ballinamona Beach

Pensions Levy

255. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the financial emergency measures in the public interest legislation, which gave rise to a public service pension levy, have been implemented in an equitable manner; his views on a specific case where a person (details supplied) who earns over the threshold is being penalised above and beyond this amount. [6071/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): It is understood that the measure to which the Deputy's question refers is the Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR), which came into effect on 1 January 2011. It became law via the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) Act 2010 and was subsequently amended via the FEMPI (Amendment) Act 2011 and the FEMPI Act 2013. Detailed application of the public service pension reduction in accordance with the legislation is a matter for the individual public service pension paying authority.

The PSPR is a progressive reduction whereby those on higher pensions are impacted by a proportionately greater reduction than those on lower pensions who are impacted by a lower reduction or are exempt. Pensioners on €12,000 per year or less are fully exempt from PSPR, with a higher exemption threshold of €32,500 applying to pensioners who retired over the last three years. There are currently 3 different PSPR rate tables; the particular table which applies to any affected pension depends on when the pension was awarded and the size of the pension.

Based on the details supplied, it is assumed that the pension referred to in the Deputy's question was awarded on or before 29 February 2012. For all such pensions the threshold before PSPR applies is €12,000. From 1 July 2013 following the FEMPI 2013 Act, pensions in this category with a pre-PSPR value above €34,132 were subject to an increase in the PSPR imposition through the application of a table of higher PSPR rates, reflecting the Government's decision to secure an additional reduction in the public service pension bill, while avoiding further impacts in the case of pensioners on relatively lower pensions.

Additionally, section 5(4) of the FEMPI 2013 Act specifies that in circumstances where the application of the table of higher PSPR rates to pensions in payment on or before 29 February 2012 would reduce the pension in payment below the €32,500 threshold, a smaller reduction will be applied ensuring the pension is not reduced below €32,500.

Legislative Programme

256. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation when an implementation date will be in place for the Construction Contracts Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6137/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government approved the delegation of responsibility for implementation of the Construction Contracts Act, 2013 to my colleague, the Minister of State for Business and Employment, Mr. Gerald Nash T.D., in November. Work is continuing on the preparations for the full implementation of the Act, as the commencement of the Act is dependent on a number of factors set out in the legislation. These factors include the appointment of a Panel of Adjudicators by Minister Nash and the selection of the adjudicators for this Panel will be achieved through an open competitive process to be arranged by the Public Appointments Service, at the earliest opportunity. Minister Nash is also overseeing the preparation of a Code of Practice for the conduct of adjudications, which will be binding on all adjudicators operating under the Act, the drafting of which is at an advanced stage and will be finalised after consultations have concluded with the construction industry stakeholders. A specific date for implementation of the Act will be announced in advance once the necessary arrangements have been finalised, in order to provide sufficient notice to those affected by the Act's provisions.

Company Law

257. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the exemptions which exist from the requirement for an annual audit for small firms and incorporated entities; if this will change with the implementation of the new Companies Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5566/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Audit exemption applies to small companies formed under the Companies Acts. Member States' entitlement to provide for audit exemption for small companies derives from EU legislation prescribing the maximum thresholds capable of being employed by Member States to determine small company size. These thresholds relate to net turnover and balance sheet total and number of employees.

Under the Fourth Company Law Directive (78/660/EC) Member States can provide for small companies to avail of an exemption from the requirement to have their individual accounts audited. This exemption applies to the accounts prepared for the members.

Currently, to be eligible for audit exemption, Ireland requires, among other things, that a private limited company meet all three of the size criteria (balance sheet total, turnover and average number of employees). The company must not be either a parent or a subsidiary. In Ireland, companies engaged in certain activities, essentially those in the nature of financial services, cannot avail of the exemption.

The audit exemption thresholds applicable in Ireland were raised to the maxima permitted by the European Union, under Directive 2006/46/EC, as implemented by S.I. 308 of August 2012. These current thresholds, which are also set out in the Companies Act 2014, are balance sheet total of €4.4m, net turnover of €8.8m and average number of employees during the financial year of 50.

In addition, the Companies Act 2014 extends the scope of the application of the audit ex-

emption to a company limited by guarantee, a company that is either a parent or a subsidiary or a dormant company. Also, to be eligible for audit exemption, the Act includes a provision that an eligible company need only meet two of the three size criteria.

The Accounting Directive (2013/34/EU) replaces the Fourth Company Law Directive (78/660/EC). Work on the transposition of the Accounting Directive is currently being progressed by my Department and is required under the Directive to be transposed by 20 July 2015. This Directive increases the current permissible maximum thresholds which Member States may establish for net turnover and balance sheet total to €12m. and €6m. respectively - the maximum permissible threshold for number of employees remains unchanged. Consideration is being given, in the context of the Department's transposition of the Accounting Directive, as to whether to maintain these thresholds at their current levels or to provide for increases and, if the latter, what levels it might be appropriate to establish.

If the decision is to provide for increased thresholds, this will be done by way of an appropriate amendment to the Companies Act 2014.

Community Enterprise Centres

258. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation when approval will be provided to the business development management programme for community enterprise centres in view of the importance of this programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5638/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I understand from Enterprise Ireland that since the launch of the first Community Enterprise Centre scheme in 1989, Enterprise Ireland has approved €64 million for the development of Community Enterprise Centres in towns and villages across the country. There are currently 117 such centres across the country.

The last scheme rolled out was in 2012 and 2013 when Enterprise Ireland provided funding of €2 million to support the recruitment of a total of 46 Business Development Managers. I plan to introduce a new approach which will draw lessons from the 2012 programme. This new programme will be part of a much more comprehensive strategy to develop enterprise at regional and local level. My aim is to enhance the impact of the CEC network on continuing job creation through this strategy.

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

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

The application of the template was tested in the Midlands region towards the end of 2014 and will lead to the publication and implementation of a Regional Enterprise Strategy for the Midlands in the coming weeks. Similar strategies for the other regions will be commenced over the course of the year, on a phased basis, and will include specific actions on the part of Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, the LEOs, Údarás na Gaeltachta and other public bodies active in

each region to promote enterprise growth and job creation. The Regional Enterprise Strategies will provide new funding for enterprise support in the regions and seek to leverage and orient existing funds to target initiatives that enable regions to achieve their full employment potential. A significant regional fund of up to €25 million in competitive funding will be announced to support regional initiatives. In this context, my Department and Enterprise Ireland will also work to explore how the Community Enterprise Centre network can best be enhanced to support regional job creation.

IDA Portfolio

259. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide a list of the sites currently owned by IDA Ireland in the constituency of Louth, by location, which have potential use in attracting inward investment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5653/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): IDA Ireland owns a total of 70.45 hectares of land in County Louth which have the potential for use for inward investment purposes. The locations of these sites are set out in the tabular statement. The site in Mullagharlin has advanced planning for a bio pharma campus.

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

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

At the end of 2014, there were 23 IDA Ireland client companies in County Louth, employing 3,029 people in full and part time employment. IDA Ireland has strong relationships with all these companies and works closely with them to ensure their long term sustainability and to encourage their growth, development and continuing re-investment in their sites.

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.

As the Deputy is aware, the Action Plan for Jobs 2015 was launched recently. 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 sites owned by IDA Ireland in Louth which have potential for use for inward investment purposes.

Park/Site	Town	Property Type	Net Hectares
Dundalk Finnabair B&T Park	Dundalk	Land	10.6900
Dundalk Mullagharlin East	Dundalk/Ravensdale	Land	15.6000
Dundalk Mullagharlin	Dundalk	Land	44.1750

Public Procurement Contracts Social Clauses

260. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the progress that has been made by the interdepartmental group on social enterprise and the Office of Government Procurement in examining the scope for including social impact clauses in public procurement procedures. [5787/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Policy responsibility for public procurement is a matter for the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Brendan Howlin, T.D. The Office of Government Procurement falls under Minister Howlin's remit.

Last year, Minister Howlin announced the establishment of a Project Group to identify suitable policy priorities to be addressed through the insertion of social clauses in public contracts. The objective is that the use of social clauses in appropriate projects could, for example, contribute to employment or training opportunities for the long term unemployed while mitigating the risk of displacing existing workers.

Further queries on the work of the Social Clauses Project Group would be best addressed to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. However, my understanding is that the Inter-Departmental Group on Social Enterprise has not made a formal submission to the Office of Government Procurement regarding the inclusion of social impact clauses in public procurement contracts.

Secretariat support to the Inter-Departmental Group on Social Enterprise is provided by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

Job Creation Data

261. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if those who are in paid work for one hour per week are to be counted as being employed in the Government target of full employment by 2018; his plans to measure under-employment among those persons who wish to work longer hours but are not offered same; the target for living-wage employment; if he will publish figures for those employed but not in living-wage jobs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5927/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Three years ago the Government set a target of having an extra 100,000 people back at work by 2016. That target will now be delivered upon during 2015, over 12 months early. The live register has fallen for 38 months in a row since the crisis peak of 15.1% three years ago to 10.5% today. The latest Quarterly National Household Survey figures show that, for the year to end Q3 2014, the

numbers of people in employment increased by 27,700, of which 94% was full-time employment. The Government is determined that this progress continues so that full employment can be achieved by 2018.

While it is very encouraging that 94% of new jobs being created are full-time, in accordance with the Statement of Government priorities, Minister Bruton has commissioned a study into the prevalence of zero hour and low hour contracts and the impact of such contracts on employees. The key objectives of the study are:

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

- To assess the impact of zero hour and low hour contract on employees.

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

All sectors of the economy, both public and private, will come within the scope of the study, and a wide range of stakeholders will be canvassed to contribute to it. It is expected that the study will be completed within six months of commencement.

Job Initiatives

262. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide a breakdown of the funding provided to the Startup Ireland Initiative as set out under the Action Plan for Jobs; the return on investment in terms of job creation; the anticipated start-date for such prior to the Startup Gathering 2015 scheduled for October 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5957/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): ‘The Startup Gathering’ is a new initiative which will be led by the not-for-profit organisation Startup Ireland as a key building block towards making Ireland a global startup hub by 2020. It builds on the success of initiatives such as ‘The Gathering’ and ‘The Wild Atlantic Way’ in a sustainable, regionally balanced way.

To help make Ireland the best place in the world to establish/locate a high impact startup, five days of events will take place annually in the second week of October (from October 5th to 10th in 2015) in each of Ireland’s cities (Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford) with a focus on the industry strengths present in each city.

Using the successful model of ‘The Gathering’ the week will leverage and augment many existing events and projects that are themed around entrepreneurship, startups and existing industry clusters present in each city. The five industries will be those ‘strength in depth’ sectors currently located in Ireland namely ICT, Medical Devices, BioPharma, Agri/Food and Business Services.

The goal for the Startup Gathering 2015 is to facilitate in excess of 50 events and networking opportunities nationally during the week for at least 15,000 members of the Irish public and international visitors.

My officials are currently in discussions with Startup Ireland regarding possible sponsorship of the Startup Gathering initiative. Any decisions regarding funding will be made with a view

to maximising the return for the State. No funding has been provided to date.

Regional Development

263. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide details on the regional development strategy currently been rolled out in the midlands in terms of the background assessment and findings; the anticipated timeframe to measure the impact; if an assessment for counties that do not have an institute of technology or another third level institute has been carried out; the effect this will have on foreign direct investment for those counties; if he will provide a cost-benefit analysis breakdown for regional development initiatives versus urban initiatives in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5958/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The 2015 Action Plan for Jobs, which was published on 29th 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 contain a series of specific actions to be delivered by a range of public bodies and local stakeholders, including Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, and the Local Enterprise Offices, to maximise the potential of each region to support enterprise development and jobs growth.

The Regional Enterprise Strategies will identify and build on the strengths and assets of each region. Most regions have a combination of urban and regionally-dispersed assets and the objective will be to ensure that these are used in a complementary way rather than competing with one another to support the development of the region as a whole. Similarly, the aim is to ensure that any Third Level institution located in a particular county benefits the region as a whole, as well as neighbouring regions where appropriate. Creating a pool of skilled and knowledgeable workers will be a factor in helping to attract investment to the region, including foreign direct investment.

The first Regional Enterprise Strategy to be published will cover the Midlands region, which includes the counties of Longford, Westmeath, Laois and Offaly. Following a process of engagement with stakeholders in the region over the last number of months, my officials are currently finalising the Regional Enterprise Strategy for the Midlands.

The Strategy will be published in the coming weeks and will include an overview of the strengths and opportunities of the region and actions to be delivered in the short-to-medium term to maximise those opportunities. Progress on implementation of the actions and their impact will be overseen through a monitoring process which will include the key stakeholders in the region.

Job Retention

264. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will meet with the workers and management of a company (details supplied) in County Westmeath to ensure that the workers and the company have the necessary supports to navigate their way through these difficult times. [5976/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I understand from a public statement issued by the company concerned, on Thursday 5 February 2015, that they have recently been awarded a major new contract with one of the world's largest Original

Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs). This business has been secured after a 9 month engagement, despite strong competition from a highly competitive international market. The recently secured business will keep orders at the plant running up to 2024 and company will continue to fight for new contracts to safe guard jobs and grow the business further.

The public statement also indicates that the plant concerned is currently being restructured and streamlined in alignment with seasonal customer demand while also continuing to upskill their workforce.

Securing this new business is testament to shrewd management and the hard working, highly skilled workforce that is imbedded within the company.

The company is a very large employer and is a key Enterprise Ireland client. My office and Department through Enterprise Ireland is in continuing contact with the company and my Department is briefed as appropriate. Enterprise Ireland will continue to offer any assistance possible to the company so that it can explore opportunities to develop and grow the business, as envisaged by the company.

Local Enterprise Offices

265. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he is satisfied that the enterprise boards provide adequate business advisers with broad knowledge of a wide range of business types, and models to the start-up businesses they are assigned to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6141/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are the first-stop-shop front line service assisting in delivering business growth and jobs for the micro-enterprise sector. They pull together all the players – other Government Departments and Agencies – to support everyone with a good business idea and strengthen the enterprise sector in the local area. The LEOs are the first port of call in terms of advice, direction, training and, in certain circumstances, grant support for anyone who wishes to start or expand a business.

The main role for the Business Advisors and Assistant Business Advisors working within all LEOs is to help meet the business development needs of all clients that come to the LEO for business advice. In performing this task, the Advisors rely upon their wealth of experience as well as the range of formal training courses that they have attended. In this regard, staff in the LEOs need to be able to respond to changing markets and, to this end, the Centre of Excellence in Enterprise Ireland is working with the LEOs to develop and implement a training plan that meets the ongoing training needs of all LEO staff.

Furthermore, LEOs maintain a list of experienced mentors to whom clients can be assigned, as necessary. For example, Business Advisors can refer clients to a mentor currently working within their sector who has specialist skills not available to the staff in the LEO. These mentors can provide the clients with practical advice and guidance as well as market and business insights and, if relevant, introductions.

I am therefore satisfied that the Business Advisors in the LEOs can provide clients with, or direct them to, the supports necessary to establish and grow their business.

Environmental Policy

266. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the regulations in place in relation to rodent control as there are concerns that bags of rodent poison are causing the deaths of birds. [5482/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The regulation in place in relation to placing rodenticides used for the control of rodents on the Irish market is ‘Regulation (EU) No 528/2012 of the European Parliament and the Council of 22 May 2012 concerning the making available on the market and use of biocidal products as amended’. This is transposed into Irish law through Statutory Instrument S.I. No., 427 of 2013 as amended.

Biocidal products, including rodenticides used for the control of rodents, are evaluated and authorised for placing on the market under Regulation 528/2012 as amended and S.I. No. 427 of 2013 as amended. This regulatory system is designed to ensure a very high level of protection for man, animals and the environment. The evaluation examines the risks to the environment, humans and animals and only approves products that can be used safely without any unacceptable risks to man or the environment. It also applies risk mitigation measures to the products to further reduce these risks.

In the case of rodenticides, my Department is the Irish Competent Authority for biocides and has placed restrictions on pack sizes available for purchase by amateur users. The product labels also instruct users to collect dead rodent bodies and unused bait and safely dispose of these.

A group called the ‘Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use – CRRU Ireland’, which involves companies engaged in the rodenticide industry and relevant state agencies, including my Department and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, has been established to promote best practice and responsible rodent control thereby enhancing the process of protecting wildlife from rodenticide exposure. Among the activities that CRRU Ireland is engaged in is the organisation and delivery of “Wildlife Aware” training courses, and associated accreditation scheme, for professional pest control technicians and other competent users of rodenticides. A series of courses were held in 2014 and a further series of courses have been arranged for 2015.

Departmental Offices

267. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding redeployment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6121/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The position is that while administrative functions have been transferred from my Department’s office in Tralee to Portlaoise, Department vets, inspectors and technical officers remain in place in Tralee and continue to provide a service to my Department’s clients across all of the schemes that are provided from this office. Thus, frontline services are being fully maintained and public access for all of the Department’s stakeholders will continue to be available in the Tralee office.

The transfer of administrative functions out of the Tralee office arises from an extensive review of the local office structure which was carried out by the Department over the last number of years. This review concluded that, arising from investment in technology and the substantial reduction in disease levels in recent years, significant efficiencies would accrue from the centralisation of administrative functions, thereby giving rise to scope for redeployment of administrative staff from existing local offices.

In line with Government policy, my Department has actively sought redeployment oppor-

tunities for administrative staff in local offices and in the vast majority of cases, arrangements have been made to maintain staff in their existing geographic location. However, in the case of Tralee, while my Department, together with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, pursued all avenues to identify redeployment opportunities there, unfortunately it was not possible to identify any at that location. Given that no options were available in Tralee, my Department acceded to a request from the Financial Shared Services Centre in Killarney and redeployed the staff there in accordance with the provisions of the Public Service Agreement 2010-2014.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Applications

268. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payments under the disadvantaged areas scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5486/15]

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 28 April 2014, processing of which has recently been completed. Payment under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme is due to issue directly to the nominated bank account of the person named shortly.

Íocaíochtaí Scéim na gCaorach Féaraigh

269. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara cén uair a dhéanfar íocaíocht le feirmeoir (sonraí leis seo) faoi Scéim na gCaorach Féaraigh do 2014; cén fáth go bhfuil moill leis an íocaíocht seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [5490/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Fuarthas iarratas faoi Scéim na gCaorach Féaraigh ón duine ainmnithe an 08 Bealtaine 2014.

De réir na dTearmaí agus na gCoinníollacha a rialaíonn Scéim na gCaorach Féaraigh, b'éigean d'úinéirí tréada comhaireamh bliantúil den líon iomlán caorach ar a ngabháltas a chur ar ais chuig mo Roinn faoin dáta deiridh, an 14 Feabhra 2014. An 16 Aibreán 2014 a fuarthas an fhoirm áirimh caorach ón duine ainmnithe i mo Roinn. Bhí an dáta sin lasmuigh den tréimhse ama ceadaithe agus ar an drochuair mar sin, níl an duine ainmnithe cáilithe lena bhreithniú faoi Scéim na gCaorach Féaraigh 2014.

An application under the Grassland Sheep Scheme was received from the person named on 8 May 2014. As per the Terms and Conditions which govern the Grassland Sheep Scheme, flock owners were required to return an annual census of all sheep on their holding to my Department by closing date of 14 February 2014. The sheep census form for the person named was received by my Department on 16 April 2014 outside the allowable timeframe and therefore unfortunately the person named is not eligible for consideration under the 2014 Grassland Sheep Scheme.

Forestry Sector

270. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding funding for the replanting of forestry in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5494/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The frequency and ferocity of storm events last winter, compounded by waterlogged soils on many forest sites, led to extensive damage on private and State owned forest lands. In order to establish the most appropriate response for forest owners and the forest industry a taskforce, chaired by Mr Tom Hayes TD, Minister of State, and comprising relevant forestry stakeholders was put in place to assess the damage nationally and to identify the various issues arising. The taskforce issued a guidance note for forest owners, laying down the steps to consider in safely harvesting and selling the fallen trees and giving advice on a range of other associated issues. Teagasc, in association with Coillte and my Department held two very successful events on managing storm damage in farm forests. These events were attended by over 400 forest owners. Teagasc forestry advisers continue to be available to discuss the issue with forest owners affected. Forest owners are also urged to get professional advice from qualified foresters to guide them through this process.

Direct Payment Scheme

271. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a person (details supplied) in County Clare will be facilitated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5536/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In accordance with the relevant EU Regulation governing the National Reserve, Member States have the option of applying objective criteria in the allocation of entitlements. The application of an off farm income limit has been included as objective criteria since the introduction of the National Reserve in 2005.

The process of deciding objective criteria for the National Reserve is carried out in consultation with the Direct Payments Advisory Committee which includes members of the main farming bodies and advisory services. After consultation with this Committee in recent months and in the context of the limited funding available to the National Reserve, it was decided that an off farm income limit of €40,000 would be applied to all applicants. The corresponding off farm income limit under the previous National Reserve was €30,000. In this case, the named applicant and other applicants under the 2015 National Reserve have the flexibility of choosing either the 2013 or 2014 tax year, whichever is more advantageous.

Applicants must comply with all eligibility criteria including off farm income criteria in order to be deemed eligible to qualify for an allocation of entitlements under the National Reserve.

Single Payment Scheme Eligibility

272. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payments under the single payment scheme for 2013 and 2014 will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Cork; the reason for the delay in issuing these payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5541/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2013 Single Farm Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 15 May 2013. A review of the land parcels declared by the person named under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme revealed that a number of the parcels declared by the person named contained ineligible features. On this basis, processing was finalised and the 2013 advance and balanc-

ing payments issuing to the nominated bank account of the person named on 16 October and 2 December 2013 respectively.

Following a review of my Department's decision, sought by the person named, a small increase in the eligible area was found. This resulted in a supplementary 2013 payment being made to the person named on 19 December 2014. An application under the 2014 Single Farm Payment application was received from the person named on 10 May 2014. Payment based on the reduced area issued to the person named on 2 February 2015. It is now necessary for a Department official to verify the position on the ground to allow the review requested by the person named be finalised. 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.

Land Parcel Identification System

273. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the dates the Bing Map Imagery was taken of each parcel under LPIS, land parcel identification vectors, in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5547/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The imagery used to review the lands declared by the person named was captured on 28 March 2012.

Under the Terms & Conditions of the Direct Aid Schemes, which includes the Single Payment scheme, farmers are obliged to declare only eligible land when making their applications and to exclude ineligible features such as roads, buildings, farmyards, dense scrub, etc. These claims are then recorded on the Department's Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS). Given the importance of the LPIS database in underpinning direct aid payments worth in excess of €1.5 billion annually, the Department is obliged under EU Regulations to ensure its accuracy.

Following consultation with the EU Commission, as part of the normal Accounting process, the Department was requested to undertake a complete review of the LPIS database. This has resulted in the necessity to adjust parcels of a significant number of applicants, where it was established that some ineligible features had been included. In certain circumstances these adjustments have given rise to penalties.

A comprehensive review and appeals process has been implemented to ensure that the cases of individual farmers are fully scrutinised. In the first instance, a farmer, who finds himself or herself in this position, can seek a review of the original decision by Department officials. If they are not happy with the outcome of the review, they can submit an appeal to the *independently-chaired LPIS Appeals Committee*.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

274. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive payment under the single payment scheme; the reason for the delay in payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5576/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under 2014 Single Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 23 April 2014. In order to receive payment under the Single Payment Scheme applicants must hold single payment entitlements. As the person named does not hold entitlements, no payment is due.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

275. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive a payment under the agri-environment options scheme 3; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5621/15]

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 1st May 2013 and payment has issued in respect of the 2013 Scheme year.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. These checks are currently being processed in respect of the 2014 Scheme year and I expect 75% payment to issue shortly. The balancing 25% payment will follow thereafter.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

276. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the agri-environment options scheme 1 will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in issuing this payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5631/15]

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 1st May 2013 and payment has issued in respect of the 2013 Scheme year.

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

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Eligibility

277. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding a rural environment protection scheme 4 payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5644/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in June 2009 and received payments for the first five years of their contract.

REPS 4 is a measure under the 2007-13 Rural Development Programme and is subject to EU regulations which require detailed administrative checks on all applications to be completed before any payments can issue. During the administrative checks in 2014 an area discrepancy was discovered between the Single Farm Payment application for 2014 and the REPS agri-environmental plan which required further clarification and the possible re-digitization of certain plots. This issue is currently being investigated with the intention of achieving a speedy resolution.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

278. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue under the 2014 single payment scheme and disadvantaged area scheme to a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; the reason for the delay in issuing this payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5663/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under 2014 Single Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 15 May 2014. An advance payment in respect of Single Payment issued on 16 October and the balancing payment issued on 1 December 2014. Payment under the Disadvantaged Area Scheme issued to the applicant on 19 September 2014. All payments were made to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

279. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding a 2014-2015 disadvantaged areas headage payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5686/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 13 May 2014, processing of which has recently been completed. Payment under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme is due to issue directly to the nominated bank account of the person named shortly.

Single Payment Scheme Appeals

280. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding an appeal under the single farm payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5695/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): A review of the land parcels declared by the person named under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme revealed that a number of land parcels declared by the person named contained ineligible features. Following an appeal from the person named a visit by a Department official to verify the position was necessary to progress the matter. The person named was supplied with new maps when notified of the outcome of this inspection in a letter dated 5 January 2015 and advised of the right of appeal to the independently-chaired LPIS Appeals Committee. The results of the verification visit have now been processed and payment due for 2013 Single Payment Scheme will issue to the person named shortly.

GLAS Eligibility

281. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will review the society registration date of 2013 for rare-breed eligibility in view of the delay in the roll-out of the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme; and if he will allow society registrations in 2014 to be included. [5721/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): GLAS (the Green Low-carbon Agri-environment Scheme) is part of a suite of proposed measures under the new Rural Development Programme (RDP) which was submitted to the European Commission in July last year and approval for the Scheme is still awaited. My officials are involved in negotiations with the Commission to expedite that approval and the Scheme will be opened as soon as possible.

The scheme gives priority access to those farmers who have valuable environmental assets, and the retention of rare breeds falls into this category. The conservation and preservation of breeds which are under threat is vitally important in the context of halting the loss of biodiversity, which is why those farmers who have continued to maintain these breeds will be given priority access into the Scheme under Tier 1. Any farmers who had registered livestock in 2012 and/or 2013 will be eligible to join the first tranche of the Scheme and this will target those who have traditionally been engaged in this valuable work. Those who register with approved breed societies in 2014 will have the opportunity to join the scheme in the second tranche.

Grassland Sheep Scheme Payments

282. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive payments under the grassland sheep payment scheme; the reason for the delay in payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5756/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2014 Grassland Sheep Scheme was received from the person named on 28 March 2014, processing of which has recently been completed. Payment under the 2014 Grassland Sheep Scheme is due to issue directly to the nominated bank account of the person named shortly.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Eligibility

283. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a decision on their application under the disadvantaged areas scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5760/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2014 Single Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Schemes application on 18 April 2014. Payment has not issued to the person named as the holding concerned has not satisfied the Scheme minimum stocking density requirements. Immediately the holding is identified as meeting these requirements, the application will be processed.

Beef Quality Assurance Scheme

284. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he or his officials have raised any concerns at the beef forum that the €3 per head incentive payment from meat factories for quality assurance is inadequate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5805/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): During the meeting of the Beef RoundTable on November the 12th, agreement was reached on a wide range of issues impacting on the beef sector, resulting in some 23 outcomes in total. At the subsequent meeting of the RoundTable held last week, there was a general consensus that progress was being made in delivering on the outcomes agreed in November, although further work was required in a number of areas. This was accompanied by a strong commitment from all participants to continue this work.

As the Deputy notes, Processors agreed at the November Round Table to a targeted, cost neutral price incentive for all steers and heifers from Quality Assured farms with effect from 1st January, based on consideration of an appropriate mechanism to be agreed by then. Following on from this, Meat Industry Ireland, the representative body for the meat processors announced with effect from 1 January a €3 per head bonus payment for steers and heifers from Quality Assured farms that do not qualify for the current 12c/kg in-spec bonus.

A number of farm organisations believe that a higher bonus payment is warranted, but welcomed the fact that the current 12c/kg in spec bonus had not been replaced in order to deliver the new bonus payment. This position was noted at the RoundTable meeting last week. This is a commercial matter of course. I have encouraged the processors and farm organisations to discuss any further adjustments to the Quality Assurance arrangements that may be necessary, as appropriate.

The Deputy may also wish to be aware that in addition to focussing on the ongoing implementation of the outcomes agreed at the Roundtable meeting in November, the most recent meeting last week considered the improved beef market position and strategic issues concerning bull beef production in Ireland. The Roundtable tasked a stakeholder group, led by Teagasc, with preparing written guidelines for beef farmers which would act as a blueprint for those currently producing bull beef or those considering developing bull beef production systems, taking into account production efficiency and market dynamics. I also updated stakeholders on progress as regards the development of Producer Organisations in Ireland, a key proposal to emerge from the Roundtable process.

I am confident that with positive engagement from all the stakeholders, the forum can continue to make a significant contribution to the strategic development of the beef sector.

Beef Imports

285. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide a yearly detail of all beef imports into Ireland for each of the past five years, providing the volumes and the country of origin; if it was carcass beef or cuts, or other forms of beef; if it was chilled, fresh or frozen; the amount of this beef that was subsequently re-exported; the details of the countries it was re-exported to; the details of those who imported the beef; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5806/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Revenue Commissioners record imports of beef into the country where the imports from an individual company exceed a threshold value of €191,000 per calendar year. This information is col-

lected on behalf of the CSO for statistical purposes only. The totals for 2010-2013 respectively are 40,174 tonnes, 46,137 tonnes, 41,448 tonnes, and 26,030 tonnes. The total for January to November 2014 is 22,061 tonnes. My Department is in discussions with the CSO about the breakdown of those amounts.

Ireland is of course the largest net exporter of beef in the Northern hemisphere and for example, exported some 530,000 tonnes of beef in 2014, compared to imports of approximately 22,000 tonnes.

Beef Industry

286. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he will be able to formally open the beef genomics scheme; when application forms will be available; the proposed latest date for applications; the requirements to be fulfilled; the date on which payments will commence in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5807/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The 2015 budget includes a package of approximately €74 million for the beef sector in 2015, including a provision of €52 million for a proposed Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) which will place Ireland at the leading edge globally in the use of genomics in beef production.

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

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

All Rural Development Plans submitted to the European Commission are subject to approval, following a detailed period of analysis and discussion. The Commission has provided observations on the BDGP and my Department has been engaged in intensive discussions to address issues raised and to provide the necessary clarifications. The scheme will be rolled out without delay following approval, with application forms issuing to all eligible farmers. Given that this is a 6 year scheme, with very specific actions spread over the full duration, I can assure the Deputy that these farmers will be given sufficient time to allow them to fully analyse the requirements of the scheme and to submit their applications as appropriate.

Meat Processing Plant Inspections

287. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he will appoint agriculture officers to each meat plant to take responsibility for monitoring carcass trim by the factories in line with the commitment in the beef Forum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5808/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department currently employs 5 officers who have specific responsibility for monitoring classification and ancillary checks, including carcase trim. In 2014 a Classification officer was appointed to the North West region and the appointment of a Classification officer in the South East was approved in January 2015 to further enhance this level of monitoring.

In 2014 there were 515 unannounced classification control inspections conducted by Classification officers in 31 factories and local authority abattoirs. During these unannounced inspections, 51,017 carcasses were checked by regionally based DAFM Classification officers for conformation and fat, weights, dressing (Trim) and labelling. The number of inspections in 2014 is up by 15% from 2013.

Later this month, my Department will engage directly with the industry in a series of regional meetings to update personnel on the legal obligations on each factory regarding, *inter alia*, classification, carcase dressing (trim) and price reporting.

While I am satisfied that my Department operates a robust and comprehensive carcase classification control regime, I am also mindful of the need to continuously monitor the way in which controls are undertaken, including the feasibility of reconfiguring existing Department resources within meat factories. I can assure the Deputy that this process of analysis and review will continue, and that I will make any changes necessary to ensure the continued good functioning of the control regime.

Live Exports

288. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the action he will take to remove the barriers on labelling at processing and retail level, that are impeding the live export trade to Britain and Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5809/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I attach substantial importance to the live export trade and my Department has been very proactive during my time as Minister in facilitating both the cross border live trade and shipments abroad. Live exports serve a dual purpose as a means of satisfying market demand for live animals and providing alternative market outlets for cattle farmers in Ireland. Total live exports for 2014 were 237,000 head, of which over 72,000 went to the UK - a 10% increase over 2013. Specifically, over 54,000 head were exported to Northern Ireland, which is comparable with the 2013 figure.

I should make it clear that Ireland has been a proponent of mandatory origin labelling for beef, which requires the place of birth, rearing and slaughter to be shown on beef labels. The longstanding policy of UK retailers, who buy large quantities of Irish beef, is to market British and Irish beef separately. This means that beef must be sourced from animals originating in one country or the other, so that they can be labelled as born, reared and slaughtered in the same country. In addition, logistical difficulties can arise when a small number of Irish-born animals are slaughtered in a UK meat plant. Under mandatory EU labelling rules, these carcasses have to be deboned in a separate batch, and packaged and labelled accordingly, thereby incurring additional costs for the processor. These issues are a matter of commercial preference, both of slaughter plants in Britain, and of British retailers.

While Bord Bia has repeatedly raised this issue with British retailers over the years, they are unlikely to reverse their marketing policy in the short term and face other demands from UK stakeholders to stock more British beef. Nevertheless Bord Bia, in its ongoing interactions

with British customers, will continue to pursue all opportunities to maximise the full potential of the beef and livestock trade with our largest trading partner. In addition, Bord Bia actively supports the development of the live export trade through the provision of market information, developing market access and promotional activity.

I have also had several meetings with my Northern counterpart, Minister Michelle O'Neill, on this subject. We agreed to make a joint approach to the three British retailers who stock Irish Beef, accepting that these were commercial matters, but also seeking some flexibility given that this mixed label beef is produced to the exacting standards required by British consumers.

Minister O'Neill also approved a voluntary beef label in Northern Ireland for cattle born in the Republic of Ireland, raised in the Republic of Ireland and/or Northern Ireland, and slaughtered in Northern Ireland. This label would facilitate the sale of beef from animals born in the South and slaughtered in the North under a voluntary 'Irish' label, if retailers are willing to stock the product carrying this label. Of course, such a label would be additional to the mandatory origin label. The question of using such a label is now a commercial matter between processors and retailers in Northern Ireland and elsewhere in the UK.

Following on from this, I convened a meeting with Minister O'Neill and the Northern Ireland Retail Consortium which took place in October. At this meeting the NIRC made it clear that their beef buyers had a preference for single origin beef, of which they had ample supply, but they would keep the situation under review. I also met separately with Tesco where we had a useful and frank discussion on this and other procurement issues. I will continue to pursue opportunities for exports of beef and live cattle at every opportunity.

Beef Exports

289. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to work with Bord Bia to support and lead the case for the introduction of a strong single brand for Irish beef exports into the US market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5810/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The opening of any major third country market for Irish beef is a very positive development for the entire beef sector given our heavy reliance on exports. This is particularly true of a lucrative market like the US where the beef market is estimated at 11 million metric tonnes. It is split 60: 40 between food service and grocery retail (by volume). The US imports 1.2 million tonnes of beef every year and Ireland is the first EU Member State to secure access to this market.

As the Deputy is aware, I am currently leading a major trade promotion to the US which will mark the arrival of Irish beef there for the first time in 15 years. I will be launching Irish beef at events in New York, Washington DC and Boston, and I will be meeting high-end trade buyers and promoting Irish beef to US food publications so as to *build awareness of the qualities of Irish Beef*. Ireland is the first EU country to be allowed back into the United States and we must use this advantage to place Irish Beef at the forefront of the premium steak cut market.

Bord Bia's strategy for the US market is to position Irish beef as a premium grass based natural product so pure and so natural that you can taste the difference. The brand positioning developed by Bord Bia is grounded in comprehensive consumer and trade research conducted in the US over the last three years. The beef market in the US is significantly different from the consumer packaged goods market and retail sales are nearly exclusively own brand. As a result, Bord Bia will use the visual identity of the Quality Assurance mark to communicate the

defining attributes of Irish beef as a natural product sustainably farmed to internationally accredited standards. In addition Bord Bia is developing an application to the sustainably Process Verified Program which will facilitate their endorsement of the product claims on pack. Bord Bia's marketing programme this year will encompass media advertising, PR and digital campaigns to targeted trade and consumer audiences to support the commercial activities of Irish beef exporters.

Farms Data

290. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the length of time a young farmer allocated entitlements from the national reserve under the 2015 scheme has to hold on to the entitlements before leasing or selling them on in order not to incur any claw-back or penalty; if it is permissible to stack these entitlements without claw-back or penalty after one year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5812/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): To be eligible under the Young Farmer priority category of the National Reserve an applicant must meet the following conditions: -

- S/he is participating in the Basic Payment Scheme in the year in which s/he submits an application;

- S/he is aged no more than 40 years of age at any time during the calendar year in which s/he first submits an application under the Basic Payment Scheme;

- S/he has successfully completed a recognised course of education in agriculture giving rise to an award at FETAC level 6 or its equivalent. Alternatively s/he must commit to commencing such a course by 30th September 2016;

- Has a gross off-farm income that does not exceed €40,000 in one of the tax years 2013 or 2014;

- S/he is setting up an agricultural holding for the first time or has set up such a holding during the five years preceding the first submission of the Basic Payment Scheme application.

The EU regulations governing the National Reserve do not provide for a retention period in respect of entitlements allocated from the reserve. The option to transfer entitlements will not be available until the 2016 scheme year. Rules pertaining to the Transfer of Entitlements in 2016 will be drawn up in due course in consultation with the Direct Payment Advisory Committee, which includes members of the main farming bodies and advisory services.

The relevant EU Regulations governing the operation of the Basic Payment Scheme do not provide for consolidation or stacking of entitlements.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

291. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue under the disadvantaged areas scheme and the agri-environmental options scheme for 2014 to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5823/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An applica-

tion under the 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 14 May 2014, processing of which has recently been completed. Payment under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme is due to issue directly to the nominated bank account of the person named shortly.

The person named was approved for participation in the 2012 Agri Environment Options Scheme (AEOS 3) with effect from 1 May 2013 and payment has issued in respect of the 2013 Scheme year. Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. These checks have been successfully completed in respect of the 2014 Scheme year and 75% payment will issue shortly. The balancing 25% payment will follow shortly.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

292. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive payment under the agri-environment options scheme and the grassland sheep scheme. [5828/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2014 Grassland Sheep Scheme was received from the person named on 16 April 2014. Payment under this Scheme issued directly to the nominated bank account of the person named on 17 December 2014.

The person named was approved for participation in the 2012 Agri Environment Options Scheme (AEOS 3) with effect from 1 May 2013 and payment has issued in respect of the 2013 scheme year. Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. These checks have been successfully completed in respect of the 2014 Scheme year and 75% payment issued on 24 December 2014. The balancing 25% payment will follow shortly.

Grant Payments

293. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the Scottish derogation rules will be finalised for farmers who were farming in 2013, but have no entitlements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5833/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Farmers who did not receive a direct payment in 2013 under the Single Payment Scheme, the Grassland Sheep Scheme, the Burren Farming for Conservation Scheme or the Beef Data Programme do not hold an automatic allocation right to receive entitlements under the Basic Payment Scheme in 2015.

The “Scottish Derogation” allows for the allocation of payment entitlements to persons who never held Single Payment Scheme entitlements, either owned or leased, but who can produce verifiable evidence that they actively farmed in 2013. The terms and conditions of this provision and its application in Member states is currently the subject of discussion with the EU Commission and the outcome is expected very shortly.

Forestry Grants

294. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if any grant provision exists for re-planting private forests which have experienced storm damage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5876/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The frequency and ferocity of storm events last winter, compounded by waterlogged soils on many forest sites, led to extensive damage on private and State owned forest lands. In order to establish the most appropriate response for forest owners and the forest industry a taskforce, chaired by Mr Tom Hayes TD, Minister of State, and comprising relevant forestry stakeholders was put in place to assess the damage nationally and to identify the various issues arising. The taskforce issued a guidance note for forest owners, laying down the steps to consider in safely harvesting and selling the fallen trees and giving advice on a range of other associated issues. Teagasc, in association with Coillte and my Department held two very successful events on managing storm damage in farm forests. These events were attended by over 400 forest owners. Teagasc forestry advisers continue to be available to discuss the issue with forest owners affected. Forest owners are also urged to get professional advice from qualified foresters to guide them through this process.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Appeals

295. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Sligo will be issued with the result of their appeal under the disadvantaged areas scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5885/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2014 Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Areas' scheme application on 27 March 2014. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases Remote Sensing (i.e. satellite) inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was selected for a Remote Sensing eligibility inspection. The inspection identified discrepancies between the areas declared and the area found resulting in an over-declaration in area of between 3% and 20%. Under the Terms and Conditions of these schemes, this resulted in the 2014 payments being based on the found area having been reduced by double the difference between the area found and the area declared. The person named was notified of this outcome on 29 November 2014.

A request for a review of this decision has been received by my Department. This review request is currently being examined and the person named will be notified of the outcome as soon as possible. In the event that the person named is dissatisfied with the outcome of this review, the decision can be appealed to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office, within 3 months.

Payment, on the basis set out above, under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme issued to the nominated bank account of the person named on 26 November 2014.

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

Single Payment Scheme Payments

296. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will review the circumstances (details supplied) in County Cork regarding the loss of 15 entitlements on a 2014 single farm payment, when compared to the previous year, and if, in view of these circumstances, the landowner can appeal the surrender of these entitlements to the national reserve; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5923/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a copy of a 2014 Consolidation Application on 23rd January 2015. Upon review my officials established that the supporting certificate of postage was in respect of the 2014 Single Payment Scheme application, received in my Department on 24th April 2014. As my Department has no record of having received a 2014 Consolidation application on or prior to the closing date of 15th May 2014, a letter issued informing the person named of the rejection of this application.

As the person named did not renew a lease of land he consequently did not draw down full payment on all of his 43.28 entitlements under the 2014 scheme year. This land reduction did not, however, give rise to a loss of entitlements to the National Reserve and has no impact on the calculation of his entitlements under the new scheme.

The calculation of a person's entitlements under the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme is based on the entitlements owned by the herd owner under the 2014 scheme year, as well as any payment received under the Grassland Sheep Scheme. Therefore while the person named held 43.28 entitlements and only claimed 33.60 hectares my Department will establish his value (going forward) based on the 43.28 entitlements.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

297. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive payment under the agri-environment options scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5943/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was approved for participation in the 2012 Agri Environment Options Scheme (AEOS 3) with effect from 1 May 2013 and payment has issued in respect of the 2013 Scheme year. Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. These checks have been successfully completed in respect of the 2014 Scheme year and 75% payment will issue shortly. The balancing 25% payment will follow thereafter.

Agriculture Scheme Eligibility

298. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his view on whether it is fair and equitable to apply a figure for gross income of €40,000 in considering applications under the national reserve and young farmers schemes, and that no consideration is given to income tax, universal social charge, pay related social insurance, mortgage payments, health insurance, the cost of travel to and from employment and married or single status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5949/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In accordance with the relevant EU Regulation governing the National Reserve, Member States have the option of applying objective criteria in the allocation of entitlements. The application of an off farm income limit has been included as objective criteria since the introduction of the National Reserve in 2005.

The process of deciding objective criteria for the National Reserve is carried out in consultation with the Direct Payments Advisory Committee which includes members of the main farming bodies and advisory services. After consultation with this Committee in recent months and in the context of the limited funding available to the National Reserve, it was decided that an off farm income limit of €40,000 would be applied to all applicants. The corresponding off farm income limit under the previous National Reserve was €30,000. Applicants under the 2015 National Reserve also have the flexibility of choosing either the 2013 or 2014 tax year, whichever is more advantageous.

Applicants must comply with all eligibility criteria including off farm income criteria in order to be deemed eligible to qualify for an allocation of entitlements under the National Reserve. The EU Regulations governing the Young Farmer Scheme do not provide for the inclusion of off farm income as eligibility criteria.

Fur Farming

299. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide an update regarding legislation for fur farming; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5969/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In Ireland farming mink requires a licence under the Musk Rats Act 1933 and the Musk Rats Act 1933 (Application to Mink) Order 1965.

Licences, which are time-bound, are issued under this legislation only if the applicant, following an inspection by officers from my Department, is found to be compliant with a number of conditions. There are currently 3 fur farmers licensed.

I established a Review Group in November 2012 to review fur farming in Ireland. The Group examined all aspects of fur farming in great detail and also took account of submissions received in response to public consultation.

The Group recommended that fur farming be allowed continue under licence and subject to official control and noted the extensive powers available to the Minister in legislation for revoking of licences in cases of non-compliance with a licence condition and where welfare conditions are not met.

My Department has statutory responsibility for the welfare and protection of farmed animals under the European Communities (Welfare of Farmed Animals) Regulations, 2010 (Statutory Instrument No 311/2010) and the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013. Irish fur farmers are subject to the same animal welfare legislation as any other livestock farmer.

EU Regulations

300. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a person (details supplied) in County Laois, whose herd number is dormant, is required to meet

the requirements for holding tanks within that person's property, for farm gullies and existing agriculture buildings as per the requirements of the European Communities Regulations 2009 (Good Agriculture Practice for Protection of Waters); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5994/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): According to the Department's records, the person named has no bovines or land area attached to this herd number.

If the person named is engaged in agricultural activity then he is required to comply with the European Union (Good Agricultural Practice For Protection Of Waters) Regulations 2014, Statutory Instrument No. 31 of 2014. Agriculture is defined in these Regulations as including the breeding, keeping and sale of livestock (including cattle, horses, pigs, poultry, sheep and any creature kept for the production of food, wool, skins or fur), the making and storage of silage, the cultivation of land, and the growing of crops (including forestry and horticultural crops).

The person named should contact their local Agricultural Advisor (FAS approved) for further advice specific to any implications under the regulations for the holding.

Wildlife Regulations

301. **Deputy Áine Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if hen harrier farmers are required to undertake specified environmental actions based on a plan prepared by an approved planner to receive a payment under the proposed green low-carbon agri-environment scheme. [6023/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): All farmers require the services of an approved GLAS advisor to prepare and submit a GLAS application on their behalf. The farming prescription set out in the Agri Environment Specifications must be applied on all Hen Harrier habitats, and a Sustainable Management Plan must be drawn up by the advisor if the area is designated Natura land.

Forestry Premium Payments

302. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Carlow will receive forestry payments for 2013 and 2014. [6029/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Following an inspection in respect of the second instalment of the establishment grant in April 2014, the Department inspector listed a number of remedial works to be completed. A letter issued to the applicant detailing the works that are required to bring the plantation up to standard. The inspector specified that the remedial works should be completed before 30 April 2015.

It is the Department policy not to pay more than six annual premiums until the second instalment of the establishment grant is paid. In this case the 6th premium was paid in May 2012. Consequently, the premiums for 2013 and 2014 must be withheld until the plantation is up to Forest Service standard, passed by the inspector and the second instalment of the grant is paid. As the onus is on the applicant to manage his plantation, he is advised to contact his forester to discuss the progress of the remedial works to ensure the site is brought up to Forest Service standard as soon as possible.

Agriculture Scheme Eligibility

303. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a person (details supplied) in County Galway will automatically be allocated entitlements under the Scottish derogation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6030/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The “Scottish Derogation” allows for the allocation of payment entitlements to persons who never held Single Payment Scheme entitlements, either owned or leased, but who can produce verifiable evidence that they actively farmed in 2013.

The person named was allocated Single Payment Scheme entitlements in 2005 and does not meet the conditions of “Scottish Derogation” as provided for in the Regulation governing the Basic Payment Scheme.

Departmental Funding

304. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount of funds that will be allocated this year for the continuing programme of storm damage remediation and prevention work in 2015; the amount of this that relates to work sanctioned in 2014 but not completed; if he will provide details of these projects; when details of the projects to be approved in 2015 will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6034/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Local Authority element of the 2015 Fishery Harbour & Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme is currently under consideration. No Local Authority funding has been allocated for 2015 to date.

Commonage Division

305. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to ensure that individual farmers in commonages do not put too much stock on the commonage to the detriment of other shareholders’ interests, in the absence of commonage framework plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6037/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): GLAS (the Green Low-Carbon Agri-environment Scheme) as proposed under the new Rural Development Programme) specifically addresses the question of the sustainable management of commonages. A key component of managing a commonage is the implementation of an appropriate grazing regime. To this end a Management Plan for the commonage must be drawn up by an approved agricultural adviser and within that Plan those farmers participating in GLAS will be assigned individual minimum stocking densities. Within the Plan there will also be flexibility to exceed the individual minimums, but the maximum livestock density for the entire commonage may never be exceeded.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Appeals

306. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when

a decision will be made on a penalty appeal under the rural environment protection scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6038/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in November 2009 and received payments for the first five years of their contract.

REPS 4 is a measure under the 2007-13 Rural Development Programme and is subject to EU regulations which require detailed administrative checks on all applications to be completed before any payments can issue. During these administrative checks an area-discrepancy was discovered between the Single Farm Payment application for 2014 and the REPS agri-environmental plan which required further clarification. This issue is currently being investigated with the intention of achieving a speedy resolution.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Appeals

307. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding a payment under the rural environment protection scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6039/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in June 2009 and received payments for the first five years of their contract.

REPS 4 is a measure under the 2007-13 Rural development Programme and is subject to EU regulations which require detailed administrative checks on all applications to be completed before any payments can issue. Following an on-farm inspection carried out in August 20 14 issues were identified in relation to the maintenance and conservation of Natura/Commonage sites and the upkeep of farm and environmental records as set out in the REPS agri-environmental plan specification , and these require further investigation. A letter issued to the person named on 19th August 2014 outlining these issues, with a request to furnish the records which, to date, have not been provided. The Inspector concerned has been in contact with the person named as well as his agricultural adviser concerned on a number of occasions in an effort to bring this situation to a satisfactory conclusion.

GLAS Administration

308. **Deputy Áine Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if farmers who own or work land designated as sanctuaries for hen harriers and who are on an agri-environment options scheme, will move directly to the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme when it commences, or if they will have to wait for the agri-environment options scheme to be completed first. [6053/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): As is the case under AEOS the protection of hen harrier habitats is a key objective of GLAS and farmers in these areas will be given priority access to the scheme. The transitional arrangements for farmers already receiving support under AEOS are under consideration in the context of the detailed rules applying to GLAS and my primary concern in this regard is to ensure that farmers continue to conserve and maintain these valuable habitats.

Beef Data Programme

309. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 327 of 16 December 2014, when a person (details supplied) will receive payment under the beef data programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6063/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named has registered forty one beef breed animals in his herd under the 2013 Beef Data Programme. One animal is not eligible for payment as it was not registered within twenty seven days after it was born. The validation process for the remaining forty animals has been completed and payment will issue to the person named shortly .

Fish Farming

310. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will put in place a compensation scheme to ensure the mussel farming sector will remain viable and in a fit state to return to normal trading and job creation once harvesting resumes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6070/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): A robust shellfish biotoxin monitoring regime is essential in order to protect consumers and safeguard the good reputation of the Irish seafood industry. I am aware that the levels of biotoxins in shellfish in a number of bays in the Southwest currently exceed the regulatory limits. Harvesting from affected areas is temporarily suspended until such time as the biotoxin levels return to normal naturally occurring background levels. Such harvesting suspensions are not unusual and all aquaculture enterprises will be aware that this is a known business risk in the sector. I have received a request from aquaculture industry representatives for a package of compensation for rope mussel farming enterprises affected by these harvesting suspensions. My Department is presently finalising a new Seafood Development Programme under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) which will determine how we use the finite resources that will be available to us in the coming years in the overall best interests of Ireland and its seafood sector as a whole. I will be publishing a detailed consultation document and Strategic Environmental Assessment for public consultation in the next month or so, with a view to submitting the new Programme to the Commission by May this year for its consideration and adoption.

The EMFF Regulation sets out a legal framework under State Aid rules and the European Structural and Investment Funds concerning investment measures that Member States may implement in the period up to 2020. This potentially includes compensation aid to aquaculture enterprises for suspended harvests, but there are of course many other worthwhile investment possibilities allowed under the EMFF and national choices must be made between competing demands. So, as part of the preparation of the new Programme, my Department has been following a structured process of considering the investment needs of the seafood industry as a whole. Stakeholders have been consulted on this on a number of occasions to date. This has helped shape my initial thoughts on investment priorities and when I publish the consultation draft of the Programme shortly, my proposals will become clear. I will welcome all views at that point on the extent to which our resources should be directed towards compensation for suspended harvests.

Departmental Investigations

311. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding his Department's investigation into payments to a person (details supplied) in County Mayo under the non-productive capital investments element of the agri-environment options scheme; and the estimated timeframe for finalisation of the wider investigation. [6136/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named is an applicant under the Agri-Environment Options Scheme 2010. A Department review of the non-productive capital investment claims submitted by applicants was undertaken in 2014. This review identified irregularities with documentation submitted for reimbursement in some of these claims. A full Department investigation is now underway into this matter and further payments to any AEOS participants included in this review are being held for the time being. This investigation is still in its early stages and decisions on any future payment cannot be taken until the findings of the investigation are to hand. My Department has written to each of the people concerned on 28 January to explain the situation.

Army Personnel

312. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Defence in view of the closure of Connolly Barracks in Longford in 2009, O'Neill Barracks in Cavan and Columb Barracks in Mullingar in 2012, the units and sub-units from those three barracks that were relocated to Custume Barracks in Athlone; and if he will provide a list, by name, of the military units in the permanent and reserve defence forces whose headquarters were in Custume Barracks after these three relocations up to the disestablishment to the 4th Western Brigade at midnight on 30 November 2012. [5567/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): It is not possible to provide the information sought by the Deputy in the time available. My Department is currently seeking to compile a reply and I will provide the information directly to the Deputy once it comes to hand.

Defence Forces Personnel

313. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide details of a case regarding a retired soldier (details supplied) who has applied for a discharge book of service, associated papers and a certificate of service, given that these have not yet been issued to that soldier; and when these documents will issue. [5743/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): I have been advised by the military authorities that the requested documentation was forwarded by registered post to the individual concerned on Friday 6th February 2015. The delay in providing the documentation was due to an administrative error which has since been rectified.

Defence Forces Reserve Training

314. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Defence the number of training field days held for the Reserve Defence Force in each year from 2011 to 2014; the number of units that participated, the number of members in these units; the number of members in these units

who attended each field day; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5864/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): I have requested the relevant information from the Military Authorities and I will forward it to the Deputy as soon as it is compiled.

Defence Forces Reserve Training

315. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Defence the reason when a Reserve Defence Force member is in attendance at a field day for in excess of 12 hours, the member's record will only show four hours of attendance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5865/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The training obligations and requirements necessary for remaining on the effective strength of the Army Reserve (AR) and Naval Service Reserve (NSR) are set out in the Defence Force Regulation R5 (the Regulation which governs matters relating to the AR and NSR). Section 39 of these Regulations specifies that members of the AR and NSR must undertake a total of 48 hours training in order to remain effective. There are a number of types of training which can be used to fulfil this requirement, such as training parades, overnight camps, field days , annual training or courses of instruction. There are a wide variety of combinations that are feasible in order to meet the 48 hours target. Section 39 (2) (a) of the Regulation states that, for the purpose of qualifying for retention on the effective strength but not for any other purpose, attendance for the full period of an overnight camp or field day shall be deemed to be attendance at training for a period of four hours. Therefore, members of the AR and NSR are required to attend 12 field days or a combination of field days, overnight camps, annual training, courses of instruction and training parades in order to remain effective.

The criteria for remaining an effective member of the Reserve are being reviewed as part of the implementation of the findings of the Value for Money Review of the Reserve Defence Force.

Defence Forces Contracts

316. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Defence the contractual relationship between a volunteer member of the Reserve Defence Force and his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5866/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Terms and Conditions for members of the Army Reserve and the Naval Service Reserve (NSR) are outlined in Defence Force Regulation R5 and Administrative Instruction R5. Members of the Army Reserve and the Naval Service Reserve are volunteers who undertake training in their spare time. Much of the training is unpaid, however there is also provision made for them to avail of paid training. Notwithstanding the fact that some training may be paid, members of the Army Reserve and the Naval Service Reserve are not employed or engaged under a contract of employment which stipulates either weekly hours of work or working time and service with the Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve is not pensionable under the Army Pension Schemes.

Terms and conditions for members of the First Line Reserve are outlined in Defence Forces Regulation R1 and Defence Forces Regulation R2. Membership of the First Line Reserve is confined to personnel who have completed a term of engagement with the Permanent Defence Force and have undertaken, either voluntarily or on foot of a contractual commitment, to com-

plete a period of service in the Front Line Reserve.

Defence Forces Reserve Training

317. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Defence if serving members of the Reserve Defence Force are excluded from all national and European Union legislation governing employment rights when undergoing full-time paid training for periods exceeding 21 consecutive days; and for periods not exceeding 21 consecutive days; and when undergoing unpaid training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5867/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): Members of the Army Reserve and the Naval Service Reserve are volunteers who undertake training in their spare time. Much of the training is unpaid, however there is also provision made for them to avail of paid training. Notwithstanding the fact that some training may be paid, members of the Army Reserve and the Naval Service Reserve are not employed or engaged under a contract of employment which stipulates either weekly hours of work or working time and service with the Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve is not pensionable under the Army Pension Schemes. As such, members of the Army and Naval Reserves, who are volunteers and not employees, are not governed by the legislation referred to by the Deputy.

Defence Forces Reserve

318. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Defence if members of the Reserve Defence Force will be covered under the non-statutory personal injuries compensation scheme for members of the Reserve Defence Force if they sustain an injury whilst training on their own time to achieve and maintain a level of fitness to pass the Permanent Defence Force fitness tests; if the members of the Reserve Defence Force will be granted the use of training facilities and access to Permanent Defence Force physical training instructors; if not, if the Defence forces will pay for gym subscriptions, as in the case of the Territorial Army in Britain, to help them achieve the fitness levels they are required to pass; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5868/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Personal Injuries Compensation Scheme for Members of the Reserve Defence Force (RDF) is a non statutory scheme administered by my Department. The Scheme covers members of the RDF who are injured in the course of their duties. It covers injuries sustained on official duty, typically while participating in annual training, field days, exercises, parades and courses of instruction. It does not cover injuries sustained by members of the RDF while engaged in physical fitness training in their own time. Members of the RDF are responsible for achieving the prescribed physical fitness standards (as laid down) in their own time. However, Defence Forces leisure and sports facilities are made available to members of the Reserve during programmed recreational training while on periods of full time training. In addition, RDF Unit Commanders, with the permission of General Officers Commanding, may avail of Defence Forces facilities and personnel for the conduct of organised training programmes for RDF personnel.

There are no plans to pay for gym subscription for members of the RDF.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

319. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Defence the number of persons serving in the Reserve Defence Force whose units are based more than 50 km from their home address; more than 100 km from their home address; if all members have been assigned to units as per their preference in the reorganisation of March 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5869/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The information requested by the Deputy concerning the numbers of personnel serving with units of varying distances from their home address is not available. It is not possible to produce this level of data without using an inordinate amount of resources. With regard to whether or not all members of the Reserve Defence Forces have been assigned to units as per their preference in the re-organisation of March 2013, my Department is currently seeking to compile an accurate reply and I will provide the information directly to the Deputy once it comes to hand.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

320. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Defence in regard to the Reserve Defence Force and the years 2011 to 2014, the number of members who attended training in each year; the number of recruits in each year; the number paid a gratuity in each year; the cost of the Reserve Defence Force in each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5920/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): Members of the Army Reserve (AR) and Naval Service Reserve (NSR) undertake both paid and unpaid training. The table below sets out the number of persons who attended paid training in each year from 2011 to 2014 in regard to the AR and NSR. The number of recruits and the number of AR and NSR members paid a gratuity in each year from 2011 to 2014 are also set out in the table below.

	2011	2012	2013	2014
Numbers who attended paid training	2,788	2,476	1,734	1,521
Number of Recruits	274	344	Nil	152
Numbers of AR and NSR members paid a Gratuity	2,011	1,938	13	1

Gratuities for members of the Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve were abolished at the end of 2012; any reference to numbers received in subsequent years relates to late claims for gratuities.

I am currently awaiting proposals in relation to the future development of the First Line Reserve. In the interim, existing arrangements relating to the First Line Reserve remain in place, including the payment of gratuities. The number of gratuities paid to members of the First Line Reserve in the years 2011 to 2014 is set out in the following table.

	2011	2012	2013	2014
Number of gratuities paid to members of the First Line Reserve	155	108	83	76

I have requested information from the military authorities on the cost of the Reserve Defence Force from 2011 to 2014. The information will be forward to the Deputy as soon as it becomes available.

Defence Forces Allowances

321. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Defence the amount paid in allowances, over and above salary, to personnel of the Permanent Defence Force employed with the Reserve Defence Force and with the Naval Service Reserve for the years 2011 to 2014; the number of personnel in receipt of such allowances; the rate per kilometre per engine capacity as regards travel allowances; the amount paid in travel allowance in each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5921/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): In the time available it has not been possible to compile all of the necessary information requested by the Deputy. The information will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

322. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Defence in respect of annual training, the amount deducted from the Reserve Defence Force and the Naval Service Reserve in each of the years 2011 to 2014 for officers and men in respect of rations, accommodation, PRSI, PAYE and universal social charge, showing the amounts separately and providing the numbers in respect of each rank; the numbers of each rank on annual training; the class of PRSI applied; if the PRSI, PAYE and universal social charge deductions were notified to the Department of Social Protection and to the Revenue Commissioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5922/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): In the time available it has not been possible to compile all of the necessary information requested by the Deputy. The information will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Defence Forces Operations

323. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Defence the extent of co-operation that the G2 Directorate of Intelligence undertakes with other intelligence agencies; if he will list the multinational surveillance programmes which the State is involved with or contributes to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5934/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Defence Forces Intelligence Branch provides regular assessments, reports and briefings to the Chief of Staff, the Minister for Defence and the Secretary General of the Department of Defence, relating to possible threats to the security of the State. Intelligence led liaison is conducted between Intelligence Branch and appropriate national authorities in other countries to counter any threat to the security of the State. The Intelligence Branch also maintains a very close and effective working relationship with their counterparts in An Garda Síochána.

For security and operational reasons, it would not be appropriate to make any further comment in relation to this matter.

Defence Forces Personnel

324. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Defence if a satisfactory reso-

lution has been reached in relation to addressing the 21-year limit for certain members of the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6048/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): By way of background, the unsatisfactory age and fitness profile of the Permanent Defence Force was an issue of serious concern during the 1990's and was the subject of severe criticism by a series of external reports, mainly PricewaterHouse Consultants and the Efficiency Audit Group (EAG). One of the key areas identified for urgent action by the EAG was the development of a manpower policy with an emphasis on lowering the age profile of Permanent Defence Force personnel. The EAG's report was accepted by Government in 1995. In an effort to alleviate the situation, the Government had already decided in 1993 to enlist personnel on a five year contract basis, following consultation with Permanent Defence Force Other Ranks Representative Association (PDFORRA). In 1997 agreement was reached with PDFORRA on a new manpower policy for the Defence Forces. This policy, applying to personnel enlisted after 1 January 1994, provided that service for Private Soldiers would initially be for five years with the option to be extended to a maximum of twelve years, subject to meeting standards of medical and physical fitness and conduct. Longer periods of service were envisaged for Non Commissioned Officers.

In 2004 PDFORRA submitted a claim under the Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme for a further review of the terms of service applying to personnel enlisting in the Permanent Defence Force after 1 January, 1994. A set of criteria was agreed with PDFORRA to provide longer careers for those who enlisted post 1994 while continuing to address the Government's objective of having an appropriate age profile to meet the challenges of a modern Defence Forces.

The criteria require that any person re-engaging after 12 years service must be able to continue to operate at their current level both at home and overseas on an ongoing basis. Re-engagement is subject to the individual soldier meeting specified criteria in regard to physical fitness, medical category, successful completion of military courses of instruction, service overseas and conduct ratings.

The maximum service period for these personnel is as follows:

- Enlisted Personnel, up to and including the rank of Corporal (and equivalent Naval Service rank), may not serve beyond 21 years service.
- Enlisted Personnel, in the rank of Sergeant (and equivalent Naval Service rank), may be permitted to continue in service up to the age of fifty years.
- Enlisted Personnel in all higher ranks may serve to the age of fifty-six.

The first effects of the agreement, whereby Privates and Corporals may not serve beyond 21 years, will be felt by Permanent Defence Force members in those ranks this year. A claim has been received from PDFORRA for a further review in relation to this matter. In accordance with normal procedures the Association's claim is being dealt with under the Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force, under which discussions are confidential to the parties involved. While there was significant progress made in recent discussions between PDFORRA and Civil and Military Management on this issue, it was not possible to reach full agreement. As a result, an adjudication hearing took place on 30 January 2015, following the exchange of submissions between the parties and the result of same is expected in the near future. In the meantime work is continuing on exit support measures to support those due to be discharged. A number of military courses and other skills courses are already accredited with various third level institutions and professional bodies. In addition, a comprehensive training course to aid transition to civilian life for these personnel, which involves a skills appraisal and review of a person's service history and training already provided, is currently being

piloted.

Defence Forces Personnel

325. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Defence the specific roles and positions the 12 new recruits at Custume Barracks in Athlone, County Westmeath have been assigned to since their posting; if and when more recruits will be posted to the barracks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6049/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): In December 2014 a total of 12 Private Soldiers who had completed their initial recruit training in other Defence Forces locations were posted to Units located within Custume Barracks in order to maintain Unit strengths and operational capability. These 12 personnel are currently undergoing further 2 and 3 star training outside of Custume Bks. This training is due to be completed in March 2015 at which time they will report for duties with their parent Units in Custume Barracks. These personnel will fulfil the duties of Private Soldiers and Artillery Gunners.

I am advised that at present there is a Recruit Platoon of 30 personnel (increased by 1 since my response to PQ 1308/15 of 14 January 2015) in training in Custume Barracks, Athlone. They are due to complete their initial training in early March this year and will be assigned to Units across the Defence Forces on an as required basis in order to maintain Unit strengths and operational capability. They will also go on to a period of further 2 and 3 star training prior to reporting for duties with their parent Units.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

326. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Defence the number of Defence Force personnel based at Custume Barracks in Athlone, County Westmeath; the number of personnel whose parent unit is not located in Athlone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6112/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The overall establishment figure for Custume Barracks, Athlone is 995 personnel. This figure represents the total number of appointments associated with the units stationed in Custume Barracks. The current strength of Custume Barracks is 940.

In addition to above, a number of personnel are attached to Custume Barracks while on courses of training, including recruit training. The current number of personnel in training in Custume Barracks is 66. Therefore, as at the 31st January 2015 the total strength of personnel in Custume Barracks stands at 1006.

Property Ownership

327. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to introduce new legislation governing the relationship between the sharers of boundaries and the growth and foliage thereon; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5501/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Difficulties experienced by property owners arising from the growth of trees, hedges and foliage on neighbouring land were raised in both the Dáil and Seanad during passage of the Land and Conveyancing Law

Reform Act 2009. My Department consulted on the matter with the Law Reform Commission and it took the view that unreasonable interference caused in such circumstances was a matter in any particular case for tort law or more generally for planning or environmental law.

In England and Wales, for example, legislation makes provision for local authorities to determine complaints by the owners or occupiers of domestic property who are adversely affected by hedges over 2 metres high. Broadly similar legislation, i.e. the High Hedges Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, came into operation in Northern Ireland on 31 March 2012.

The manner in which problems associated with high hedges and trees are resolved in both England and Wales and Northern Ireland demonstrates a clear preference for the resolution of such disputes at local level, preferably by mediation, with recourse to the courts only as a last resort. This reduces the risk of prolonged and costly litigation, and the further risk that court proceedings could leave a legacy of bitterness between neighbours and ill-feeling in the local community. The introduction of such legislation in this jurisdiction would be a matter for the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government and his Department.

Depending on the circumstances of the case, a person may, under existing law, be in a position to seek damages or an injunction requiring the cutting of boundary hedges or trees under the tort of nuisance. In order for the nuisance to be actionable, the person would have to show that an easement existed and that there had been a substantial interference with that right.

Mediation offers a viable, effective and efficient alternative to court proceedings in many cases, including disputes over boundaries and overhanging foliage. It can both reduce the legal costs involved and speed up the resolution of disputes. It is my intention to bring forward a mediation Bill to promote mediation as an alternative to court proceedings. The legislation, which is currently being drafted, will introduce an obligation on solicitors and barristers to advise any person wishing to commence court proceedings to consider mediation as a means of resolving a dispute before embarking on such proceedings. It will also provide that a court may, following the commencement of proceedings, on its own initiative invite parties to consider mediation and suspend the proceedings to facilitate the mediation process.

Garda Remuneration

328. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to review the position whereby new recruits to An Garda Síochána will not be paid the allowance for rent which was previously paid; if her attention has been drawn to the hardship this will cause to new members of the force; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5737/15]

334. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to re-introduce the annual rent allowance payable to new Garda recruits; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5570/15]

335. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will re-introduce the rent allowance of €4,000 per annum for the new recruits to An Garda Síochána, and in particular to those who are stationed in Dublin, in view of the very high cost of rent in the capital and the importance to the criminal justice system of the welfare of members of An Garda Síochána. [5582/15]

341. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will restore the rent allowance paid to members of An Garda Síochána; if she will restore other allowances

and payments paid to employees of her Department or agencies under her Department's remit that were cut or reduced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5714/15]

343. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if rent allowance will be reinstated to newly qualifying gardaí (details supplied). [5723/15]

344. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to review the position whereby new recruits to An Garda Síochána will not be paid the allowance for rent which was previously paid; if her attention has been drawn to the hardship this will cause to new members of the force; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5738/15]

347. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on sanctioning an increase in wages and/or restoring the rent allowance payment for the recent intake of trainee members of An Garda Síochána; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5758/15]

355. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will reverse the cuts to salary rates for the current intakes of Garda trainees; if she will reinstate the €4,000 rent allowance that has been abolished; her views that it is fair for trainee gardaí to be on a gross annual salary of €23,171, considerably less than the starting salary of the last group of trainees in 2009 who commenced on a starting salary of €31,000; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5912/15]

359. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the basic pay payable to a full-time member of An Garda Síochána and a student garda just recruited; the way this varies, depending on date of recruitment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5947/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 328, 334, 335, 341, 343, 344, 347, 355 and 359 together.

The current Garda recruit competition commenced in late 2013 and attracted over 20,000 applications. Details of the remuneration package, ie basic pay and other allowances including unsocial hours allowances, were made available to all applicants prior to their recruitment and I am providing with this answer a table of current basic pay for members at Garda rank together with the basic pay from 2009. These pay scales do not include any allowances. It is expected that newly attested Gardaí will be assigned to frontline duties and will work the Garda Roster system. This will immediately attract unsocial hours payments which, in addition with other relevant allowances amounts to over 25% of their earnings. Even at the entry level of €23,171 and the lower end of unsocial hours scale, this would add almost €5,800 to their salary.

The Deputies will be aware that under the 2013 Haddington Road Agreement, the current remuneration and conditions of service of members of An Garda Síochána together with an evaluation of annualised hours/shift pay arrangements are being examined as part of a wider review of An Garda Síochána.

However, the Deputies will also be aware that, following a review of all allowances in the public service in 2011 and 2012, rent allowance for all new public servants including Gardaí, Prison Officers and Fire Officers was abolished in early 2012. There are no plans to re-instate this allowance.

	2015	2009	
Recruits Allowance	€184 (weekly)	€203 (weekly)	Recruits Allowance
on Attestation 32 weeks	€23,171		
Year 1	€25,472	€ 27,100	On attestation 62 weeks
Year 2	€28,302	€ 29,792	after 22 weeks
Year 3	€29,834	€ 31,442	After 1 year
Year 4	€32,407	€ 34,224	After 2 years
Year 5	€35,840	€ 37,935	After 3 years
Year 6	€38,110	€ 40,389	After 4 years
Year 7	€40,163	€ 42,609	After 5 years
Year 8	€42,138	€ 44,744	After 6 years
Year 9	€42,138	€ 44,744	After 7 years
Year 10	€42,138	€ 44,744	After 8 years
Year 11	€42,138	€ 44,744	After 9 years
Year 12	€42,138	€ 44,744	After 10 years
Year 13	€43,857	€ 46,602	After 11 years
Year 14	€43,857	€ 46,602	After 12 years
Year 15	€43,857	€ 46,602	After 13 years
Year 16	€43,857	€ 46,602	After 14 years
Year 17	€43,857	€ 46,602	After 15 years
Year 18	€43,857	€ 46,602	After 16 years
Year 19	€45,793	€ 48,695	After 17 years

Legislative Programme

329. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when it is expected that the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Bill 2013 will complete Committee Stage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5813/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Bill 2013 is a comprehensive reform of the law relating to decision-making by persons with capacity difficulties. Its enactment will be a key step forward in enabling Ireland to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

My Department is currently preparing amendments for the Dáil Committee Stage of the Bill to respond to issues raised in submissions to my Department and to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality. The aim is to strengthen the safeguards contained in this legislation so that persons with capacity difficulties can exercise decision-making autonomy to the greatest extent possible. It is intended that Committee Stage will take place during this legislative session and that the Bill will be enacted this year.

Personal Insolvency Practitioners

330. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will report on her meeting on 28 January 2015 with a group of personal insolvency practitioners; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5892/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): At the end of January, the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and I met with representatives of the Insolvency Service of Ireland (ISI) and a selection of Personal Insolvency Practitioners (PIPs) in order to hear first-hand the PIPs' experience of working to put arrangements in place between people struggling with debt and their creditors.

While some financial institutions are constructively engaging in the process, clearly, others are not.

A number of suggestions were made by the PIPs with a view to improving engagement by creditors in the process.

I am considering those suggestions, and proposals received from a range of stakeholders, in the context of the review of the operation of the insolvency legislation to ensure that the ISI has the powers necessary to support families willing to work their way through their debt problems. This review follows the commitment in the Statement of Government Priorities 2014-2016.

Visa Applications

331. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding a temporary visa for Ukrainian citizens (details supplied) from the conflict area in Ukraine living in Dublin 3; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5455/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) in my Department, that there is no specific programme in place for residents of the Ukraine to travel to escape the conflict there. It is, of course, open to the family of the Irish citizen concerned to apply at any time for a visa to travel to Ireland. Any such application will be considered taking all the circumstances of the applicant(s) into account. However, the Deputy will be aware that our visa system is not intended to be a protection system.

Visa applications for Ukrainian nationals are processed by the dedicated Irish Visa Office in Moscow, which is a sub-office of INIS. This office handles all aspects of visa applications. Where it is unsafe or difficult for applicants to travel from their region to Kiev to submit their supporting documentation (including passports) to the Irish Honorary Consulate there, they may submit this documentation by post or courier directly to the visa office in Moscow or to the Irish Embassy in Warsaw.

It is open to a visa-required national to make a visa application for any purpose, the onus resting with the applicant to satisfy the Visa Officer as to why the visa should be granted. All information that the applicant wishes to have taken into consideration should be included with his or her application.

Guidelines on the visa application process, including details of the required supporting documentation can be found on the website of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department at www.inis.gov.ie. It should be borne in mind, however, that the information contained on the website is intended to act as guidance only; it does not limit the discretion of the Visa Officer in dealing with individual applications.

Garda Strength

332. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will sup-

port a matter (details supplied) regarding policing. [5505/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, 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 Clontarf Garda Station on 31 December 2014, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 68. There are also four Garda Reserves and one civilian attached to Clontarf 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 and another 100 last week. This has brought the number of recruits in the Garda College to 300 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 Clontarf Garda Station under review within the overall context of the needs of Garda Divisions throughout the country.

Garda Strength

333. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of gardaí in the force for each year from 2007 to 2015 to date; the number of gardaí in the Dublin metropolitan area in the same period; the number of recruits graduating from Templemore in the same period; and the number of gardaí expected to graduate from Templemore during the remainder of 2015. [5562/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, 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 arranged to send detailed tables of the information which the Deputy has requested directly to him.

Questions Nos. 334 and 335 answered with Question No. 328.

Court Procedures

336. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans, if any, to review and, if necessary, to amend the 1986 regulations contained in Statutory Instrument No. 15 of 1986, specifically in relation to Order 40, subsections (6), (9) and (15), which impose a strict requirement for the accurate inclusion of the prescribed information in all circumstances; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5640/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Statutory Instrument to which the Deputy refers comprises the Rules of the Superior Courts 1986. The Superior Court Rules Committee is established under the Courts of Justice Act 1936, as amended,

and its statutory remit is to make, annul, or alter rules of court to provide for the practice and procedure of the Superior Courts. This power is exercised with the concurrence of the Minister for Justice and Equality. Any amendment to the Rules of the Superior Courts is, of course, a matter for the Superior Courts Rules Committee.

Order 40 rule 15 of the Rules of the Superior Courts, which confers a discretion on the court to accept an affidavit sworn for use in court proceedings notwithstanding certain defects in the form of the affidavit, is a long established provision of court procedure - indeed, one which has been in place long before the introduction of the 1986 Rules. The discretion concerned is entirely a matter for the courts, and is exercised in accordance with principles established through case-law.

Garda Disciplinary Proceedings

337. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 325 of 23 September 2014, the reason the Garda Commissioner has not yet furnished the information sought; and if she will rectify the matter. [5667/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I wish to refer the Deputy to my letter of 09 February 2015 which contains the information sought.

Immigration Policy

338. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps in place to refuse the right of citizens from other European Union member states, with serious criminal records, from entering and remaining here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5693/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I refer the Deputy to my reply to his previous question (No. 328) dated 20 January 2015.

The Deputy will be aware that under the provisions of various EU legal instruments nationals of the EU Member States and the European Economic Area enjoy freedom of movement rights within the general area of the Union. Freedom of movement is subject to limitations and conditions and a Member State may refuse an EU national the right of entry or residence on the grounds of public policy, public security or public health. Measures affecting freedom of movement and residence must be based on the personal conduct of the individual concerned, and such conduct must represent a sufficiently serious and present threat to fundamental interests of the state.

Where any person, who is not a citizen of Ireland or the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, who is resident in the State, is known or suspected to have engaged in criminal activity, An Garda Síochána may provide relevant information to the Irish Naturalisation & Immigration Service (INIS) for the purpose of consideration being given to initiating a process for the purpose of arranging for their removal from the State. In the case of an EU national, this is done pursuant to Regulation 20 of the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2006.

It is also the case that any person residing in or visiting the State who is alleged to have committed a criminal offence in the jurisdiction will be made amenable to and subject to the laws of the State.

Garda Career Breaks

339. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda personnel in each Division who availed of a three-year career break in each year during which the facility was available; the number expected to return to their positions and when; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5706/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Incentivised Career Break Scheme for members of An Garda Síochána is part of the agreed terms set out in the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013 - 2016 (The Haddington Road Agreement). Appendix 3, the Collective Agreement for An Garda Síochána, provides that, among other things, the use of short-term career breaks, Incentivised career breaks, unpaid leave and family friendly schemes will also be made available. This agreement was entered into between the Garda Staff Associations and the management side. An incentivised Career Break for An Garda Síochána was announced on 7 March 2014.

The terms of the Scheme stated that a Garda member could commence the career break from 7 March 2014 but no later than 28 February 2015. The commencement date could be postponed only in the event that a member was on maternity leave on 28 February 2015 or if a decision was deferred in accordance with a discipline action. The latest date for returning from the incentivised Career Break is the 28 February 2018, unless the date was deferred for one of the reasons stated above. It is expected that all Garda personnel will return to duty on the expiry of their three year career break with 81 expected to return before the end of 2017 and the remaining 110 returning in 2018.

A breakdown of the number of Garda members who commenced their incentivised Career Break in 2014 and 2015, by Division is below.

Division	Number Commenced Career Break in 2014	Number commencing Career Break in 2015
CAVAN/MONAGHAN		4
CHANGE MANAGEMENT		1
CLARE	2	4
CORK CITY	3	9
CORK NORTH		1
CORK WEST	2	
CRIME AND SECURITY	1	
D.M.R. EAST	6	7
D.M.R. NORTH	6	8
D.M.R. NORTH CENTRAL	6	12
D.M.R. SOUTH	1	4
D.M.R. SOUTH CENTRAL	9	12
D.M.R. WEST	1	6
DIRECTORATE FINANCE	1	
DONEGAL	2	2
G.N.I.B.	1	1
GALWAY	3	2
KERRY		1
KILKENNY/CARLOW	1	3

Division	Number Commenced Career Break in 2014	Number commencing Career Break in 2015
LAOIS/OFFALY	4	1
LIAISON & PROTECTION	2	2
LIMERICK	3	9
LOUTH	1	1
MAYO	4	1
MEATH	1	3
N.B.C.I.	1	
NATIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES	1	
OPERATIONAL SUPPORT UNIT	1	
ROSCOMMON/ LONGFORD	1	1
S.D.U.		1
SECURITY & INTELLIGENCE	3	
SLIGO/LEITRIM	2	
TECHNICAL BUREAU	1	
TIPPERARY	2	1
TRAFFIC DIVISION (DMR)		3
WATERFORD		3
WESTMEATH	2	1
WEXFORD	1	5
WICKLOW	6	1
Total	81	110

Juvenile Offenders

340. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the deterrents in place for young persons under 12 years of age who are stealing from shops and businesses in County Carlow. [5713/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, the age of criminal responsibility was effectively raised from 7 to 12 years under Part 5 of the Children Act 2001, as substituted by Section 129 of the Criminal Justice Act 2006, which came into force on the 16th October 2006. No child under the age of 12 years can be charged with an offence. An exception is made for 10 and 11 year-olds charged with murder, manslaughter, rape, rape under Section 4 of the Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) Act, 1990 or aggravated sexual assault. In addition, the Director of Public Prosecutions must give consent for proceedings to continue against any child under the age of 14 years that has been charged with an offence.

Section 53 of the Children Act 2001 sets out a series of clear steps which a member of An Garda Síochána should undertake when dealing with any child under the age of criminal responsibility who commits an offence

Section 53(4) of the Children Act states that it is the duty of the HSE to apply for a care order or supervision order (in accordance with the Child Care Act 1991) where it appears to the HSE that the child is unlikely to receive the care and protection it requires under the circumstances described above.

The Deputy will be aware that the functions of the Health Service Executive under the Children Act 2001, as amended, transferred to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency under the Child and Family Agency Act 2013. In the circumstances you may wish to contact Tusla, which comes under the remit of my colleague the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, about their role in relation to such children.

Question No. 341 answered with Question No. 328.

Naturalisation Applications

342. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason there has been a delay of over eight months in processing the citizenship application of two persons (details supplied) in County Galway, considering that their application for certification of naturalisation was approved in July 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5715/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): 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 by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that further necessary evaluation of the cases is ongoing. As soon as enquiries are complete, my officials will be in further contact with the persons concerned.

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.

Questions Nos. 343 and 344 answered with Question No. 328.

Naturalisation Applications

345. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position and progress made to date in the determination of application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5751/15]

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. Processing of the application is ongoing and the case will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

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

Family Reunification

346. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality, further to Parliamentary Question No. 72 of 28 January 2015, if she will consider employing extra staff for the purposes of reducing waiting times for the family reunification visa, as opposed to using existing staff in her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5757/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As advised in my answer of Wednesday, 28th January, 2015, January, 2014, my predecessor, introduced a Policy Document on Non-EEA Family Reunification. Contained therein is a stated business target that visa applications to join Irish citizens should be dealt with within six months of receipt of application. A target of twelve months applies to other applications for family reunification. These processing times are in line with international norms for such applications. However, it must be made clear that these are business targets for the immigration service. Accordingly, they in no way constitute legal obligations.

These business targets reflect the detailed assessment that is required to be carried out in relation to applications for family reunification and are qualified by availability of resources. These targets are largely being met. Delays in achieving them are primarily related to processing more complex cases where the provision of additional documentation is requested by my officials, or where detailed assessments of family rights under the Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights are required, rather than to the availability of staff resources.

The stated targets are being largely met despite a 58% increase in the number of visa applications from persons wishing to join an Irish citizen spouse/partner from 2010 to 2014.

The management of resources is kept under constant review in my Department. As I stated in my previous reply, I must balance the needs of this specific area of my Department with the requirements of other areas.

In this regard, it must be borne in mind that 'join family' applications are not as time-bound as other forms of visa applications e.g. for the purpose of tourism, to study, to do business, to take up employment etc. and, therefore, the staff resources available for processing must be organised to deal, in a timely way, with these more time-bound applications while also progressing the more complex family reunification applications.

Question No. 347 answered with Question No. 328.

Garda Investigations

348. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if her Department is carrying out a full review of the murder of a person (details supplied). [5764/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The correspondence supplied by the Deputy contains a request by a third party to have the particular case reviewed

under the Independent Review Mechanism set up to consider allegations of Garda misconduct and inadequacies in the investigation of such allegations.

As the Deputy is aware, the Independent Review Mechanism was set up for the specific purpose of considering matters of, or relating to, Garda misconduct. The concerns raised in the material provided do not, on the face of it, appear to raise any issues of Garda misconduct but refer to matters which occurred during the course of a trial.

While I appreciate the difficulties and distress that people engaged in court proceedings can experience, the position is that the courts are subject only to the Constitution and the law, independent in the exercise of their judicial functions. The conduct of any court case is a matter entirely for the presiding judge. As the Deputy is aware, I cannot comment or intervene in any way in relation to how particular proceedings are conducted or on the outcome of those proceedings.

A copy of the correspondence was also forwarded directly to my Department by e-mail on 26 January 2015 and a reply will issue in due course.

Naturalisation Applications

349. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will examine the naturalisation application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; if this application will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5767/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a valid application for a certificate of naturalisation has been received from the person referred to by the Deputy. Processing of the application is well advanced and the case will be submitted to me for decision 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.

Road Safety Data

350. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on the Road Safety Authority figures from 29 October 2013, the date on which it took over as the single licensing authority, to 17 December 2014; in this period 9,611 drivers were disqualified in court, but 8,137 of these did not surrender their licences; and the number of drivers prosecuted for the offence of failing to surrender their licence when disqualified in 2013, 2014 and to date in 2015. [5800/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have sought the detailed views of an Garda Síochána in relation to the matter raised by the Deputy and I will be in contact directly when information is available.

Garda Deployment

351. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of gardaí, by year and by Garda division, stationed in each Dublin metropolitan region station in the years 2009 to 2014 and to date in 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5900/15]

353. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide, in tabular form, the current number of vacancies in senior Garda posts in the Dublin metropolitan region; when she will fill these posts; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5902/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 351 and 353 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, 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 arranged to send detailed tables of the information which the Deputy has requested directly to him.

Crime Data

352. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the Central Statistics Office's crime data for quarter 3 2014 will be published; the reason there is a delay in publication; the actions that have been taken in view of the criticisms of these statistics by the Garda Inspectorate; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5901/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will appreciate that, as the CSO is the independent national statistical agency, the timing and format of the recorded crime statistics which it publishes are matters for it to determine.

As the Deputy may be aware, the CSO has previously indicated that it is carrying out a detailed analysis of certain issues raised by the Garda Inspectorate in relation to the recording, classification and reclassification of crime, to see whether and to what extent they may have implications for the crime statistics which that Office produces. This process is currently ongoing and the CSO has indicated that it has resulted in a delay in publishing the Quarter 3 statistics for 2014.

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

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

crime information, and to bring outdated paper based practices into the 21st century.

Question No. 353 answered with Question No. 351.

Registration of Title

354. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when an application for first registration which has been in progress since May 2014 will be expedited (details supplied). [5908/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can inform the Deputy that under the Registration of Deeds and Title Act 2006, the Property Registration Authority (PRA) was established as and from 4 November 2006. The PRA replaces the Registrar of Deeds and Titles as the registering authority in relation to property registration in Ireland and, subject to the above Act, is independent in the performance of its functions.

The Deputy will be aware of the service to T.D.s and Senators which provides information on the current status of applications, such as the subject of this question, which was introduced in May 2006. The service provides a speedier, more efficient and more cost effective alternative to submitting Parliamentary Questions. It is operated by the PRA and is available all year round.

I can further inform the Deputy that his query has been forwarded to the PRA for attention and direct reply via the above mentioned service.

Question No. 355 answered with Question No. 328.

International Agreements

356. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide details of the memorandum of understanding or co-operation on information sharing arrangements, with regard to the criminal records of persons from other European Union countries and beyond; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5926/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS) provides for the transmission of information on a conviction handed down against the national of another Member State by the Member State of conviction to the Member State of the person's nationality and for transmission by the Member State of nationality to other Member States, on request, of information on national convictions registered in the national criminal record, information on convictions handed down in other Member States against its nationals, information on convictions handed down in third countries, subsequently transmitted to the Member State of nationality and entered in the national criminal record.

Prior to the establishment of ECRIS in 2012, information on convictions was exchanged through systems set up by the 1959 Council of Europe Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters. These arrangements still apply to exchanges of information with Council of Europe states that are not part of the EU.

Subsidiary Protection Applications

357. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress, to date, in the determination of an application for subsidiary protection, in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5935/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): If the person concerned has made an application for asylum or subsidiary protection, the Deputy will be aware that it is not the practice to comment on such applications for so long as they remain in the protection process. The position in this regard is in accordance with Section 19 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) which provides for the protection of the identity of asylum applicants.

Protection applicants are issued with a temporary residence permission pending a final decision on their application.

Gambling Legislation

358. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the licensing and regulatory framework initiatives being pursued by her Department to address the increasing incidences of gambling addiction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5941/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will be aware that the Government approved the General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill in July 2013. The Scheme is available on my Department's website and is with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel awaiting formal drafting. It is not possible as yet to indicate when the Bill is likely to be published.

This Bill will, upon enactment, replace all extant laws on gambling (with the exception of that governing the National Lottery). The new legislation will have consumer protection generally as one of its core principles, and it is envisaged that it will include several measures aimed at assisting and protecting vulnerable persons, the young and those for whom gambling has become a problem.

The Scheme, at Part 7, provides for a Fund to aid research, education and awareness activities and to support treatment programmes. The Fund will be based on contributions from the industry but the proposals will ensure independent supervision of its disbursement.

I am not aware of any specific national data or evidence, other than anecdotal evidence, that would support the Deputy's assertion about an increase in the numbers of persons presenting with gambling addiction problems. However, some limited scale research in this area is suggestive. I am not, therefore, in a position to comment on the matter. The scarcity of information on the scale and impacts of gambling underlines the need for measures such as the Fund I referred to above.

Question No. 359 answered with Question No. 328.

Haddington Road Agreement Review

360. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the commitment in the Haddington Road agreement to review the remuneration and conditions of service of An Garda Síochána; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5948/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The review under the Haddington Road Agreement will make recommendations on the use by An Garda Síochána of

the resources available to it, with the objective of achieving and maintaining the highest level of efficiency and effectiveness in its operations and administration.

The review encompasses all aspects of the operation and administration of An Garda Síochána.

The elements dealing with the remuneration and conditions of service of members of An Garda Síochána including an evaluation of annualised hours/shift pay arrangements and the appropriate structures and mechanism for the future resolution of matters relating to pay, industrial relations and attendant matters are being dealt with by Mr Ray McGee. Mr McGee was formerly the Deputy chair of the Labour Court.

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

Work on both elements of the review is under way and will be completed as soon as possible.

Visa Applications

361. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of a visa appeal in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5965/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The visa appeal referred to by the Deputy was submitted to the Irish Visa Office, Abu Dhabi on 29 December 2014. I have been advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department that the appeal is currently being examined by the Appeals Officer and a decision is expected shortly.

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

362. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position in respect of leave to remain in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; if she will indicate the correct procedure to be followed in this case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5966/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of an application having been received for residency in the State arising from marriage to an Irish citizen in respect of the person concerned.

It is open to the person concerned to make a written application to the Spouse of Irish National Unit, Residence Division, INIS, 13-14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 seeking residency in the State arising from her marriage to an Irish national. Details of how to make the application can

be found on the INIS website “www.inis.gov.ie” under Spouse of an Irish National.

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

Naturalisation Applications

363. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 363 of 3 February 2015, the specific grounds on which application for naturalisation was refused in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 14; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5972/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): A foreign national who is married to, or is the civil partner of, an Irish citizen for at least three years may apply for naturalisation under section 15A of the Irish Naturalisation and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, where the applicant has been continuously resident in the island of Ireland for the year immediately prior to the date of his or her application and has in addition been resident in the island of Ireland for two out of the four years prior to that year.

The marriage or civil partnership must be subsisting and recognised under Irish law. Section 15A provides that the Minister may waive certain conditions for naturalisation if satisfied that the applicant would suffer serious consequences in respect of his or her bodily integrity or liberty if not granted Irish citizenship.

An application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy was received in the Citizenship Division of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) on 19 November, 2014. On examination of the application submitted it was determined that the person in question did not have total residence in the island of Ireland of three years in the five years immediately prior to the date of application and therefore did not satisfy the statutory residency requirements as set out in the Act and referred to above. The person concerned was informed of this by letter on 20 January, 2015.

It is open to the individual referred to by the Deputy to lodge a further application for citizenship if and when he is in a position to meet the prescribed statutory requirements. The online Naturalisation Residency Calculator available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie can be used as a guide to whether an individual satisfies the naturalisation residency conditions and, if not, give an indication of how long they should wait before making an application.

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

Victim Support Services

364. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding homicide; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5974/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I will shortly be meeting with representatives of AdVIC, Advocates for Victims of Homicide, to hear from them first hand about their proposals for policy change. In relation to the items listed in the Deputy's question I reply under the following headings.

1. A state appointed victim liaison officer for families of homicide victims

I am not satisfied that the operation of a separate scheme parallel to the existing Garda Family Liaison Officers would prove in the best interests of providing an effective service in this area.

2. Garda Family Liaison Officer (FLO) scheme to be extended to all districts and FLOs to be given continuous training

I understand that the Garda Family Liaison Officer scheme is available in all districts and that Family Liaison Officers receive initial training.

3. Victim impact statement for all homicide victims

When an offender has been convicted of murder or manslaughter representatives of the family of the deceased victim may make a victim impact statement prior to sentence being passed. There is no requirement on a family to make such a statement and where a statement is not made no inference may be drawn by the court that the offence had little or no impact. If a judge thinks it is appropriate, the judge may allow a victim impact statement in other cases, for example a fatal road traffic incident.

4. Definition of manslaughter and murder to be changed to murder by degree

5. Minimum of 25 years imprisonment for first degree murder

6. Defined sentencing scales for other degree murder convictions

9. Revision of concurrent sentences

The mandatory sentence for murder is life imprisonment, as provided by section 2 of the Criminal Justice Act 1990. A sentence of life imprisonment means that the prisoner is subject to that sentence for the rest of his or her life. Such a prisoner has no right to be released early at any stage. If granted temporary release, the prisoner remains subject to the life sentence and can be recalled to prison at any stage. Currently a person sentenced to life is, on average, likely to spend 17-18 years in prison before receiving any extended period of temporary release.

The imposition of multiple life sentences, whether concurrently or consecutively, in a case where more than one murder is committed in the same incident, does not increase the severity of the sanction and has no such effect in practice or in law.

The offence of manslaughter does not attract a mandatory sentence but is punishable by a maximum of life imprisonment.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the courts are independent in the matter of sentencing, as in other matters concerning the exercise of judicial functions, subject only to the Constitution and the law. The approach of the Oireachtas has generally been to specify in statute a maximum penalty for an offence, so that a court, having considered all the circumstances of a case, may

impose an appropriate penalty up to that maximum. The court is required to impose a sentence which is proportionate not only to the crime but to the individual offender, in that process identifying where on the sentencing range the particular case should lie and then applying any mitigating factors which may be present. An important safeguard rests in the power of the Director of Public Prosecutions to apply to the Court of Criminal Appeal to review a sentence she regards as unduly lenient.

The prescription of mandatory prison terms in legislation is an exception to this general approach. I would draw the Deputy's attention to the Law Reform Commission 2013 Report on Mandatory Sentences, which recommends the repeal of existing presumptive mandatory minimum sentence provisions for various drugs and firearms offences. I would also draw the Deputy's attention to the Report on the Strategic Review of Penal Policy, published in September, which recommended that no further mandatory sentences or presumptive minimum sentences should be introduced.

I have no plans at present to amend the law to provide for a specific minimum term of imprisonment for murder or to replace the offence of manslaughter with offences of different degrees of murder.

7. Bail laws to be tightened and implemented by the judiciary

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.

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.

8. Parole and release

In September last year I published the report of the Penal Policy Review Group which was tasked with carrying out a strategic review of penal policy. As an initial step, the Government agreed, in principle, last November to proceed immediately with the bringing forward of legislative proposals to establish the Parole Board on an independent statutory basis. I believe this will help to strengthen the Board and improve its functions. My Department is currently

considering the matter in more detail ahead of presenting proposals for legislation.

10. Revision of article 10 of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

Section 10 of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme is being examined as part of an overall review of the Scheme itself which is currently underway in my Department.

Garda Vetting Applications

365. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to introduce a more streamlined process in respect of Garda vetting, particularly in the child care sector, where Garda vetting would remain with the person and not the organisation, by way of issuing a card and expiry date of no more than two years, a process which is operational in many European countries and Australia; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5990/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Ensuring the safety of children and vulnerable adults is the primary consideration in any vetting process and accordingly such vetting processes demand rigorous procedures to ensure their integrity and to maintain the highest level of confidence by the public and organisations availing of the service.

There is no arrangement in place whereby vetting reports are valid for fixed periods of time. Full vetting checks are conducted by the Garda Central Vetting Unit (GCVU) for each new vetting application received to ensure that the most recent data available is taken into account.

The current procedures for Garda vetting ensure the integrity of the system. This is because once there has been any significant lapse of time between one employment and another, the original Garda Vetting Disclosure would not include information regarding any recent criminal convictions, and the second employer could not safely rely on it.

Furthermore, under the Data Protection Acts, any sensitive personal data which employers use in regard to their employees must be current, accurate and up-to-date and employers would be exposed to civil liability if they knowingly recruited staff based on out-of-date criminal records information where the person in fact had a more recent criminal conviction. Effectively, the non-transferability and contemporaneous nature of the current process protects against the risk of fraud or forgery and is a guarantee of the integrity of the vetting service and such procedures are in line with best practice internationally.

There are, however, certain limited circumstances where organisations can share a single vetting disclosure where this is agreed to by the vetting applicant. For example, persons involved in voluntary work may be doing work with more than one voluntary organisation at the same time, and may agree with the vetting applicant to share a single vetting disclosure. Similar arrangements arise in the health sector in regard to persons working as locums, agency nurses or other temporary employees in a number of different organisations, or in the education sector where substitute teachers are on panels for substitute teaching in more than one school.

Finally, the current average processing time for vetting applications is four weeks. Any vetting process will take a certain minimum amount of time to complete and, taking into account the need to protect children and vulnerable adults while providing an effective and efficient service, I do not think that this time period is unreasonable.

Courts Service

366. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will investigate and clarify proposals to remove or downgrade court services in County Tipperary; if she will address issues raised in correspondence (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6017/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy is aware, the Courts Service Act 1998 provides that management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions, which include the provision of accommodation for court sittings.

However, in order to be of assistance I have had enquiries made and have been informed that during 2014, the Courts Service commenced a review of the overall delivery of court services, including probate services, in County Tipperary. The purpose of the review is to identify in consultation with all stakeholders a range of options which could be considered to enable the Courts Service to more efficiently and effectively maintain frontline court services in the county. The review will collate and analyse data on court business being conducted in Clonmel and Nenagh Courthouses. It will consider the appropriate operational structure which should underpin the provision of frontline services and the necessary support for court sittings in both locations.

I welcome the consultative approach which is being adopted by the Courts Service in seeking submissions on the review from any interested parties or local interests. The Courts Service had originally sought submissions by the end of November 2014 but they agreed to extend the timeframe for submissions to mid January 2015 to allow for the fullest possible consultation. I am informed that all submissions have now been received and there are some further consultations with key stakeholders and court users in the county to be completed. I have been assured by the Courts Service that all views received will be taken into account in the decision making process. The Courts Service anticipate that its report of the review of court services in County Tipperary will be completed by the end of March. It should, however, be noted that the final decision is a matter for the Courts Service Board. Under the statute I have no role or function in the matter.

Domestic Violence Policy

367. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will amend legislation in order to enable grandparents to seek and obtain barring orders against their grandchildren where it is necessary as an alternative to an injunction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6065/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Government is committed to introduce consolidated and reformed domestic violence legislation to address all aspects of domestic violence. In this regard, I intend to bring the General Scheme of a consolidated bill on domestic violence to Government early this year with a view to enactment later this year.

My Department has received a number of proposals in relation to the reform of our domestic violence legislative provisions including the extension of the availability of orders to other classes of applicants. All such proposals will be carefully considered during the legislative process for the Bill.

Guardian Status

368. **Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on the position of a family (details supplied); her plans to address this issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6067/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): There are two mechanisms under the current law through which a non-marital father can become a guardian of his children. If the mother agrees, the parents can jointly make a statutory declaration appointing the father as a guardian; alternatively, the father may apply to court to be appointed a guardian under Section 6A of the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964. The vast majority of such court applications are successful.

The Children and Family Relationships Bill which will be published very shortly, if enacted will ensure that more fathers are automatically the guardians of their children. Where the father lives with the child's mother for more than 12 consecutive months, of which at least 3 months are with the mother and the child after the child's birth, the Bill will provide that he will automatically be the guardian of the child. This will substantially improve the position of non-marital fathers generally, including in situations such as the Deputy has outlined.

Where a father is the guardian of his children or has a court order granting him custody, including shared custody, of the children, or there are proceedings pending, the Central Authority on Child Abduction may be able to provide assistance where the children are removed from the jurisdiction in breach of those rights of custody.

The procedures for dealing with situations of international parental child abduction involving countries which are party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction are set out in the Child Abduction and Enforcement of Custody Orders Act 1991. EC Regulation 2201/2003 supplements and supports the terms of the Hague Convention in instances of international child abduction between EU Member States excluding Denmark. The Deputy should note that the Hague Convention and EC Regulation 2201/2003 are applicable in the jurisdictions of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Further detail in relation to these instruments is available at www.justice.ie. under the "Youth Justice, Children and Family" heading.

A network of Central Authorities has been established in contracting states to facilitate applications for the return of children under the Hague Convention and the Irish Central Authority for International Child Abduction is located in my Department. The contact details for the Irish Central Authority are:

Spent Convictions Legislation

369. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide an update regarding the Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions) Bill which has been subject to delays, owing to legal issues concerning a case in the UK; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6125/15]

370. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide a timeframe on when the Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions) Bill will be brought through to completion; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6143/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 369 and 370 together.

The Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions) Bill has passed Committee Stage in the Dáil, hav-

ing passed all stages in the Seanad. However, before the Bill could be taken at Report Stage, a 2013 UK Court of Appeal judgment necessitated a review of the disclosure provisions in both the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 and the Spent Convictions Bill. That review has been completed and amendments to the Vetting Act and consequential amendments to the Spent Convictions Bill are currently being drafted. The Bill will be enacted at the earliest opportunity. Pending the amendment of the Bill, an Administrative Filter for Garda Vetting Disclosures has been introduced, which provides that certain minor offences that are over seven years old are no longer disclosed.

Magdalen Laundries

371. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will ensure that each Magdalen woman who is currently institutionalised, automatically and immediately receives personal advocacy services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6150/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Judge Quirke's recommendation on the issue of advocacy will be implemented. However, Judge Quirke makes a very clear distinction between what is required for most women and what is required for those lacking full mental capacity including those women that are in institutional settings.

I can advise the Deputy that women who were in the Magdalen laundries are already covered under section 21 of the Nursing Home Support Scheme Act 2009 which makes provision for persons to act as care representatives in respect of any person applying for support under that Act.

In addition, the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Bill 2014 is awaiting committee stage in the Dáil. This provides for a range of options including decision making assistants, co-decision makers, decision making representatives and the public guardian, which are well suited to look after the best interests of the women who were in Magdalen laundries and have capacity issues.

My Department are careful to ensure that applicants do have the necessary capacity to understand the scheme and sign the relevant legal documentation and they cross check with other Departments to establish if there any issues. A medical assessment is sought if there is any indication that an applicant under our scheme has capacity issues. We have identified about 40 such women to date and are delaying payment until proper safeguards are in place.

With regard to women who do not lack capacity, the Government has provided a grant to the Irish Women Survivors Support Network to provide advice and support to the women who are residing in the UK. Judge Quirke recommended the establishment of a dedicated unit which would assist women getting their entitlements and advocating on their behalf. My officials will be looking at how to develop this idea now that the dedicated unit in my Department has almost completed its primary task of processing applications and paying out cash benefits.

Child Care Services Provision

372. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 26 of 27 March 2014, and the introduction of changes impacting on community employment workers on placement, the difficulties that the changes would present to community child care facilities, and the commitment provided to considering how best to address the issue, if he will provide an update on the measures being taken to address the issue;

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5569/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Some community child care services are very dependent on Community Employment participants to make up their numbers. This is not always in the interests of children in services or indeed of the CE participants themselves. However, in recognition of the difficulties that the new qualification requirements could create for some services, this issue is being considered in the context of finalising the revised Child Care Regulations and in consultation with Tusla.

Early Childhood Care Education

373. **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. [5572/15]

384. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his views on the recommendations contained in correspondence (details supplied) regarding the early childhood sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5919/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 373 and 384 together.

I am aware of the relatively high cost of child care 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 Child Benefit, 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) programme 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 provides 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 coordinated, I am establishing a cross-departmental group to look at the provision right across the 0 to 6 age group as well as to consider the after-school needs of older school-going children. It is crucial that we develop a coherent whole-of-Government approach to investment in childcare services. This new group will include representatives of the 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.

Early Childhood Care Education

374. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position regarding increasing early childhood capitation funding and linking this to a nationally agreed pay scale; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5574/15]

375. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will introduce mechanisms to ensure that children with additional needs have the support they need to engage fully as equals in their early childhood education setting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5575/15]

376. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will ensure that provisions of child free hours and CPED days are part of all Government funded schemes, which will enable those working in the sector to fully implement the national curriculum and quality frameworks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5577/15]

377. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his views on raising the level of spending of 0.2% of gross domestic product to the European average of 0.7% on early childhood education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5639/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 374 to 377, inclusive, together.

I am aware of the relatively high cost of child care in this country and to help address the issue my Department supports a number of child care programmes that assist parents in accessing quality and affordable child care. These programmes are, of course, in addition to the support provided to all parents in the form of child benefit, 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) programme 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 provides 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 coordinated, I am establishing a cross-departmental group to look at the provision right across the 0 to 6 age group as well as to consider the after-school needs of older school-going children. It is crucial that we develop a coherent whole-of-Government approach to investment in childcare services. This new group will include representatives of the 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.

Early Childhood Care Education

378. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his plans to increase early childhood capitation funding and link to nationally agreed pay-scales; his plans to introduce mechanisms to ensure that children with additional needs have the supports they need to engage fully, as equals, in their early childhood education setting; if he will provide child-free hours and CPD days as part of all Government funded schemes, to enable those working in the sector to implement fully the national curriculum and quality frameworks; if he will raise the current level of spending of 0.2% of Gross Domestic Product in view of early childhood funding, that has been shown to be very beneficial; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5822/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I am aware of the relatively high cost of child care in this country and to help address the issue my Department supports a number of child care programmes that assist parents in accessing quality and affordable child care. These programmes are, of course, in addition to the support provided to all parents in the form of child benefit, 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) programme 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 provides childcare supports to eligible parents returning to work.

The aforementioned 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 coordinated, I am establishing a cross-Departmental group to look at the provision right across the 0 to 6 age group as well as to consider the after-school needs of older school-going children. It is crucial that we develop a coherent whole-of-Government approach to investment in childcare services. This new group will include representatives of the 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.

Direct Provision System

379. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if funding will be sourced to establish an art therapy service for children in direct provision accommodation centres (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5897/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I can inform the Deputy that I have no ministerial responsibility for direct provision accommodation centres provided by the Reception and Integration Agency, which come under the remit of my colleague, the

Minister for Justice and Equality.

Social Workers Recruitment

380. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of social workers that are full-time and currently in post, that is, not on sick leave, maternity leave and so on, and comparable figures on the same for previous years, that is 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014; if he will provide a breakdown of same in tabular form. [5903/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): My officials have requested the information from the Child and Family Agency and I will forward the reply to the Deputy once I have been furnished with it.

Children and Family Services

381. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide figures on the average frequency of visitations between social workers and the children in their care; if he will provide a breakdown, in tabular form, of these figures by level of priority; and if he will provide comparative figures, in tabular form, for the years 2010 to 2014, inclusive. [5904/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I have been informed by the Child and Family Agency that data on the frequency of visits requested by the Deputy is not collected for statistical reporting. Regulations for foster and residential care set minimum intervals between visits of 3 months initially and, after 2 years, the maximum interval is 6 months. Visits may be as frequent as considered necessary and are often in excess of the frequency required under the regulations. The frequency of visits is considered on a case to case basis as part of the child's care plan. The need for visits would be further considered as part of care plan reviews and monitored as part of the inspection regime for that service. The Agency has provided my Department with a breakdown of the number of children in care, number of children in care with an allocated social worker and number of children in care with a written care plan for the past five years. It is provided below for the assistance of the Deputy.

Children in Care 2010 to October 2014

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
The number of children in the care of the State	5,964	6,160	6,332	6,460	6,454
The no of children in the care of the State with a written care plan	5,376	5,567	5,544	5,646	5,781
as % of Children in Care	90%	90%	88%	87%	90%
The no of children in the care of the State with an allocated social worker	5,558	5,706	5,816	5,933	5,982
as % of Children in Care	93%	93%	92%	92%	93%

(Source: Child and Family Agency)

Homeless Persons Data

382. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children and young persons who have presented at homeless services in the past year; and if he will provide, in tabular form, figures on the number of young persons who have left State care and who have presented at homeless services in the past year in comparison with the years 2010 to 2014, inclusive. [5905/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): As the Deputy can appreciate, policy responsibility for homelessness, insofar as it extends to my Department, relates to children under 18 and any child welfare and protection concerns that may arise in the context of the Child Care Act 1991. A child can only be received into the care of the Child and Family Agency where there are welfare or protection concerns. Homelessness as part of a family group is not, in of itself, a basis for seeking to receive a child into care. Responsibility for young adults (aged over 18 years) presenting as homeless lies primarily with the local authorities and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. In light of this, I have been advised by the Agency that it does not collect the data requested by the Deputy and cannot provide it in the format as requested.

I would note, however, that where a child under 18 years of age presents as homeless and it is not possible to reunite them with their family, then the child may be taken into care. In some circumstances, a child aged 16 or 17 years of age may be accommodated and supported by the Agency under section 5, accommodation of homeless children, of the Child Care Act 1991. The Child and Family Agency does capture some information on children aged 16 and 17 years presenting as homeless and who are referred to the Agency under section 5 of the Child Care Act 1991. The Agency advises that there were 26 children who were accommodated under section 5 of the Act in the year to the end of the third quarter of 2014. The regional breakdown reported was 1 in Dublin Mid-Leinster, 5 in Dublin North East, 13 in the South and 7 in the West. Figures for previous years can be found in the Review of Adequacy reports published under section 8 of the Act.

Young adults, generally in the age range of 18 to 23 years old, who were formerly in the care of the State and presently in receipt of aftercare services will, as part of this support, have their accommodation needs identified. As of September 2014, the Agency reported that there were 1,698 young adults aged 18 to 23 in receipt of an aftercare service and education participation in this group was on a par with the national participation rate of 56%. In respect of homelessness, I have been advised by the Agency that it does not collect statistics on young adults (over 18 years) who present themselves as such to local authorities.

Last year, a protocol was established between the County and City Management Association and the Child and Family Agency in relation to the assessment of housing needs for young people leaving care. The aim of the protocol is to make the assessment and allocation of social housing, where deemed to be the most appropriate response to the young person's need, more efficient and seamless. It is hoped this will facilitate an improved service for those leaving care in obtaining social housing suitable to their needs.

Foster Care

383. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding foster care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5906/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): As the Deputy may appreciate, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on an individual case. I have requested

a report from the Child and Family Agency in relation to this case and I will revert to the Deputy when this is to hand.

Question No. 384 answered with Question No. 373.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

385. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the way children's disabilities are being facilitated in preschool settings; the amount made available to support such facilitation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6040/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme was introduced in January 2010 and provides a free preschool year to all eligible children before they commence primary school. The programme, which is a free and universal provision, represents an annual investment of approximately €175 million.

To ensure that the ECCE programme is more accessible to children with special needs, a number of additional provisions have been added. These include an exemption from the upper age limit for qualification under the programme where a child is developmentally delayed and would benefit from starting primary school at a later age. In addition, children with special needs can apply to have the preschool year split over two years on a pro-rata basis, for example availing of the programme for 2 days a week in the first year and for 3 days a week in the second year.

Many children with special needs avail of the free preschool year in mainstream childcare services without any additional supports. I am aware that the Health Service Executive does, where possible, assist children with special needs who may require additional support to enable them to avail of preschool services in mainstream settings.

My Department has been working with the Department of Health in the context of building better supports to facilitate the children with special needs. The aim is to develop an agreed framework for the provision of resources to support special needs children in mainstream childcare settings.

Magdalen Laundries

386. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Health the reason survivors of the Magdalen laundries are not entitled to Health (Amendment) Act cards provided by the Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5632/15]

388. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the particular Health (Amendment) Act, HAA, card services the Government has determined not to be directly relevant to Magdalen women; when a comprehensive guide to this card will be made available to the women; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6151/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 386 and 388 together.

The Health (Amendment) Act 1996 provides for the making available without charge of certain health services to persons who contracted hepatitis C in the State from a blood product or blood transfusion. In his report, Mr Justice Quirke recommended, inter alia, that legislation be

introduced to give effect to his recommendation on the provision of health services to Magdalen women. To this end, the Minister for Justice has published the Redress for Women Resident in Certain Institutions Bill 2014. This Bill is to make provision for the making available without charges of certain health services to certain women who were admitted to and worked in certain institutions, to provide that those women shall not be required to pay charges for acute in-patient services, and to amend the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act 2009.

The Bill completed Committee Stage in the Dáil last week and is scheduled for Report Stage on 10 February 2015. It is anticipated that it will continue its passage through both Houses over the coming weeks. The final provisions of the Bill will be determined in the course of the Oireachtas debate.

Health Services Staff

387. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health the retirement packages available for domestic staff in community hospitals (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6128/15]

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.

Question No. 388 answered with Question No. 386.

Medicinal Products Availability

389. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if a decision has been made by the Health Service Executive to include the drug Daxas in the community drugs scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5456/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicinal products under the community drugs schemes in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

The decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds by the HSE on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics. They are not political or ministerial decisions.

The HSE received an application for the inclusion of Roflumilast or Daxas® to give it its brand name in the GMS and community drugs schemes. The National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics conducted a pharmacoeconomic evaluation of Daxas in 2010.

The assessment report concluded that the manufacturer had not demonstrated the cost effectiveness of Roflumilast. The HSE considered this report and other evidence but was unable to support reimbursement as the available evidence submitted by the pharmaceutical company was insufficient. In these circumstances, Roflumilast, was not added to the HSE Reimbursement List.

I understand that the pharmaceutical company Takeda have a multinational clinical trial on-going in an attempt to develop sufficient evidence to allow the HSE and other international reimbursement agencies to re-consider reimbursement. To date there is no evidence of publica-

tion of the results of the new clinical trial by Takeda, however, it is expected that the company will re-submit a pricing and reimbursement application when the results of this trial are available to it.

Vaccination Programme

390. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if a decision was made by the National Immunisation Advisory Committee, NIAC, in respect of sanctioning of the meningitis B vaccine; if so, when it will be rolled out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5477/15]

418. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Health his plans to include a vaccine for meningitis B into the national immunisation scheme; the contact there has been between his Department, the Health Service Executive and the National Immunisation Advisory Committee on the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5670/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 390 and 418 together.

The immunisation programme in Ireland is based on the advice of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC). The NIAC is a committee of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland comprising of experts in a number of specialties including infectious diseases, paediatrics and public health. The committee's recommendations are informed by public health advice, international best practice, and a cost effective analysis conducted by the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics.

NIAC has issued guidance in relation to the use of the Meningitis B vaccine in the control of clusters or outbreaks of Meningococcal B disease.

My Department has recently received a letter from the Chairman of NIAC regarding the introduction of the Meningitis B vaccine into the Primary Childhood Immunisation Schedule. This matter will be considered by my Department.

Prescription Charges

391. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce the prescription charge for those with medical cards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5488/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Prescription charges are part of a set of measures introduced by Government in recent years to reduce pharmaceutical drugs expenditure. Medical card holders are required to pay a prescription charge of €2.50 per item for medicines and other prescription items supplied to them by community pharmacists, subject to a cap of €25 per month for each person or family. Prescription charges do not apply to children in the care of the Health Service Executive or to methadone supplied to patients participating in the Methadone Treatment Scheme.

There are no plans to amend the prescription charge, however, I am pleased that the prescription charge is frozen at the level set in 2014 as was announced as part of the packet of health measures in Budget 2015.

Under the Drug Payment Scheme, no individual or family pays more than €144 per calendar

month towards the cost of approved prescribed medicines. The scheme significantly reduces the cost burden for families and individuals incurring ongoing expenditure on medicines.

Medical Card Applications

392. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5493/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

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

Health Services Provision

393. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if the diabetes watch programme has been discontinued nationally and in County Louth; the alternatives that have been put in place for chiropody services for diabetics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5498/15]

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.

Medical Card Applications

394. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if a medical card will be approved as a matter of urgency in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny, in view of the range of medical issues with which that person must deal; and if he will expedite the matter. [5500/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

10 February 2015

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

Disability Services Funding

395. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that the Central Remedial Clinic, Dublin 3, will receive the maximum support in 2015. [5503/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Government currently provides funding of almost €1.5 billion to the Disability Services Programme through the Health Service Executive's (HSE's) National Service Plan for 2015 and is committed to protecting front-line services for people with disabilities. In 2015, the HSE is seeking to maximise the provision of services within available resources and to maintaining a level of services consistent with that provided in 2014. The HSE is currently in discussion with all voluntary health service providers, including the Central Remedial Clinic, regarding funding and service arrangements for 2015. The Central Remedial Clinic, Dublin 3, will receive the maximum support for 2015.

Hospital Waiting Lists

396. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the reasons a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny was removed from the waiting list at University Hospital Waterford where that person was to be seen as a matter of urgency by an ear, nose and throat specialist; if the four to five years that person is on the waiting list will now be considered in the context of an early appointment as the person has a hole in the ear drum; and if he will expedite same. [5539/15]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

397. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if a more immediate date for an operation will be provided in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5545/15]

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

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

Nursing Staff Remuneration

398. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health his plans to make changes to the pay and remuneration received by nurses participating in the graduate nursing scheme in order that they will have parity of income and remuneration with their colleagues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5573/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Under the Haddington Road Agreement (HRA), nurses and midwives participating in the Graduate Nurse Programme are paid 85% of the first point of the Staff Nurse/Midwifery Scale in the first year, €23,129, and 90% in the second year, €24,490. Slightly higher scales apply for Mental Health Nurses, €23,667 in the first year and €25,059 in the second year, maintaining previous relativities. In addition, participating nurses would also be in receipt of allowances and other premium payments.

The HRA specifies that any subsequent appointment following completion of the Graduate Nurse Programme will be to the third point of the staff nurse salary scales. In addition, under the Agreement, the January 2011 new entrant salary scales have now been assimilated with the scales applicable to those who were in the Public Service prior to January 2011. The Graduate Programme is a HRA provision and the HRA provides for a re-examination of the Programme when the Agreement is being reviewed.

I hope that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Blood Donations

399. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health his views on a project (details supplied) regarding blood donation; if he will support this worthy project of awareness of blood donation and its aim to decrease the age of consent to donate blood from 18 to 17 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5580/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I would like to offer my support and encouragement to the Transition Year students in the Sacred Heart Secondary School Tullamore with their Young Social Innovators project. I commend them for their efforts to raise awareness on the importance of blood donation.

The Irish Blood Transfusion Service (IBTS) is responsible for providing a safe and reliable 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 organisation is to ensure that it always has the necessary programmes and procedures in place to protect both the donors of blood and recipients of blood and blood products.

The IBTS is continually seeking ways to recruit donors and to raise awareness of the importance of blood donation. It 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.

The IBTS has no plans to reduce the age of consent for blood donations to 17 years of age. They have advised that they are not in a position to reduce the age of consent due to a higher

rate of adverse reactions, such as fainting, in younger donors.

Home Help Service

400. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when vital home help will be provided in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5614/15]

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.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

401. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide the details of the long-term illness card and the list of condition-specific medications for diabetes mellitus; if certain medications such as Proton pump inhibitors might be included for those listed as having diabetes mellitus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5618/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Long Term Illness (LTI) Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act, 1970 (as amended). Regulations were made in 1971, 1973 and 1975 specifying the conditions covered by the LTI Scheme, which are as follows: Acute Leukaemia; Mental handicap; Cerebral Palsy; Mental Illness (in a person under 16); Cystic Fibrosis; Multiple Sclerosis; Diabetes Insipidus; Muscular Dystrophies; Diabetes Mellitus; Parkinsonism; Epilepsy; Phenylketonuria; Haemophilia; Spina Bifida; Hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide.

Under the LTI scheme, persons suffering from the prescribed conditions are provided with an LTI Book which details the drugs, medicines and medical and surgical appliances for the treatment of that condition which are provided free of charge.

As the HSE is responsible for the administration of the LTI Scheme the HSE has been asked to examine the additional information requested and 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 they will follow up the matter with them.

Health Services

402. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the services that will be put in place in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5622/15]

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.

Home Care Packages

403. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if there is a maximum limit on the amount of hours of home help or care provided under a home care package; the supports available to families who require a sufficient home care package to be put in place to bring their loved ones home and where they have only been offered minimal hours; the costs associated with providing 40 hours of home care as opposed to the cost of a person remaining in hospital full time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5624/15]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

404. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical procedure in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5626/15]

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

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

Hospital Appointment Status

405. **Deputy Brian Walsh** asked the Minister for Health if a surgical appointment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5629/15]

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

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

National Children's Hospital

406. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health his views on a submission (details supplied) regarding the national children's hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5637/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board is the statutory body responsible for planning, designing, building and equipping the new children's hospital. The new hospital will be co-located with St James's Hospital, and ultimately tri-located with a maternity hospital to be developed on campus. In addition to the main hospital, the project includes two satellite centres at the campuses of Tallaght and Connolly Hospitals.

A design team has been procured and is working on detailed design development, with the aim of submitting a planning application in June 2015. Subject to planning, work will commence at the main site at St. James's, and at satellite centre sites at Connolly and Tallaght, in January 2016.

I am aware of the issues raised in the correspondence you have supplied and have recently responded directly to the individual concerned. Officials in my Department will arrange to provide the Deputy with a comprehensive response to all the issues raised in the attached correspondence with this Parliamentary Question.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

407. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a list of social activities that are expected to be covered in nursing homes under the fair deal scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5642/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme provides financial support towards the cost of long-term residential care services in nursing homes. The Scheme covers the cost of the standard components of residential care, which are:-

- nursing and personal care appropriate to the level of care needs of the person,
- bed and board,
- basic aids and appliances necessary to assist a person with the activities of daily living, and
- laundry service.

Part 8 of the Health Act 2007 (Care and Welfare of Residents in Designated Centres for Older People) Regulations 2009 stipulates that the registered provider of the nursing home must agree a contract with each resident within one month of their admission. This contract must include details of the services to be provided to that resident and the fees to be charged. The HSE is not a party to such contracts which are concluded between each resident and their nursing home.

HSE Investigations

408. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his views regarding progress in the

investigation at Áras Attracta; if he will confirm that none of the staff under investigation have recently been promoted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5645/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Like others, I was shocked and distressed by the revelations of extremely poor and unacceptable standards of care and mistreatment of vulnerable adults in Áras Attracta. Every person who uses our disability services is entitled to expect and receive supports of the highest standard and to live in an atmosphere of safety and care.

The safeguarding and protection of vulnerable people in the care of the health service is of paramount importance and the Director General of the HSE has written to all staff instructing them to take personal responsibility for ensuring that individuals supported by the HSE in any setting are treated with dignity and respect.

In December 2014, the HSE initiated both an expert investigation chaired by Mr Christy Lynch, and an independently chaired review of services at this facility led by Dr Kevin McCoy.

The Garda investigation into allegations of abuse at the centre is ongoing and the Garda had requested that a stay is placed on HSE investigations until such time as the Garda investigation is completed. I welcome the fact that the Garda has now cleared the way so that Mr. Lynch's investigation can commence. I have asked the HSE to keep me informed of progress.

Mr Lynch's investigation team is working independently of the HSE and will form an important input into any disciplinary process which the HSE will undertake.

A full assurance review has also been commissioned of all of the Units in the Áras Attracta facility under the independent chairmanship of Dr. Kevin McCoy, assisted by 3 independent experts within the field. The group will review the programme of work already implemented on foot of the reports from HIQA and HSE Audits to establish their effectiveness, identify the gaps that arose and make recommendations for further improvements for each unit at Áras Attracta. In addition the output from the Review Team will help to inform a system-wide programme of improvement and assurance for all residential centres, including a mechanism for input from service users and their families, staff at all levels throughout the sector and academia.

The HSE has undertaken a number of additional initiatives to ensure that quality and safe care in residential services for people with disabilities is appropriately implemented and monitored.

A six-step plan will address this in a systematic way. These steps are:

- The establishment of a National Implementation Taskforce, including a series of National Summits to improve client safety, dignity, respect and culture;

- Implementation of the *National Policy & Procedures on Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse*;

- Development of an Advocacy programme;

- Implementation of an evaluation and quality improvement programme in disability residential centres;

- Development of an implementation plan for any recommendations arising from the McCoy review of residential services in Áras Attracta when complete, and

- Development of long term sustainable & evidence-based safeguarding practices and training programmes specific to residential settings.

I can assure the Deputy that my Department will monitor progress on the initiatives and processes commissioned by the HSE in relation to Áras Attracta, to ensure that the learning from this incident is promulgated throughout our health system.

As the second part of 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, she can contact my Private Office and they will follow the matter up with the HSE.

Dental Services

409. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) in County Kildare is entitled to assistance for dental work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5647/15]

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 Appointments Administration

410. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Offaly will receive a hospital appointment. [5648/15]

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

Health Insurance

411. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons availing of private health insurance in 2014 in each of the following age groups: 17 years and under, 18 to 29 years, 30 to 39 years, 40 to 49 years, 50 to 59 years, 60 to 69 years, 70 to 79 years, and 80 years and over. [5650/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The table below provides a breakdown of the most recent data available by age category from the Health Insurance Authority, which is compiled in respect of the commercial health insurers and excludes members of Restricted Membership Undertakings (which provide insurance to people who are members of a particular group, normally a vocational group or employees of a particular organisation).

Age Group	Membership for the Market as of 1 July 2014
Aged 17 and under	452,979 (24.0%)

Aged 18 to age 29	204,473 (10.8%)
Aged 30 to age 39	286,310 (15.2%)
Aged 40 to age 49	292,718 (15.5%)
Aged 50 to age 54	134,965 (7.2%)
Aged 55 to age 59	126,092 (6.7%)
Aged 60 to age 64	114,962 (6.1%)
Aged 65 to age 69	100,513 (5.3%)
Aged 70 to age 74	71,673 (3.8%)
Aged 75 to age 79	49,964 (2.7%)
Aged 80 to age 84	30,429 (1.6%)
Aged 85 and over	19,496 (1.0%)
Total	1,884,574 (100.0%)

Primary Medical Certificates Applications

412. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for a primary medical certificate in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5652/15]

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.

HSE Investigations

413. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding investigations into Áras Attracta in Swinford, County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5655/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Like others, I was shocked and distressed by the revelations of extremely poor and unacceptable standards of care and mistreatment of vulnerable adults in Áras Attracta. Every person who uses our disability services is entitled to expect and receive supports of the highest standard and to live in an atmosphere of safety and care.

The safeguarding and protection of vulnerable people in the care of the health service is of paramount importance and the Director General of the HSE has written to all staff instructing them to take personal responsibility for ensuring that individuals supported by the HSE in any setting are treated with dignity and respect.

In December 2014, the HSE initiated both an expert investigation chaired by Mr Christy Lynch, and an independently chaired review of services at this facility led by Dr Kevin McCoy.

The Garda investigation into allegations of abuse at the centre is ongoing and the Garda had requested that a stay be placed on HSE investigations until such time as the Garda investigation is completed. I welcome the fact that the Garda has now cleared the way so that Mr. Lynch's investigation can commence. I have asked the HSE to keep me informed of progress.

Mr Lynch's investigation team is working independently of the HSE and will form an important input into any disciplinary process which the HSE will undertake.

A full assurance review has also been commissioned of all of the Units in the Áras Attracta facility under the independent chairmanship of Dr. Kevin McCoy, assisted by 3 independent experts within the field. The group will review the programme of work already implemented on foot of the reports from HIQA and HSE Audits to establish their effectiveness, identify the gaps that arose and make recommendations for further improvements for each unit at Áras Attracta. In addition the output from the Review Team will help to inform a system-wide programme of improvement and assurance for all residential centres, including a mechanism for input from service users and their families, staff at all levels throughout the sector and academia.

The HSE has undertaken a number of additional initiatives to ensure that quality and safe care in residential services for people with disabilities is appropriately implemented and monitored.

A six-step plan will address this in a systematic way. These steps are:

- The establishment of a National Implementation Taskforce, including a series of National Summits to improve client safety, dignity, respect and culture;

- Implementation of the *National Policy & Procedures on Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse*;

- Development of an Advocacy programme;

- Implementation of an evaluation and quality improvement programme in disability residential centres;

- Development of an implementation plan for any recommendations arising from the McCoy review of residential services in Áras Attracta when complete, and

- Development of long term sustainable & evidence-based safeguarding practices and training programmes specific to residential settings.

I can assure the Deputy that my Department will monitor progress on the initiatives and processes commissioned by the HSE in relation to Áras Attracta, to ensure that the learning from this incident is promulgated throughout our health system.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

414. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health regarding the provision of swimsuit and swimming prosthesis for breast cancer patients, if the Health Service Executive has stopped approving them in certain areas throughout the country, including Dublin; if so, if he will provide details of the locations; his plans to reinstate this service; if so, when; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5660/15]

415. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health regarding the provision of mastectomy prosthesis and surgical bras, the difference in the funding provided to Health Service Executive areas throughout the country including Dublin; if he will provide, in tabular form, the funding made available for each item in these areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5661/15]

416. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form

the waiting time for approval for mastectomy prosthesis and surgical bras in every Health Service Executive area throughout the country, including the Dublin areas, those waiting two to three weeks, six weeks, eight weeks, 12 weeks and longer since September 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5662/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 414 to 416, inclusive, together.

A national group has been established in the HSE to review practices in the area of aids and appliances. This review will include policy and procedures applying to the provision of breast prostheses and bras for women who have had mastectomies. The Group will complete its work this year and it is expected that the implementation of its recommendations will lead to standardised procedures nationwide.

With regard to the specific service related queries raised in the Deputy's question, including the funding made available in HSE areas and waiting times for prosthesis and surgical bras, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to him.

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

Medical Card Eligibility

417. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the reason applications for medical cards from persons, who are in receipt of assistance under the farm support scheme, are not being processed by the Health Service Executive unless the applicant can provide a notice of self-assessment (details supplied); the reason the Health Service Executive will not accept the fact they have little or no tax liability; the reason the Health Service Executive is determined to make these persons undergo this process and oblige them to employ a tax advisor or an accountant at a cost of €500 to prove that they owe no tax; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that, in view of this, many of these persons are not taking their necessary prescribed medication, such as for blood pressure, cholesterol, arthritis and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5665/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

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

Question No. 418 answered with Question No. 390.

Home Care Packages

419. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health regarding the home care pack-

age, if a care provider is unable to fill the hours allocated to a client, if the Health Service Executive is entitled to withdraw the hours allocated to that client; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5671/15]

420. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health regarding the home care package, if, where the hours allocated have been divided between spouses and the care provider is not in a position to fill one of the client's hours, that client can have their hours reallocated to another care provider who would be able to fill the hours; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5672/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 419 and 420 together.

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

Medical Card Applications

421. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if and when a medical card will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5676/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

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

Hospital Services

422. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if particular difficulties were experienced at Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9 on the weekend of 31 of January 2015, in view of the case of a person (details supplied). [5677/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Firstly I would like to extend my sympathies to the family of the person concerned. With regard to the matter raised by the Deputy, this is a matter for the Health Service Executive, therefore I have asked the them 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 Services

423. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the plans the Health Service Executive has for the staff of the palliative care unit, which has been constructed at Saint Ita's Community Hospital, Newcastle West, County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5681/15]

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

Primary Care Strategy

424. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the roll-out of the Government's primary care strategy; the number of primary care centres currently in operation; the services currently available in each, and the future plans for increased service provision or the development of additional centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5683/15]

425. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the progress that has been made in implementing the programme for Government's commitment to widening access to primary care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5684/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 424 and 425 together.

The implementation of the Primary Care Strategy is an essential component of the health service reform process. The key objective is to develop services in the community which will give people direct access to integrated multi-disciplinary teams of general practitioners, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and other allied health professionals.

The development of the Teams is a work in progress with enhancements occurring in terms of team membership and organisational delivery over time. At the end of December 2014, core Team staff amounted to approximately 3,000, providing services for almost 4 million of the population.

264.5 Primary Care Team posts (Public Health Nurses; Registered General Nurses; Occupational Therapists; Physiotherapists; and Speech & Language Therapists) were approved in 2013. 247 posts are now filled or start dates agreed. The recruitment process is continuing regarding the remaining posts.

On 8 October, the HSE launched the Community Healthcare Organisations Report. The Report sets out plans for a comprehensive reorganisation of health services outside the acute hospital system. The primary focus is to provide the maximum proportion of care to people in the communities where they live and to achieve joined-up, integrated services.

The present 17 Integrated Service Areas will be replaced by nine Community Healthcare Organisations, which will be part of the HSE. Existing resources will be reorganised into 90 Primary Care Networks, each serving about 50,000 of the population. Each network will be headed by an identified, accountable person responsible for care delivery by professionals such as nurses, therapists and social workers so as to meet a wide range of people's needs in a joined-up way. There will be strong GP involvement and a focus on decision-making at local level. The new structures will also have a strong focus on building good linkages with the acute hospital system so that people's care pathways are appropriately planned and their needs met in the right

setting.

The implementation of the recommendations of the CHO Report, including the establishment of the CHOs and their management structures, has been listed as a key priority of the HSE's National Service Plan for 2015. The HSE has appointed seven of the nine Chief Officers. The process is ongoing in relation to the remaining two posts.

There are currently 8 Community Intervention Teams (CITs) in place in Dublin North, Dublin South, Cork, Limerick, Tipperary, Clare, Carlow/Kilkenny and Galway. CITs work in partnership with Primary Care Teams, General Practice, Community Response Beds, community nursing, home support services, acute hospitals and other professional, voluntary and external providers to deliver enhanced services and patient centred care in the most appropriate setting. The CIT provides a rapid and integrated response to an appropriate patient with an acute episode of illness who requires CIT services for a defined/short period of time in the community/home, thus helping to increase hospital avoidance and earlier discharge from acute hospitals.

There are currently over 2,400 GPs providing services to 1,768,700 medical card holders and 159,576 GP visit card holders under the General Medical Services scheme. 90% of the population have access to GP out-of-hours services in 14 centres nationally, in all HSE regions, in at least part of every county.

The development of Primary Care Centres (PCC) to accommodate the HSE's Primary Care Teams and GPs in the one location is a key enabler for the delivery of primary care services. There are three methods used by the HSE for the development of PCCs: Direct Build; Public Private Partnership (PPP) Programme; and Operational Lease. To date, there are 85 PCCs in operation (42 of which have opened since March 2011). There are currently 37 locations where primary care infrastructure is under construction or at an advanced planning stage.

In general, services provided in PCCs include: Public Health Nursing; Physiotherapy; Occupational Therapy; Speech and Language Therapy; Primary Care Social Work; Primary Care Counselling; Dietetics; and Podiatry. Some centres also provide additional services such as Minor Surgery, Mental Health services, Pharmacy and Dental services.

The Government is committed to widening access to primary care. This includes introducing, on a phased basis, a universal GP service without fees. This process has commenced in respect of all children under 6 years. The objective is to have universal GP care without fees for children under 6 years in place in Quarter 2, 2015, subject to the conclusion of the present discussions with the Irish Medical Organisation and the completion of a fee-setting process.

The Government is also prioritising GP care without fees at the point of access for persons over 70 years to coincide with the introduction of GP care without fees for children under 6. This will be facilitated under the existing GMS contract.

The HSE/Department and the IMO, under the Framework Agreement signed in June 2014, have also commenced talks on a new GP contract, with more substantive engagement scheduled for the coming weeks. A priority of these discussions will be the inclusion of chronic disease management for patients.

The HSE has identified an initial five Integrated Care Programmes for implementation in 2015, including the Integrated Care Programme for the prevention and management of Chronic Disease.

The National Integrated Care Diabetes Programme is being implemented on a phased basis. In 2013, the Government approved funding for the appointment of 17 Integrated Care Diabetes Nurse Specialists to support the phased roll out of the programme. To-date, 16.65 Whole Time

Equivalent nurse specialists have been recruited.

Work is also underway in the HSE on an implementation plan for the National Clinical Programme for Asthma's Model of Care.

The HSE's 2015 National Service Plan (NSP) commits the HSE to roll out a pilot, to provide GP direct access to ultrasound, at approximately eight primary care sites, across the South and West, from early 2015. The pilot will aim to clear any existing hospital waiting lists for GP referrals to ultrasound.

The NSP also makes a commitment to pilot the provision of additional minor surgery services in agreed primary care settings and sites. This will contribute to a reduction in the waiting lists for minor surgery procedures in hospitals. The intention is to make this pilot service available in all of the HSE's Community Healthcare Organisations, ensuring local access for patients.

I am satisfied that the implementation of the above key measures will play a significant part in the refocusing of health services in line with the Government's health reform programme.

Universal Health Insurance White Paper

426. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health his views that the conclusion reached in the report published by the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, entitled Health System responses to financial pressures here, that it is unlikely that the health policy objectives set out in the programme for Government can be met without an increase in the level of statutory resources; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5685/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Government has embarked on a major reform programme for the health system, the aim of which is to deliver a single-tier health service, supported by universal health insurance, where access is based on need, not income. The *White Paper on Universal Health Insurance* (UHI) was published on 2nd April 2014 and provides detailed information on the UHI model for Ireland.

When I became Minister for Health, I reviewed our progress to date and the timescales for implementing very important reforms, including UHI. I concluded that it would not be possible to introduce a full UHI system by 2019, as envisaged in the White Paper. However, I want to emphasise my commitment to implementing reforms. In particular, I want to push ahead with key reforms in areas such as extending free GP care on a phased basis, improving the management of chronic diseases, implementing key financial reforms, including activity-based funding, and establishing hospital groups. As well as representing critical building blocks for the future health system, they are also important reforms in their own right that will drive efficiencies and bring benefits in advance of moving to a system of universal healthcare.

With regard to the introduction of universal GP care, €37 million has been provided for the first and second phases of this initiative this year, which is intended to provide GP care without fees to all children aged under 6 and to all persons aged 70 years and over by Quarter 2 2015, subject to the conclusion of discussions between the Department of Health, the HSE and the IMO.

Finally with regard to the wider issue of the statutory resources required to deliver UHI, my Department is undertaking a major costing exercise, in conjunction with the ESRI, the Health Insurance Authority and others. This exercise will estimate the cost of UHI for individuals/

households and the Exchequer. I expect to have the initial results from this exercise in April, following which I will revert to Government with a roadmap on the next steps to UHI.

Medical Card Reviews

427. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if and when a medical card review will be completed in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5689/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

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

Hospital Services

428. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide resources through the Health Service Executive to staff the new cystic fibrosis unit at University Hospital, Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5690/15]

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

Health Services Provision

429. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the Health Service Executive's delay in responding to correspondence (details supplied). [5697/15]

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

Orthodontic Service Waiting Lists

430. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if a child (details supplied) in Dublin 11 is on the waiting list for urgent orthodontic treatment; the average waiting period in this region for cases with priority status to receive an appointment; if this child is eligible to have two teeth filled under the medical card scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5702/15]

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

Health Services Expenditure

431. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Health when the Health Service Executive's 2015 capital plan will be launched; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5703/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The HSE has submitted its draft Capital Plan for the period 2015-2019. It requires both my approval and also the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. Following completion of the approval process details will be published on the HSE's website.

Hospital Waiting Lists

432. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the long waiting lists for magnetic resonance imaging, MRI, scans at Crumlin Hospital (details supplied) in Dublin 12; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5716/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): There has been a significant increase in the number of MRI scans provided at Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin in recent years, resulting in pressure on available MRI capacity. In 2011, 1,600 MRI scans were carried out while in 2014, the number had risen to over 2,000. The Government regards the situation in relation to waiting times for MRI scans for children as unacceptable and acknowledges the difficulties which delays cause for patients and their families. The HSE has advised that all patients who are referred for MRI at the hospital are clinically triaged by a consultant radiologist and urgent cases are prioritised, and that the hospital is undertaking a number of initiatives to address the waiting list for MRI scans. The Department of Health and the HSE are continuing to work together to address waiting times for diagnostic services, including MRI, and to ensure appropriate collection and reporting of MRI waiting times.

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

Health Services

433. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 330 of 7 October 2014, if he will provide an update on the review of assistance for stoma care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5722/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The HSE is responsible for the administration of the primary care schemes and, therefore, the HSE has been asked to update you regarding the review of stoma care products on the List of Reimbursable Items. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Appointment Status

434. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a hospital appointment in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5732/15]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Data

435. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health, further to Parliamentary Question No. 157 of 22 January 2015, the number of persons on the placement list for the nursing homes support scheme; the timeframe for same to issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5742/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As of the 6 of February 2015 (latest figures available) there were 1,368 people on the national placement list for the Nursing Homes Support Scheme with an average wait time of 11 weeks.

Hospital Appointment Status

436. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5755/15]

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

Hospital Accommodation Provision

437. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure the re-opening of the 20 beds closed in Belmullet district hospital, County Mayo, to alleviate the overcrowding at Mayo General Hospital, and facilitate the care of very elderly vulnerable patients who are told to move out of the district hospital and find a nursing home bed over 40 miles away; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5766/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply. If you have

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

Air Ambulance Service Provision

438. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Health when the emergency aeromedical service will be made permanent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5790/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Emergency Aeromedical Support Service (EAS) Establishment Group was set up to examine how best to provide a dedicated EAS service. The group's report was completed late last year and is currently under consideration. Pending a decision, the Department of Defence has agreed that the Air Corps should continue to provide aeromedical support to the EAS until March 2015.

Mental Health Services Provision

439. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Health if he will examine a case (details supplied) regarding service boundaries for mental health; if the Health Service Executive will implement a system whereby clients in this part of west Waterford will be able to access south Tipperary mental health services, taking into consideration the difficulties with transport in that area; if a model similar to arrangements in place in south Kilkenny and Waterford could be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5791/15]

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.

Nursing Home Accommodation

440. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health if he will fund a nursing home stay in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare, while that person's nursing home support application is being processed, on the basis that the hospital arranged for the person to be moved directly from Limerick University Hospital to free up an acute bed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5816/15]

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

Hospital Appointment Status

441. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when an appointment for a hip operation will be arranged in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5821/15]

10 February 2015

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

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

Hospital Accommodation Provision

442. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the level of negotiations that have taken place regarding utilising both St. Joseph's long-stay hospital in County Longford and St. Mary's long-stay hospital in Mullingar, County Westmeath as step-down facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5831/15]

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

Medical Research and Training Provision

443. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the creation and maintenance of Enrol-HD sites here for those suffering from Huntington disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5871/15]

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

Hospital Appointment Status

444. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the delay in an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if they are likely to get an appointment in the short term. [5884/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In relation to the particular patient query raised by you, 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.

Accident and Emergency Services Provision

445. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a commitment that the accident and emergency services at the Midland Regional Hospital, County Westmeath,

will not be downgraded during the construction of the new accident and emergency department, but will be enhanced when the new €6 million department is fully operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5888/15]

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 Card Eligibility

446. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Health his plans to further extend eligibility for medical cards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5889/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the Deputy will be aware, eligibility for medical cards is set out in the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The Act provides that persons, unable without undue hardship having regard to their overall financial situation to arrange GP services for themselves and family, qualify for a medical card. The Deputy will also be aware of the publication of the Report of the Expert Panel on Medical Need for Medical Card Eligibility and the Medical Card Process Review in November 2014. A key recommendation of the Expert Panel was that a person's means should remain the main qualifier for a medical card.

The HSE has discretion, exercised in accordance with the legislation, to grant a medical card where a person's income exceeds the income guidelines. The HSE is obliged to operate within the legal parameters as set out in the Health Act, while also responding to the variety of circumstances and complexities faced by individuals who apply for a medical card.

In the light of the conclusions of the two reports a range of actions have been identified to improve the operation of the medical card system, particularly for people with significant medical needs. The HSE has appointed a senior manager, at Assistant National Director level, with specific responsibility for Primary Care Schemes and Eligibility, to lead the reform. A Clinical Advisory Group has been appointed and it will provide an interim report within three months on the development of guidance on assessing medical card applications involving significant medical conditions. It includes representatives of Our Children's Health and Patients for Patient Safety Ireland.

The HSE is also putting arrangements in place for a more integrated and sensitive processing of medical card applications involving significant medical conditions to ensure greater interaction between the central office regarding the assessment of a person's eligibility and the local health office regarding the person's medical condition and the services that they may require. Consequently, the number of medical cards issued, where the HSE has exercised discretion, has increased from approximately 50,300 at the start of 2014 to approximately 76,700 at the start of 2015.

Patient Transport Provision

447. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Health the consideration being given to addressing the transportation issues that have arisen for patients in counties Longford and Westmeath who have to attend hospitals in the Dublin area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5890/15]

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

Hospital Appointment Status

448. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a liver transplant operation in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [5910/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I am committed to making every effort to increase the rate of organ donation and the number of successful transplantations. The enormously positive impact that an organ transplant can have on the life of a recipient, and to the lives of those around them, cannot be overstated.

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

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

Primary Care Centre Provision

449. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Health the number of primary care centres being developed in the Dublin Central constituency; the progress made to date on constructing each primary care centre; when each centre is due to open to the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5911/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the delivery of primary care infrastructure is a service matter your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up on the matter.

Hospital Complaints Procedures

450. **Deputy Áine Collins** asked the Minister for Health the options available to patients (details supplied) who are dissatisfied with their care. [5914/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I believe that it is generally best that complaints are dealt with locally when they occur and all efforts made to resolve them with the patient or person who has the complaint. There are a number of options open to individuals to make a complaint about the health services at present. Part 9 of the Health Act 2004 states that a person has the right to complain about any action of the Health Service Executive (HSE) or a service provider that they believe was not fair or had an adverse affect on them. The HSE has appointed designated Complaints Officers to ensure the effective management of complaints throughout their relevant areas of responsibility. The HSE actively encourages and promotes consumer feedback and links with customers on a regular basis to ensure that the complaint handling processes are effective, are being communicated and are achieving outcomes that are satisfactory to the consumers. The HSE continues to seek improvements in its complaint handling ability and capacity in order to respond to the needs of patients.

If an individual is unhappy with the way in which his/her complaint was dealt with the National Advocacy Unit of the HSE will appoint an independent officer to review the complaint. If an individual is still unhappy with the outcome of this process he/she can request an independent review of the complaint from the Office of the Ombudsman or Ombudsman for Children.

Healthcomplaints.ie is an on-line information service which was developed by the Office of the Ombudsman in co-operation with a number of organisations including my Department and the HSE. This service provides information on how to make a complaint or give feedback about health and social care services in Ireland. This website has been developed for people who use health and social care services in Ireland, as well as for their families, care-givers and advocates.

Furthermore, if an individual is unhappy with the level of care provided by a regulated health service professional such as a doctor, nurse or other healthcare professional, he/she may make a complaint to that employee's professional regulatory body.

I believe that it is paramount that both patients and their families raise queries or complaints and that they feel that those complaints will be listened to and acted upon.

Finally, it is not possible for me to answer the specific queries raised by the Deputy based on the details supplied. However, I will say that it is a basic tenet of medical practice that all medical procedures carried out require the full and informed consent of the patient.

General Medical Services Scheme Payments

451. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if the terms in the general medical service contract and schedule of fees, out-of-hours only, apply when a surgery is not open (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5915/15]

452. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding general practitioners and the service they provide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5929/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 451 and 452 together.

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.

Medical Card Applications

453. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive a decision on an application for a discretionary medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5936/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch) (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has es-

established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

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

Hospital Appointments Administration

454. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment with a neurologist in Letterkenny General Hospital, County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5937/15]

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

Hospital Appointments Administration

455. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment for an operation in Letterkenny General Hospital, County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5938/15]

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

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

Hospital Appointments Administration

456. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment for a knee operation in Letterkenny General Hospital, County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5939/15]

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.

Medical Card Administration

457. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health his estimate of the cost of extending medical card cover to every cancer patient for the duration of their illness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5946/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch) (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As medical cards are not awarded on the basis of illnesses or medical conditions, the HSE does not collect data such as illness category for all applicants. Therefore, it is not possible to provide the Deputy with a cost of extending medical cards to all people with cancer.

Medical Card Eligibility

458. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a person (details supplied) in County Cavan who had previously lived in England and who has made an application for a medical card under European Union regulations, where that person has been informed that there is a requirement to show proof of savings, investments and three months' bank statements, despite the fact that the medical card-general practitioner visit card assessment guidelines of January 2014 state that persons with European Union entitlement are exempt from a means test; if that person must be treated as a couple with their spouse, though the spouse does not work, nor receive an Irish social welfare payment; if he will clarify the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5964/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Under Regulation (EC) 883/2004 persons insured in any EU Member state, together with persons insured in any EEA Member state (Iceland, Norway or Liechtenstein) or in Switzerland, are entitled to receive health care services in Ireland at the cost of that member state provided they are not subject to Irish social security legislation. Persons in this category are entitled to full eligibility and receive a medical card as evidence of their entitlement. The applicant is only required to demonstrate to the HSE that they qualify under the EU Regulations and there is no requirement to submit income details and details of savings. The applicant must produce the appropriate E or S-form, completed by their Member State confirming the healthcare entitlement for which that state is liable. The position regarding the UK is that, under a reciprocal agreement, the EU S form is not required, however, proof of receipt of a qualifying payment from the UK authorities should be provided with the application to the HSE.

The HSE has responsibility to establish if an applicant is subject to Irish social security legislation. A person is considered subject to Irish social security legislation if s/he is in receipt of a contributory Irish social welfare payment or engaged in work in Ireland and subject to PRSI. If a person is considered subject to Irish social security legislation, the person will not qualify for a Medical Card under EU legislation, but may qualify for a means-tested Medical Card under national legislation. An applicant under the EU Regulations may apply in respect of themselves alone if they consider they meet the above requirements even where their partner/spouse is subject to Irish social security legislation. The dependants of the person who qualifies for a medical

card under the EU Regulations who reside with him/her are also entitled to a medical card on production of the appropriate E or S-form provided that they are not themselves subject to the Irish social security system, or in the case of children, that the spouse or person looking after the children is not also subject to Irish social security legislation. Again no form is required in the case of UK applicants provided the required evidence of entitlement is provided.

A spouse who does not qualify under the EU Regulations may separately apply for a means-tested medical card under national legislation but will however be required to supply the information requested by the HSE in respect of the couple's means in order to permit the HSE assess if the spouse will qualify for a means-tested medical card under national legislation.

The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Appointments Administration

459. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if and when a required appointment at the Eye and Ear Hospital, Dublin 2 will be arranged in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5983/15]

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.

Medicinal Products Prices

460. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health in view of the high prices charged for medicines by the pharmaceuticals companies, and the varying prices charged across the European Union by the same companies for the same medicines, if he will raise this matter at a Council of Ministers meeting to see if European Union Government procurement can work collectively to get the best possible price for European Union taxpayers by combining the purchasing power of all European Union states, rather than allowing the individual companies to pick off countries on an individual basis, and charge them different prices, based on what they believe they can get away with; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5985/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Decisions on pricing and reimbursement of pharmaceutical products within public health systems are a national competence for EU Member States. However, the issue of pricing and reimbursement of medicines has been the subject of recent discussion at an EU level.

The Council of the European Union issued conclusions in December 2014 on the issue of

innovation for the benefit of patients which included the issue of co-operation on the pricing of medicines between Member States. The Council conclusions invited the European Commission and Member States to examine opportunities for potential co-operation on a voluntary basis in the field of pricing and reimbursement.

I have indicated previously in discussions at an EU level on this issue that I am supportive of proposals that would deliver greater transparency in prices. However, I am mindful that this may be difficult to achieve as Member States negotiate directly with pharmaceutical companies to agree commercially confidential discounts on the price of medicines and to establish patient access schemes.

A number of mechanisms exist at a European level to assist with the issue of pricing and reimbursement of medicines. In 2008 the network of Competent Authorities on Pricing and Reimbursement was created of which Ireland is a member. This is an informal platform which discusses the issues and challenges in the field of pricing and reimbursement of medicines. Ireland also has access to the EU Euripid Database which was launched in 2010. This is a web based database which provides up to date information on the prices of medicines which can be accessed by participating Member States.

It is also worth noting that a Joint Procurement Agreement for medical countermeasures is in place at an EU level which enables countries, including Ireland, to procure pandemic vaccines and other medical countermeasures on a group rather than individual basis.

Medicinal Products Prices

461. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the reason he and the Health Service Executive discuss the cost of medicines with the Irish Pharmaceuticals Health Care Association, instead of directly with the pharmaceutical companies; the reason he goes through a third party; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5986/15]

462. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he or the Health Service Executive enter into direct face-to-face negotiations with the pharmaceutical companies regarding the price of medicines that they charge the Irish tax payer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5987/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 461 and 462 together.

The Department of Health and the Health Service Executive have entered into a series of agreements with the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA) and the Association of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers in Ireland (APMI). Between 2006 and 2014 these agreements have generated savings in the region of €790 million.

The State has engaged at an industry level on the basis not only of the savings delivered but also that the agreements have provided the State with certainty regarding security of supply of pharmaceutical products for Irish patients including ensuring that patients have access to new and innovative medicines.

The 2012 agreement with the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association provides for a mid-term review. My Department and the HSE have been engaging with IPHA in this context. Whilst the Government's preference would be for 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.

It is important to note that the HSE does enter into direct negotiations with pharmaceutical companies who are seeking reimbursement of new products on the GMS and community drugs schemes.

HSE Properties

463. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a vacant building (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5998/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As the management of the health property portfolio is a service matter, therefore your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up on the matter.

Hospital Appointments Administration

464. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a child (details supplied) in County Clare will receive the surgery required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6013/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Spinal conditions, including scoliosis, in children and young people are predominantly managed at Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin (OLCHC). It is acknowledged by all that waiting times for surgery are unacceptable and the Children's Hospital Group, OLCHC and the HSE are actively working to address them as quickly as possible and exploring all short, medium- and long-term options to increase capacity. I am pleased to say that funding has been allocated in the 2015 Service Plan to facilitate the appointment of an orthopaedic surgeon, anaesthetist and support staff to maximise utilisation of available theatre sessions in OLCHC.

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

Health Services Provision

465. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health the paediatric services available for children who attend a school (details supplied) in County Carlow, who may have difficulties with speech and language; and the funding that has been made available for this in the coming year. [6014/15]

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

days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Orthodontic Service Provision

466. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding orthodontic treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6025/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch) (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The HSE provides orthodontic treatment to patients based on their level of clinical need. An individual's access to orthodontic treatment is determined against a set of clinical guidelines and priority is given to patients with greatest needs. I have asked the HSE to investigate this matter and respond to the Deputy as soon as possible.

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

Calorie Posting on Menus

467. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding calorie counts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6041/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The levels of overweight and obesity have increased in recent years. Currently 61% of all adults in Ireland are either overweight (37%) or obese (24%). The picture in relation to childhood overweight and obesity is similar where one in four children is either overweight or obese.

A significant contributor to this trend is the consumption of high calorific foods and drink outside the home. In 2012, the then Minister for Health initiated calorie posting on menus on a voluntary basis. Although the majority of restaurants stated that they would like to display calories, in May 2013 only 8% of all fast food outlets, coffee shops and food chains did so.

In 2012, the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) conducted a consultation exercise to find out public views on the matter. 96% of the general public who made a submission wanted calorie menu labelling in all, or some, food outlets. 86% wanted calorie labelling in all food service businesses. An industry majority were in favour of calorie posting.

It is important to note that putting calorie counts on menus is about providing consumers with information at the point of choice.

I am aware that the legislation may impose a cost on the industry and, for that reason, the FSAI was requested to develop a web-based, user friendly and free to users Calorie Calculator to enable them to accurately calculate calories on all menus at no cost. This calculator is called "MenuCal" and has been in operation since April 2014. The Department of Health will consult with industry and other stakeholders on the calorie posting legislation.

HSE Investigations

468. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of formally trained sys-

tems analysis investigators here; the date of completion of the first training in systems analysis here; and the number of systems analysis investigations reported to date. [6052/15]

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

469. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment and treatment will be expedited in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [6056/15]

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.

Nursing Home Services

470. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the status of equipping a nursing home (details supplied) in Dublin 7 that is currently closed; and the date it will be re-opened. [6059/15]

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

Medical Card Appeals

471. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical card appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6089/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

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

Primary Medical Certificates Applications

472. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a primary medical certificate application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6104/15]

473. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on an application for a primary medical certificate in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6105/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 472 and 473 together.

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

Hospital Beds Data

474. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the number of inpatient beds available across the country, broken down by area, for children with mental health difficulties; if he will provide a comparison between these numbers and the numbers over the past five years; the way these numbers have changed since the inclusion of 17-year-old and 18-year-old children in the category of child and adolescent mental health; and his views that this group of vulnerable patients are adequately catered for. [6106/15]

476. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the number of children in the child and adolescent mental health services that are currently waiting for inpatient beds, after being referred for admission; and if children are still being admitted to adult mental health wards. [6108/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 474 and 476 together.

As this is a service issue these questions have 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 these matters with them.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

475. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an emergency inpatient bed in an appropriate unit in respect of a person (details supplied). [6107/15]

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. *Question No. 476 answered with Question No. 474.*

Hospital Beds Data

477. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the number of child mental health inpatient beds recommended by his Department; and the way this compares with actual provision. [6109/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): *A Vision for Change* recommends the provision of 80 child and adolescent psychiatric in-patient beds. Currently, there are 54 operational Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) beds in the HSE, i.e. beds available to take a child/adolescent as an in-patient if the need arises. These beds are located as follows - 22 in Dublin, 20 in Galway and 12 in Cork. This is an improvement on the position in November last, when 48 beds were operational.

A new purpose built 22 bed CAMHS in-patient unit located on the grounds of Cherry Orchard Hospital is due to be completed in mid-2015. The existing 14 beds in the current temporary facility, will transfer across, thereby giving a net increase of 8 beds in the facility, thus increasing the number of operational beds nationally to 62. In addition, the HSE intends to open an additional 8 beds, currently closed, in the Eist Linn Unit in Cork, when staffing recruitment issues are resolved, thereby targeting an overall operational capacity of 70 beds in 2015. The question of providing additional bed provision, in line with *A Vision for Change* and overall revenue availability over the longer term, will be kept under review by the Department of Health and the HSE.

Mental Health Services Provision

478. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the facilities available in the constituency of Louth for persons under 18 years of age, who may be suffering from mental health difficulties; the way these facilities are accessed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6116/15]

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.

Home Help Service Provision

479. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the home help service in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6129/15]

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

Health Services Provision

480. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will support Kare Social Services in Dublin 5, in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6146/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a

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

Respite Care Services

481. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons (details supplied) with an intellectual disability, who are on waiting lists for residential day care and respite care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6147/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Specialist Disability services are provided by or on behalf of the HSE to enable children and adults with a disability to achieve their full potential and maximise independence, including living as independently as possible in the community. Disability services are provided in a variety of community and residential settings in partnership with service users, their families and carers and a range of statutory, non-statutory, voluntary and community groups. Voluntary agencies provide the majority of services in partnership with or on behalf of the Health Service Executive.

In planning for the delivery of intellectual disability services, the Health Service Executive (HSE) and disability service providers maintain the National Intellectual Disability Database (NIDD).

The NIDD provides a comprehensive database for decision-making in relation to the planning, funding and management of services for people with an intellectual disability. The 2013 report of the NIDD forecasts the future residential, day care and respite requirements of people with an intellectual disability in the period 2014 to 2018 based on 2013 data. However, it is important to emphasise that the NIDD acts as a planning and forecasting tool and does not match individuals to the actual service they will require at the specific time it will be required. This will often depend on individual and family circumstances which will change over time.

The report forecasts that 4,488 additional residential, day and residential support/respite places will be needed to meet service requirements in the period 2014 – 2018. Of these 4,488 individuals, it is forecast that 190 will require a day service, 2,043 will require a residential support or respite service and 2215 will require a full-time residential service.

In 2013, the 2,043 individuals forecast as requiring a full-time residential service between 2014 and 2018 were in receipt of specialist disability services to meet their needs at that time. 99.8% of this group of 2,043 were in receipt of a day service or a residential support service and 90.0% of the 2,043 lived at home.

Hospital Beds Data

482. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the number of acute hospitals and hospital beds here per capita and overall; his views on the way this compares to international examples; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6153/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The best measure to use for international comparisons would be Eurostat data on curative care beds. This specifically excludes day case beds, beds used for longer term care, for example geriatrics, and it also excludes psychiatric beds. The data Ireland supplies to Eurostat is based on the publicly funded acute hospitals only.

In the most recent data available from 2011, Ireland had 217 curative care beds per 100,000

population. This compared with an average of 365 curative care beds per 100,000 population for the 25 EU Member States that provided data in 2011. It should be noted that data for Ireland and UK (237 per 100,000) exclude beds in private hospitals which affects the comparability somewhat.

Passport Controls

483. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on discussions held with states outside the European Union-European Economic Area on the acceptance of the passport card that will be issued by his Department later this year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5615/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The new Irish Passport Card is an innovative passport offering and unique in European terms. It will be accepted for travel within the European Union (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Republic of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK), the European Economic Area (EU countries plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) and Switzerland. Discussions with countries outside this area regarding acceptance of the passport card are at a preliminary stage.

Passport Services

484. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will extend the validity period of passport cards from five years to ten years; the reason the validity period is five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5616/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Passport Card is designed on the basis of a credit card sized and so will fit conveniently into a wallet. It will be of a polycarbonate construction also very similar to a credit card. The industry standard to ensure durability and security of the card recommends that the validity should be set to no more than 5 years.

Passport Services

485. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of passport holders that have registered for the passport reminder service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5617/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): There is a link on the DFA website to this service which is run by Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, on behalf of the parent department.

I can confirm there are 23,592 registrations in the system of which 1,126 have been received in 2015.

Diplomatic Representation Expenditure

486. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide a breakdown of the costs for the past three years for the top ten Irish embassies abroad; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5625/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Our embassies' work in support of Ireland's foreign policy interests include:

- Promoting investment in Ireland and supporting Irish businesses to expand overseas;
- Providing frontline consular assistance and passport services to Irish citizens overseas;
- Promoting Ireland as a tourism destination and promoting Ireland's culture abroad;
- Representing and advancing Ireland's policies and interests;
- Engaging with and supporting Irish communities abroad; and
- Managing Ireland's overseas development programmes.

My Department works closely with the State agencies, including Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Bord Bia and Tourism Ireland, to support trade missions, directly assist Irish companies with advice and introductions and work to resolve regulatory or market access issues.

Staff of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade promote Ireland as a destination for investment and lobby and negotiate for Ireland on issues that could impact our economic interests: whether that's on trade policy, taxation issues or other crucial issues.

In responding to the severe economic and financial crisis which has affected Ireland in recent years, the Embassy network has played a particularly important role in repairing and enhancing our reputation and promoting economic recovery.

The following table shows the ten highest costs among Irish embassies for the years 2012, 2013 and 2014:

2014	€	2013	€	2012	-
London (including passport office)	5,510,338	London (including passport office)	5,396,713	London (including passport office)	5,944,944
Paris (including OECD)	3,367,957	Paris (including OECD)	3,206,758	Paris (including OECD)	2,780,161
Beijing	2,225,579	Washington DC	2,250,933	Tokyo	2,495,289
Washington DC	2,217,443	Tokyo	2,034,096	Washington DC	2,452,061
Tokyo	1,810,639	Mozambique	2,006,230	Rome	1,953,880
Berlin	1,780,725	Beijing	1,934,537	Mozambique	1,822,624
Mozambique	1,542,967	Berlin	1,674,131	Berlin	1,624,043
Madrid	1,439,721	Tanzania	1,558,291	Vienna	1,606,742
Uganda	1,418,132	Rome	1,548,200	New Delhi	1,548,660
Rome	1,408,031	Moscow	1,514,269	Beijing	1,511,390

The figures in the table include expenditure charged to mission budgets. Capital expenditure incurred on behalf of a Mission is also included even though such expenditure is not part of a

Mission's budget. The costs for London include the London passport office and the costs for Paris include Ireland's OECD representation.

Passports Data

487. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of new passports issued to foreign nationals; the number of requests from foreign nationals to remain here, for the years 2012, 2013 and 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5704/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Only Irish citizens are entitled to be issued with Irish passports.

As the Passport Service does not request any information on other nationalities as part of the application process, information on the number of Irish passport holders who are dual nationals is not available.

Foreign Conflicts

488. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the execution of a Jordanian airforce pilot by the group called ISIS and the execution of prisoners in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in reprisal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5793/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I condemn the murder of Jordanian pilot Lt. Moaz Al-Kasasbeh by the terrorist group ISIS. This murder, and the particularly cruel and immoral manner of it, is appalling. In a statement, I expressed my deep sympathies to his family and to the Jordanian nation on their loss.

Ireland, like our EU partners, has a strong and unequivocal opposition to the death penalty in all times and in all circumstances and accordingly seeks its universal abolition. We believe that its abolition contributes to the enhancement of human dignity and the progressive development of human rights.

Foreign Conflicts

489. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on any contact his Department has had with the Embassy of Israel to Ireland and on any contact the Embassy of Ireland to Israel and the Representative Office of Ireland in Palestine has had with Israeli authorities regarding a case (details supplied); his views on the matter of the Israeli state jailing and detaining minors arrested in the occupied territories; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5826/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The treatment of Palestinian children in the Occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem is of deep concern, and an issue on which Ireland has been active for some time. In October 2013, during the universal periodic review of Israel's human rights record, Ireland expressed this concern and urged Israel to fully implement the recommendations of the February 2013 UNICEF report, entitled "Children in Israeli Military Detention". We recommended that Israel end urgently night arrests of Palestinian children, the admissibility in evidence in military courts of written confessions in

Hebrew signed by Palestinian children, the use of solitary confinement and the denial of access to family members or to legal representation. Bilaterally, our concerns regarding the detention of Palestinian minors have been raised as part of our ongoing dialogue with the Israeli authorities on the overall situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel's treatment of the Palestinian population, both with the Israeli Embassy here and through our own Embassy in Tel Aviv.

We cannot attempt to follow each specific case in which these issues arise. The case cited by the Deputy has not previously come to the attention of my Department, although it is a clear example of the reasons why these practices are of such concern.

In my view, Palestinian children should be afforded the same rights and protections under the law which Israel rightly considers to be appropriate for Israeli children living alongside them.

The overall human rights situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including the treatment of children in detention, remains a matter of concern and will continue to be raised in the relevant multilateral fora, and to feature in the EU's broader concerns about human rights in the area.

Similar concerns would exist in relation to the detention of children in many other states in the region.

Human Rights Issues

490. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will press his counterpart in the Republic of Indonesia, Minister Retno L.P. Marsudi, to allow international journalists access to West Papua and commit to genuine media freedom for local and international journalists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5878/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The human rights situation in West Papua, and in particular the difficulties the media face in reporting on developments there, remains an issue of concern. The situation in Papua was raised directly with the Indonesian Foreign Ministry on 12 November last during the EU-Indonesia human rights dialogue. It also remains an issue which I, as well as my officials, will continue to raise with the Indonesian side. Ireland also supported the United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution on Safety of Journalists at the 27th Session of the Council last September. This Resolution urged States to promote a safe and enabling environment for journalists to perform their work independently. A free and independent media is indispensable for democracy.

491. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to send observers to the upcoming Nigerian presidential election on 14 February 2015; if he has liaised with the Irish ambassador designate to Nigeria, Mr. Seán Hoy, on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5882/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Sean Sherlock): In response to an invitation from the Nigerian authorities, the EU deployed an Electoral Observation Mission to observe the Presidential and National Assembly elections which were scheduled for 14 February and the Gubernatorial and State Assembly elections which were scheduled for 28 February. Over the past weekend, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of Nigeria announced the rescheduling of the elections for 28 March and 11 April respectively. The Commission stated that the decision was based on security concerns.

The EU Observation Mission is being led by Mr Santiago Fisas Ayxela, a Member of the European Parliament. The European Union has also provided assistance totalling €35 million to support the electoral process in Nigeria.

In November last, the EU issued a call for nominations for the Mission to all Member States, requesting the nomination of 30 Long Term Observers to observe these elections. Following circulation of the request to the members of Ireland's Election Observation Roster, Ireland put forward three nominees for consideration by the European Union. One of these, Ms Cecilia Keaveney, was selected to join the team, and is now in Nigeria supporting the preparatory phase of the Mission.

In addition, members of the diplomatic staff at our Embassy in Abuja, including the Ambassador, will participate as short-term observers when the elections are held.

At the meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels yesterday, the EU expressed its disappointment at the postponement of the elections and called on all parties to respect the independence of the INEC, and ensure that transparent and well-run elections take place without further delay.

This is a crucial moment for Nigeria, at a time of instability in the north-east of the country and the violence being perpetrated by the terrorist group, Boko Haram.

It is important that the rescheduled elections are as inclusive as possible and enable each eligible Nigerian citizen to cast their vote fairly. We will follow developments closely through our Embassy in Abuja, and in co-operation with our partners in the EU.

Trade Union Agreements

492. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the opportunities for jobs and training and economic benefit that will develop from the recently signed agreement between the Technical Engineering and Electrical Union of Ireland and the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices in the United States of America; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5925/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): On 27 January Ireland's largest craft union, the Technical Engineering and Electrical Union (TEEU) signed a federation agreement with the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices (UA), which represents 370,000 craft workers in the United States, Canada and Australia. The signing ceremony was hosted at the Embassy of Ireland in Washington DC by Irish Ambassador Anne Anderson and took place in the presence of US Secretary of Labour, Thomas Perez and Richard Trumka, President of the AFL-CIO.

The federation promises to deliver considerable benefits, especially in terms of expanding training and future employment opportunities for the members of both unions. Explaining the context of the agreement, Eamon Devoy, General Secretary of the TEEU, has pointed to the imperative that engineering workers are suitably trained and retrained to meet the demands of change based technologies that are crucial to the needs of successful business.

He has also highlighted the TEEU's focus on training, quality and standards and noted that the association with the UA will be important to developing the training aspect of their activities. Under the agreement, the TEEU will bring US trainers to Ireland to teach workers new skills under a "train the trainers" programme. William Hite of the UA has also stressed the need for skills development in order to compete for high skilled jobs in a global economy and com-

mitted the UA to sharing their knowledge.

I welcome the signing of this agreement and commend the role of our Embassy in Washington in facilitating it. In an increasingly globalised world and in an open economy such as Ireland's it is essential that we constantly look to enhance and improve our skills so that training opportunities arising, as the economy starts to grow again, can be availed of. While the future development of this agreement is for the two unions concerned, I hope and expect that it will contribute to such improved training opportunities and wish the two organisations every success with its implementation and development.

Ministerial Travel

493. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide further details on his proposed trip to Palestine and Israel; if he will be visiting Gaza; and if the dates for the visit have been confirmed. [6064/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am planning to visit the Middle East next week, from 15 to 20 February inclusive. The exact itinerary and schedule of meetings is still being worked on. The core of the visit will be in Israel and the Palestinian Territory, and I hope also to visit Lebanon and Jordan. It is my intention to visit Gaza, if the security situation permits.

School Transport Provision

494. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of school buses that were tested for safety in the past 12 months; and the percentage of buses that passed those tests. [5729/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English): Buses provide services to carry school children both under the Department of Education and Skills School Transport Scheme and also in a private capacity hired by, for example, parents of school children or schools.

Every school bus is required to be tested under the Road Safety Authority's (RSA) Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness Test (CVRT), which is the primary annual vehicle safety inspection.

All Bus Éireann buses and those owned by operators contracted by Bus Éireann are required to have a valid annual roadworthiness test certificate in order to be used to provide school transport services.

The RSA may be in a position to provide national statistics for these tests.

School Transport Expenditure

495. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which Bus Éireann calculates depreciation of school buses in its school bus fleet; if there is a maximum amount that it can depreciate on an annual basis per bus; and the way same is calculated. [5730/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English): Bus Éireann has advised that depreciation is charged as a direct cost to the Department of Education and Skills in relation to Bus Éireann School Transport vehicles.

Depreciation in this context relates to the amortisation of the capital cost of the vehicles and for the purposes of the direct cost is calculated on the replacement costs, which is in line with the approach agreed with the Department for each vehicle type and its useful operating life. This is the maximum charge that can arise in respect of any vehicle.

Once the vehicle is fully depreciated no further charges arise.

At present the school transport fleet consists of a small number of buses purchased by the Department of Education and Skills but the majority of the fleet was purchased by Bus Éireann. The School Transport Scheme is not charged depreciation in respect of any vehicles fully funded by the Department of Education and Skills.

Vehicles are transferred from road passenger services to school transport services on a planned cascade basis when they are available in order to improve the age profile and quality of the school bus fleet. The depreciation charge takes account of the net book value of the vehicles cascaded to school transport and the date the vehicle was cascaded. The depreciation charge also takes account of any school vehicles scrapped and the date of scrapping.

The depreciation charge is independently reviewed by PricewaterhouseCoopers each year as part of the annual audit process.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

496. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will reverse the cuts to special education needs provision that have been imposed in recent years, in particular the 15% cut to resource hours, the cuts to the number of English- as-an-additional-language teachers and the cuts to resource teachers for members of the Traveller community; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5478/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Budget 2015 included an increase in spending on education for the first time in recent years, amounting to additional funding of €60m during 2015.

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

With regard to Resource Teachers for Travellers, the principle of inclusion is at the core of the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy published in 2006 and, accordingly, the focus of both current and future provision is on the development of a more inclusive school environment. In keeping with this principle, additional resources provided in the education system are allocated on the basis of identified individual educational need rather than that of ethnic or cultural background.

Following decisions of the last Government, as part of the December 2010 budgetary process, Traveller pupils who are eligible for learning support teaching now receive this tuition through the existing learning support provision in schools. This is in keeping with the policy of inclusion and the 2006 report.

The General Allocation Model, which provides additional learning support and English as

an additional language allocations for primary schools, was updated for all primary schools from the 2012/13 school year and now includes the Traveller pupils who had previously been supported by Resource Teacher for Traveller (RTT) posts.

Limited alleviation measures were put in place to assist schools who had high concentrations of Traveller pupils previously supported by Resource Teacher for Traveller posts/hours, in the context of the limited resources available.

A total of 141 posts have been allocated to schools for this purpose. 81 posts were also provided to readjust Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) allocations to include Traveller pupils previously supported by Resource Teacher for Traveller posts.

38 alleviation posts were provided for schools that had high numbers or concentrations of Traveller pupils who were previously supported by RTT posts and a further 22 alleviation posts were allocated to schools who had the highest percentage of traveller pupils previously supported by RTT posts, in comparison to other schools, taking into account their overall pupil populations, and who had not qualified for the first round of alleviation posts.

This Government has been resolutely committed to protecting, and where possible, increasing, the level of investment being made to support children with special educational needs at a time when there has been a requirement to make expenditure reductions across a range of areas. It is an area of spending which has been prioritised above most other areas by this Government, despite the enormous pressures on all areas of public spending.

Some €1.37 billion will be spent in support of children with Special Educational Needs this year, which represents approximately 15% of my Department's budget.

365 new Special Needs Assistant (SNA) posts and 480 resource teaching posts have been provided to support children with special educational needs in schools in 2015, bringing the total number of SNAs available for allocation in 2015 to 11,330 posts and the total number of resource teaching posts to 6,705. Over 11,000 resource and learning support teaching posts are now available. This is the highest level of SNA and resource teaching allocations that we have ever had, and will ensure that children with special educational needs can continue to participate in education and be supported in a manner appropriate to their needs.

With regard to the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, a number of sections have been commenced, including those establishing the National Council for Special Education and those promoting an inclusive approach to education of children.

The NCSE report on 'Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools' which was published in 2013 and is available on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie, recommends that the EPSEN Act be fully implemented as soon as possible. The report also states that the NCSE recognises that the current economic climate makes it unlikely that the Government will be able to implement this recommendation in the short to medium term.

It is intended to bring into effect many of the good ideas contained in the EPSEN Act, on a non-statutory basis initially, through policy developments across a range of areas, in conjunction with NCSE policy advice.

This includes the National Council for Special Education's (NCSE) Report on a Proposed New Model for Allocating Teachers for Students with Special Educational Needs, published on 18th June 2014.

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

inclusion.

I hope to make an announcement in relation to this matter shortly, in order to give clarity to schools regarding the allocation process for the coming school year.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

497. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the proposals for the new model for allocation of resources and learning support hours in primary schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5492/15]

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.

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.

I can also 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.

I hope to make an announcement in relation to this matter shortly, in order to give clarity to schools regarding the allocation process for the coming school year.

School Accommodation

498. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if additional accommodation will be provided in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5502/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the school in question has recently submitted an application for additional accommodation to my Department. The application will be assessed and a decision conveyed to the school authorities as soon as this process has been completed.

Special Educational Needs Expenditure

499. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding proposed cuts in funding special education needs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5579/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Budget 2015 included an increase in spending on education for the first time in recent years, amounting to additional funding of €60m during 2015.

This funding will be used to provide 1,700 additional teachers and SNAs for our schools, as well as to fund prioritised reforms, such as implementation of the literacy and numeracy strategy, reform of junior cycle, and the introduction of education focussed preschool inspections. It was not possible to also secure the funding which would have been required to change the staffing schedule for schools.

With regard to Resource Teachers for Travellers, the principle of inclusion is at the core of the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy published in 2006 and, accordingly, the focus of both current and future provision is on the development of a more inclusive school environment. In keeping with this principle, additional resources provided in the education system are allocated on the basis of identified individual educational need rather than that of ethnic or cultural background.

Following decisions of the last Government, as part of the December 2010 budgetary process, Traveller pupils who are eligible for learning support teaching now receive this tuition through the existing learning support provision in schools. This is in keeping with the policy of inclusion and the 2006 report.

The General Allocation Model, which provides additional learning support and English as an additional language allocations for primary schools, was updated for all primary schools from the 2012/13 school year and now includes the Traveller pupils who had previously been supported by Resource Teacher for Traveller (RTT) posts under the General Allocation Model.

Limited alleviation measures were also put in place to assist schools who had high concentrations of Traveller pupils previously supported by Resource Teacher for Traveller posts/hours, in the context of the limited resources available.

Provision for English Language Support posts is now provided for under the General Allocation Model for schools, while further additional temporary language support posts are provided on the basis of appeals to the Staffing Appeal Boards. The appeal criteria are set out in the published staffing arrangements.

It should be noted that there has been no overall reduction to the level of investment being provided to support children with special educational needs in our schools. On the contrary, the number of SNA and Resource Teaching posts being allocated to support children with special educational needs has increased in recent years to reflect demographic growth and increased demand in this area.

This Government has been resolutely committed to protecting, and in some instances increasing, the level of investment being made to support children with special educational needs at a time when there has been a requirement to make expenditure reductions across a range of areas. It is an area of spending which has been prioritised above most other areas by this Government, despite the enormous pressures on all areas of public spending.

Some €1.37 billion will be spent in support of children with Special Educational Needs this year, which represents approximately 15% of my Department's budget.

365 new Special Needs Assistant (SNA) posts and 480 resource teaching posts have been provided to support children with special educational needs in schools in 2015, bringing the total number of SNAs available for allocation in 2015 to 11,330 posts and the total number of resource teaching posts to 6,705. Over 11,000 resource and learning support teaching posts are now available. This is the highest level of SNA and resource teaching allocations that we have ever had, and will ensure that children with special educational needs can continue to participate in education and be supported in a manner appropriate to their needs.

With regard to the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, a number of sections have been commenced, including those establishing the National Council for Special Education and those promoting an inclusive approach to education of children.

The NCSE report on 'Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools' which was published in 2013 and is available on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie, recommends that the EPSEN Act be fully implemented as soon as possible. The report also states that the NCSE recognises that the current economic climate makes it unlikely that the Government will be able to implement this recommendation in the short to medium term.

It is therefore intended to bring into effect many of the good ideas contained in the EPSEN Act, on a non-statutory basis initially, through policy developments across a range of areas, in conjunction with NCSE policy advice.

This includes the National Council for Special Education's (NCSE) Report on a Proposed New Model for Allocating Teachers for Students with Special Educational Needs, published on 18th June 2014.

I hope to make an announcement in relation to this report shortly, in order to give clarity to schools regarding the allocation process for the coming school year.

Apprenticeship Programmes

500. **Deputy Michael Conaghan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the apprenticeship council will provide her with a report of proposals for a new way of developing apprenticeships; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5610/15]

501. **Deputy Michael Conaghan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the uptake from engagement with the enterprise sectors in promoting new apprenticeships as outlined in the apprenticeship implementation plan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5611/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 500 and 501 together.

Following initial communication with stakeholders in December 2014, the Apprenticeship Council formally invited proposals for new apprenticeship programmes from consortia of enterprise, professional bodies and education and training providers on the 16th January 2015. Details of the proposal process are available on www.apprenticeshipcouncil.ie.

The deadline for receipt of proposals is the 31st March 2015. The proposals will be assessed by the Apprenticeship Council against a range of sustainability and deliverability criteria before

recommendations are submitted to me towards the end of the second quarter of this year.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

502. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will examine the proposal from Inclusion Ireland regarding a new model of allocation of hours, which will move from a diagnosis-based system to one based on needs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5633/15]

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 Inclusion Ireland.

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.

I can advise that officials have advised all stakeholders, including Inclusion Ireland, that there will be ongoing consultation with them as the work on the development of the model progresses.

I hope to make an announcement in relation to this matter shortly, in order to give clarity to schools regarding the allocation process for the coming school year.

School Enrolments

503. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to address the ongoing issue of a lack of school places for primary schools in Dublin South, where the demand for new entrants into primary schools exceeds the supply of school places available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5634/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): On Thursday the 5th of February last I announced that seven new primary schools are to be established in the next two years. One of the new schools to be established in 2016, is in the Goatstown/Stillorgan area. A

patronage determination process for this school will be run later this year.

Since 2012, three new schools have opened in Dublin South. Ballinteer Educate National School and Stepside Educate Together National School commenced operation in September 2012 and Gaelscoil Shliabh Rua commenced in September 2013. These three schools between them will cater for just over 1,500 pupils when fully developed.

Additional classroom accommodation has been provided in the last two years at three primary schools in the area: St Raphaelas NS, Stillorgan received 4 classrooms, SN Cnoc Ainbhil, Mount Anville received 2 classrooms and Scoil Caoimhin Naofa, Stillorgan received 3 classrooms.

In addition Garran Mhuire NS, Goatstown received funding for a new 16 classroom replacement school which was completed in 2014.

Departmental Correspondence

504. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 480 of 25 November 2014 (details supplied), when a final response will issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5643/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Teachers who are fully registered with the Teaching Council and who hold provisional or restricted recognition from my Department continue to be eligible for appointment to posts in special schools and classes and Resource Teaching (low-incidence) Posts.

To be eligible for appointment to a learning support post, teachers must be fully registered with the Teaching Council and have satisfactorily completed their probationary period.

The teacher to whom the Deputy refers has restricted recognition and is currently employed in a permanent capacity in a primary school in a resource teaching post.

Interim arrangements were put in place following the introduction of the General Allocation Model in 2005, which permitted teachers with restricted recognition to teach in a combined learning support/resource teaching LS/RT post. However, with the revision of GAM in 2012, the terms of Circular 0007/12 no longer permits the combination of learning support and resource teaching hours.

A reply to the correspondence referred to by the Deputy will issue forthwith.

Third Level Fees

505. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the projected cost of abolishing fees for part-time postgraduate courses. [5649/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The information requested by the Deputy is not readily available in my Department. Officials of my Department have requested the information from the Higher Education Authority and it will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Departmental Expenditure

506. **Deputy Tom Barry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the full cost of the archaeological dig in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Cork. [5654/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As the Deputy is aware the conditions attached to the planning consent granted in respect of the project in question contained a requirement that archaeological monitoring be undertaken during the removal of topsoil and other ground works. The rationale underlying the requirement was the presence of a monument which is listed on the statutory Record of Monuments and Places in the vicinity of the project location, as well as its proximity to the zone of archaeological potential surrounding the historic town where the school is being built, which is also a recorded monument. I understand that ground works at the site revealed evidence of significant archaeological remains and, as a result, an archaeological excavation was commenced, which was also a planning condition.

The cost of the archaeological monitoring to date is €103,239 inclusive of VAT. I understand that a small quantity of archaeological monitoring is planned for the final services connections which will require excavations and this is expected to take place later this year.

School Enrolments

507. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she shares the views of her predecessor regarding the continuance of the national school system (details supplied). [5659/15]

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

This Department’s main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking school places in the area. Parents have the right to choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available the pupil should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice.

Existing equality legislation, which outlaws discrimination in relation to the admission of a student, makes provision for exemptions to apply in the case of single sex schools and in the case of schools where the objective is to provide education in an environment that promotes certain religious values. The Equality legislation provides that any school that has this objective may, where it has more applicants than places available, admit a student of a particular religious denomination in preference to other students. 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

508. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will approve an application for funding for a school (details supplied) in County Westmeath for additional accommodation under phase 2, in order to facilitate the significant numbers currently enrolling on post-leaving certificate courses, and the increased enrolments for all courses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5682/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the school in question has submitted an application for additional accommodation to my Department. The application will be assessed and a decision will be conveyed to the school authorities as soon as this process has been completed.

Schools Building Projects Status

509. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the building in which a school (details supplied) in County Dublin is currently housed could be re-purposed as a special educational school when the school goes to its new premises at Castleland later this year, as requested by members of the local community. [5698/15]

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.

Special Educational Needs Expenditure

510. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will reverse the cuts affecting special educational needs children as a matter of priority (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5701/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Budget 2015 included an increase in spending on education for the first time in recent years, amounting to additional funding of €60m during 2015.

This funding will be used to provide 1,700 additional teachers and SNAs for our schools, as well as to fund prioritised reforms, such as implementation of the literacy and numeracy strat-

egy, reform of junior cycle, and the introduction of education focussed pre-school inspections.

With regard to Resource Teachers for Travellers, the principle of inclusion is at the core of the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy published in 2006 and, accordingly, the focus of both current and future provision is on the development of a more inclusive school environment. In keeping with this principle, additional resources provided in the education system are allocated on the basis of identified individual educational need rather than that of ethnic or cultural background.

Following decisions of the last Government, as part of the December 2010 budgetary process, Traveller pupils who are eligible for learning support teaching now receive this tuition through the existing learning support provision in schools. This is in keeping with the policy of inclusion and the 2006 report.

The General Allocation Model, which provides additional learning support and English as an additional language allocations for primary schools, was updated for all primary schools from the 2012/13 school year and now includes the Traveller pupils who had previously been supported by Resource Teacher for Traveller (RTT) posts. Limited alleviation measures were put in place to assist schools who had high concentrations of Traveller pupils previously supported by Resource Teacher for Traveller posts/hours, in the context of the limited resources available.

A total of 141 posts have been allocated to schools for this purpose. 81 posts were also provided to readjust Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) allocations to include Traveller pupils previously supported by Resource Teacher for Traveller posts.

Thirty-eight alleviation posts were provided for schools that had high numbers or concentrations of Traveller pupils who were previously supported by RTT posts and a further 22 alleviation posts were allocated to schools who had the highest percentage of traveller pupils previously supported by RTT posts, in comparison to other schools, taking into account their overall pupil populations, and who had not qualified for the first round of alleviation posts.

This Government has been resolutely committed to protecting, and where possible, increasing, the level of investment being made to support children with special educational needs at a time when there has been a requirement to make expenditure reductions across a range of areas. It is an area of spending which has been prioritised above most other areas by this Government, despite the enormous pressures on all areas of public spending.

Some €1.37 billion will be spent in support of children with Special Educational Needs this year, which represents approximately 15% of my Department's budget.

Three hundred and sixty-five new Special Needs Assistant (SNA) posts and 480 resource teaching posts have been provided to support children with special educational needs in schools in 2015, bringing the total number of SNAs available for allocation in 2015 to 11,330 posts and the total number of resource teaching posts to 6,705. Over 11,000 resource and learning support teaching posts are now available. This is the highest level of SNA and resource teaching allocations that we have ever had, and will ensure that children with special educational needs can continue to participate in education and be supported in a manner appropriate to their needs.

With regard to the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, a number of sections have been commenced, including those establishing the National Council for Special Education and those promoting an inclusive approach to education of children.

The NCSE report on 'Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools' which was published in 2013 and is available on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie, recommends

that the EPSEN Act be fully implemented as soon as possible. The report also states that the NCSE recognises that the current economic climate makes it unlikely that the Government will be able to implement this recommendation in the short to medium term.

It is intended to bring into effect many of the good ideas contained in the EPSEN Act, on a non-statutory basis initially, through policy developments across a range of areas, in conjunction with NCSE policy advice.

This includes the National Council for Special Education's (NCSE) Report on a Proposed New Model for Allocating Teachers for Students with Special Educational Needs, published on 18th June 2014.

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

I hope to make an announcement in relation to this matter shortly, in order to give clarity to schools regarding the allocation process for the coming school year.

Schools Refurbishment

511. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to the current need for infrastructural improvement in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Donegal; if her attention has been drawn to the need to upgrade and replace the school's ageing facilities and equipment; her views on the challenges facing teaching staff which this situation is causing; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5726/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): As the Deputy may be aware, a building project for the school referred to, is currently being progressed within my Department's architectural planning process. I understand that the school's Design Team and School Authority are currently working on the Stage 2(a) report.

The school in question is one of a number of schools which it was not possible to include in the 5 Year construction programme. However the school project is being progressed to the final planning stages so that it will be well placed for further progression in anticipation of further funds being available to the Department.

In the interim, I can advise the Deputy that my Department allocates funding to schools for furniture and equipment which can be applied for on an ongoing basis in response to requirements. It is open to the school referred to by the Deputy to submit such an application for consideration.

School Curriculum

512. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures currently in place to promote youth awareness of politics and current affairs. [5731/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): There are a range of measures that promote students' awareness of politics and current affairs in our primary and post primary schools.

At primary level, the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme provides

pupils with an awareness of individual and community rights, as well as an understanding of the concepts of personal, local, national, European and global identity. These themes are further developed in SPHE at post primary level.

My Department also supports the Blue Star programme for primary school students. This programme, which is funded through the Department of the Taoiseach, seeks to foster pupils' better understanding and knowledge of the European Union and how it affects the lives of Irish citizens.

Education about active citizenship is an integral component of the new Framework for Junior Cycle. For example, one of the 24 'Statements of Learning', that encompass the key knowledge and skills that students will be expected to develop during their junior cycle, requires that all students will "value what it means to be an active citizen with rights and responsibilities in local and wider context". In addition, the 8 key skills which underpin the new Framework for Junior Cycle, include "working with others" whereby students should realise and experience how they can "contribute to making the world a better place".

A new short course in Civics, Social and Political Education (CSPE), which has been developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), is available, since last September, to schools to implement, should they wish to do so, as part of their junior cycle programme. The short course aims to inform, inspire, empower and enable young people to participate as active citizens in contemporary society at local, national and global levels based on an understanding of human rights and social responsibilities. Or, for this academic year, schools may choose to offer the existing CSPE syllabus.

In my proposal for Junior Cycle last November, I have included "wellbeing" as a core element of the reformed Junior Cycle. This will include CSPE, SPHE and PE.

Post primary schools who offer Transition year (TY) have the flexibility to design their own TY programme, consisting of 'Transition Units', in accordance with an overall framework set out by the DES. Among the 'Transition Units' that have been developed to date are peace studies, politics, European studies, and gender studies.

One of the programmes that is implemented as part of TY is the Young Social Innovators Programme. This programme helps to develop social awareness and activism amongst young people in the 15-18 year age group. Participating students working in teams, attempt to address a social issue that they have identified as important at either local, national or international level. The projects are showcased in an annual event each year, with an award scheme.

The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) includes a 'Social Education' Module which provides opportunities for the students to examine and explore issues and topics related to contemporary social, economic, political and cultural issues.

My Department is also currently planning to introduce 'Politics and Society' as a new optional Leaving Certificate subject. It is intended that this new subject will be trialled in a number of schools in the 2016/2017 school year.

Physical Education

513. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on the merits of expanding the University of Limerick's health and sciences faculty's third study into flexibility and neuromuscular development in adolescents in Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5735/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My Department is involved in a number of measures to promote the overall government ‘Healthy Ireland’ agenda that is being led by the Department of Health. This includes a number of measures to promote physical activity in post primary schools.

Post primary schools are required to deliver a minimum of 2 hours per week of Physical Education. In 2012, my Department carried out a ‘Lifeskills’ Survey in primary and post primary schools. The data indicated that, in addition to this formal PE provision, 96% of post primary schools encourage physical activity outside of school, and 86% promote physical activity during school break times.

My Department’s Professional Development Support Service for Teachers (PDST) is currently developing a professional development programme for primary and post primary teachers in P.E.. The initial focus of this professional support will be on developing fundamental movement skills and building the knowledge, skills and capacity of teachers to meet the physical literacy needs of learners through the P.E. Curriculum.

My Department also supports the Active Schools Flag. This initiative, which was launched in 2009, recognises schools that provide a quality programme for all students and promote physical activity across the whole school community. The popularity of this programme among all schools is increasing annually.

Physical activity by pupils is not the sole remit of schools. PE in schools is designed to complement activity and other lifestyle habits outside of school. In fact, this “whole of life” approach is being adopted in the National Physical Activity Plan, which is currently being finalised by a cross-sectoral working group co-chaired by the Department of Health and the Department of Tourism and Sport. The Department of Education and Skills is a member of this group.

In addition, I will shortly be issuing guidance to all schools about measures to promote healthy lifestyles generally. This guidance encompasses measures to promote P.E. and physical activity, as well as healthy eating and healthy vending. The guidance has been drafted in consultation with the Department of Health and the HSE.

I have no plans at this time to extend the study referred to by the Deputy. However, as part of a quality physical education programme, P.E. teachers routinely provide information, advice and guidance to students on how to improve a range of components of fitness as part of a healthy lifestyle. This would frequently include advice on the benefits of improved flexibility and the measurement of this component using basic field tests such as the sit-and-reach test.

The authors of the study may wish to make contact with the management bodies of post primary schools, or principals’ associations, should they wish to disseminate the benefits of their work more widely.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

514. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason schools (details supplied) in County Carlow were not sanctioned for units for children with autism in view of the fact they have better facilities and would have 12 units rather than the six-unit classroom sanctioned for another school, and also in view of the fact that since the number of children with autism is on the increase, these schools would be able to facilitate more children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5763/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for approving special classes/units. On this basis, my Department approved funding for such a facility in another school in the area. It is my Department’s understanding that the works required to facilitate this unit’s operation are nearing completion. The unit, when completed, will have capacity for 12 pupils.

My Department has no record of receiving an application for funding for a special need’s unit from the other schools referred to by the Deputy.

School Accommodation

515. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to the gross under provision of primary school places in the Goatstown area, Dublin 14, where the local schools application for September 2015 is four times the potential intake; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5788/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): On Thursday the 5th of February last I announced that seven new primary schools are to be established in the next two years. One of the new schools to be established in 2016 is in the Goatstown-Stillorgan area. A patronage determination process for this school will be run later this year.

Garran Mhuire NS, Goatstown received funding for a new 16 classroom replacement school which was completed in 2014.

Also additional classroom accommodation has been provided in the last two years at three primary schools in the adjoining Stillorgan area: St Raphaela’s NS, Stillorgan, received 4 classrooms, SN Cnoc Ainbhil, Mount Anville, received 2 classrooms and Scoil Caoimhín Naofa, Stillorgan, received 3 classrooms.

Pupil Data Collection

516. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on the matter of schools collecting the personal public service, PPS, numbers of their pupils; if this is being done to comply with a policy or a requirement from her Department; the details of this policy or requirement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5796/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Department of Education and Skills is currently developing an individualised electronic database of primary school pupils (POD – the Primary Online Database). Individualised data coverage has already been in place for a number of years at pre-primary, post-primary and third level education. The primary purpose of POD will be to monitor the education progress of primary pupils (in DES aided schools), throughout the primary system and onwards to post primary level and to help them develop their full educational potential. Once up and running other secondary purposes of POD will include becoming the basis for the allocation of teachers and capitation grants. The Department has consulted with the Data Protection Commissioner in relation to the collection of individual pupil information for the Primary Online Database. They have stated that PPSN can now be collected by schools with the purpose being it is a requirement of the Primary Online Database. A PPS number is an individual’s unique identification number for all dealings with the Public Service, including Social Welfare, tax, education and health services. Having the PPSN on the database will help ensure that there are no duplicate records in the system i.e that

two schools do not have the same child on their roll. In the future we will be able to track pupils from early childhood education, to primary school and onto post-primary, which will allow us to ensure that every child in the State of compulsory school age is in education.

Stay Safe Programme

517. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide a list of the names, roll numbers and locations of all the schools that indicated to her Department, in respect of the 2012 Lifeskills study, that they were not implementing the Stay Safe programme; and the interaction her Department has had with these schools since then with a view to ensuring 100% implementation of the programme. [5797/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The results of the 2012 ‘Lifeskills’ survey, which were published by my Department in January 2014, indicate that approximately 99% of respondent primary schools have a ‘Stay Safe’ programme in place. This represents an increase in four percentage points since the previous Lifeskills survey in 2009.

The findings from the 2012 survey also indicate that 100% of respondent primary schools support their pupils to develop the skills of identifying and responding to unsafe situations, know when and how to seek help, and to say no to keeping secrets. A similar response was achieved through the Lifeskills survey in 2009.

The validity of the findings from the Lifeskills survey is contingent on school principals completing the relevant questionnaire as honestly and accurately as possible. The integrity of this process would be compromised if responses given by school principals were used to target particular schools. My Department uses the findings from the Lifeskills survey to develop appropriate policy responses that are aimed at all schools, rather than targeting individual schools.

The Lifeskills survey is conducted every 3 years. I will be launching the next Lifeskills survey in the next month. This will allow for the measurement of progress made by schools since 2012.

School Staffing

518. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will report on the date for the issuing of P60s for 2014 to special needs assistants. [5802/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My Department operates the largest payroll in the State, with approximately 98,000 school employees and pensioners paid every fortnight. These payrolls have become increasingly complex over the past five years, due to the following:

In addition, the school employee payrolls have a high volume of substitute and casual appointments for payment, which is not a feature of other comparable payrolls. Work is ongoing at present to incorporate payments to home tutors through the payroll, which will broaden the range of payees coming within the remit of the school employee payrolls. There is a huge level of work associated with the issuing of P60s and my Department is arranging to have them issued as soon as possible.

Site Acquisitions

519. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a suitable site has been identified for a new school (details supplied) in County Donegal; if her Department plans to engage with the school's board of management in relation to its plans for the purchase of a site in advance of acquiring it; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5804/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): As the Deputy is aware, my Department is working closely with the relevant Local Authority in relation to acquiring a suitable site for the school to which he refers. A suitable site has been identified and negotiations are ongoing. However, as I am sure the Deputy will appreciate, there are commercial sensitivities associated with land acquisitions generally and I am not in a position to comment further at this time.

Departmental Programmes

520. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on concerns (details supplied) regarding teachers in schools, other than in respect of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, DEIS, being denied the opportunity to take part in the reading recovery programme. [5817/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Reading Recovery is a literacy initiative that was initially made available for DEIS Band 1 and Band 2 schools only as part of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, which was launched in May 2005. Each of these schools was given an opportunity to have a teacher trained as a Reading Recovery teacher. In some areas where training took place in local cluster groups, schools other than those outlined were allowed to participate in the programme.

Since 2004 over 20,000 students have benefited from the Reading Recovery Programme together with a range of other literacy supports. My Department, through the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), continues to prioritise support for DEIS Band 1 and DEIS Band 2 schools as well as maintaining ongoing support for other schools already participating in the programme.

New schools have not been permitted to join the Reading Recovery Programme in light of the extensive programme of support available in the area of literacy.

Emerging evidence from work carried out by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) is positive on the range of interventions including Reading Recovery in place for DEIS schools. Inspectorate evaluations also demonstrate that the effectiveness of specialised programmes is maximised when they are integrated into the overall programme in a school.

Support for all schools provided by the PDST takes this into account as part of the ongoing continuing professional development programme for "Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life - The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy for Children and Young People 2011-2020".

School Staffing

521. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide an update on an appeal lodged by a school (details supplied) in County Westmeath regarding a

second teacher. [5824/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The criteria used for the allocation of teachers to schools is 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 shortly.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

522. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the action she will take to ensure that the current pupil-teacher ratio in our schools is improved; her plans to ensure that children with special needs are provided with adequate educational supports in order for them to participate fully in education and learning; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5863/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My focus in Budget 2015 was on obtaining the additional funding that was necessary to provide for demographic growth. The last Budget included an increase in spending on education for the first time in recent years, amounting to additional funding of €60m during 2015.

This funding will be used to provide 1,700 additional teachers and SNAs for our schools, as well as to fund prioritised reforms, such as implementation of the literacy and numeracy strategy, reform of junior cycle, and the introduction of education focussed pre-school inspections. It was not possible to also secure the funding which would have been required to change the staffing schedule for schools.

This Government has been resolutely committed to protecting, and in some instances increasing, the level of investment being made to support children with special educational needs at a time when there has been a requirement to make expenditure reductions across a range of areas. It is an area of spending which has been prioritised above most other areas by this Government, despite the enormous pressures on all areas of public spending.

Some €1.37 billion will be spent in support of children with Special Educational Needs this year, which represents approximately 15% of my Department’s budget.

Three hundred and sixty-five new Special Needs Assistant (SNA) posts and 480 resource teaching posts have been provided to support children with special educational needs in schools in 2015, bringing the total number of SNAs available for allocation in 2015 to 11,330 posts and the total number of resource teaching posts to 6,705. Over 11,000 resource and learning support teaching posts are now available. This is the highest level of SNA and resource teaching allocations that we have ever had, and will ensure that children with special educational needs can continue to participate in education and be supported in a manner appropriate to their needs.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

523. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide

an update on the Student Universal Support Ireland application grant in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Longford. [5870/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As part of a comprehensive customer service and communications strategy provided by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), to ensure that all necessary avenues are open to applicants to receive the information they need, a dedicated email and phone line service is provided by SUSI for Oireachtas members. This was established to meet an identified need for applicants who choose to engage the assistance of their public representatives in making enquiries about their grant applications.

This service compliments the established channels provided by SUSI which include online application tracking, a dedicated website, a telephone helpdesk, email and social media, including Facebook and Twitter.

Enquiries may be emailed direct to SUSI at oireachtas@susi.ie. SUSI are responding to email queries within a matter of days.

I understand from information provided by the Deputy that the financial circumstances of the student referred to changed in 2014. As the Deputy may be aware, Article 32 of the Student Grant Scheme allows for the review of eligibility during the academic year if there is a permanent change in circumstance, relating to a number of events including a drop in reckonable income which is likely to obtain for the duration of the approved course or for the foreseeable future. The link in relation to requesting a review of a student application is <http://www.susi.ie/Quicklinks/Appealing-your-grant-decision.aspx>.

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant, or that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one she/he may appeal, in the first instance to SUSI.

Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted to the Independent Student Grants Appeals Board

Departmental Expenditure

524. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of funding her Department has spent on new school buildings in Dublin 9 and Dublin 11 since 2011; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5872/15]

525. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of funding her Department has spent on additional accommodation in Dublin 9 and Dublin 11 since 2011; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5873/15]

526. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of funding her Department has spent on emergency works in Dublin 9 and Dublin 11 since 2011; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5874/15]

527. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of funding her Department has spent on pre-fabricated replacement in Dublin 9 and Dublin 11 since 2011; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5875/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 524 to 527, inclusive, together.

The capital funding issued to Dublin schools (primary and post-primary) in the years 2011 to date is as follows:

It is not possible to provide data in respect of an area or region within a county. However, if the Deputy wishes to nominate a specific school, I would be happy to provide the level of capital funding issued in such an instance.

Home Tuition Scheme

528. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 488 of 27 January 2015, where she stated that the home tuition was operated in a consistent and equitable manner, the reason her Department agreed to pay 48 hours at the higher qualified rate to one company per letter dated 3 October 2013, and agreed to pay another company a lower amount of only 20 hours at the higher rate in a letter sent on 23 September 2013 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5879/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I wish to inform the Deputy that it is, in my view, reasonable to conclude that the Department has maintained a consistent position in relation to the development of group arrangements and direct payment arrangements for home tuition and that the scheme is operated in a consistent and equitable manner. The rates agreed between my Department and a number of providers in 2013/2014 represents significant value for money. The rate agreed with one provider in 2008 is subject to review and my Department will decide if and when such a review should be undertaken.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

529. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding special educational needs provision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5887/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Budget 2015 included an increase in spending on education for the first time in recent years, amounting to additional funding of €60m during 2015.

This funding will be used to provide 1,700 additional teachers and SNAs for our schools, as well as to fund prioritised reforms, such as implementation of the literacy and numeracy strategy, reform of junior cycle, and the introduction of education focussed preschool inspections. It was not possible to also secure the funding which would have been required to change the staffing schedule for schools.

With regard to Resource Teachers for Travellers, the principle of inclusion is at the core of the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy published in 2006 and, accordingly, the focus of both current and future provision is on the development of a more inclusive school environment. In keeping with this principle, additional resources provided in the education system are allocated on the basis of identified individual educational need rather than that of ethnic or cultural background.

Following decisions of the last Government, as part of the December 2010 budgetary process, Traveller pupils who are eligible for learning support teaching now receive this tuition through the existing learning support provision in schools. This is in keeping with the policy of inclusion and the 2006 report.

The General Allocation Model, which provides additional learning support and English as an additional language allocations for primary schools, was updated for all primary schools from the 2012/13 school year and now includes the Traveller pupils who had previously been supported by Resource Teacher for Traveller (RTT) posts under the General Allocation Model. Limited alleviation measures were put in place to assist schools who had high concentrations of Traveller pupils previously supported by Resource Teacher for Traveller posts/hours, in the context of the limited resources available.

Provision for English Language Support posts is now provided for under the General Allocation Model for schools, while further additional temporary language support posts provided on the basis of appeals to the Staffing Appeals Boards. The appeal criteria are set out in the published staffing arrangements.

It should be noted that there has been no overall reduction to the level of investment being provided to support children with special educational needs in our schools. On the contrary, the number of SNA and Resource Teaching post being allocated to support children with special educational needs has increased in recent years to reflect demographic growth and increased demand in this area.

This Government has been resolutely committed to protecting, and where possible, increasing, the level of investment being made to support children with special educational needs at a time when there has been a requirement to make expenditure reductions across a range of areas. It is an area of spending which has been prioritised above most other areas by this Government, despite the enormous pressures on all areas of public spending.

Some €1.37 billion will be spent in support of children with Special Educational Needs this year, which represents approximately 15% of my Department's budget.

365 new Special Needs Assistant (SNA) posts and 480 resource teaching posts have been provided to support children with special educational needs in schools in 2015, bringing the total number of SNAs available for allocation in 2015 to 11,330 posts and the total number of resource teaching posts to 6,705. Over 11,000 resource and learning support teaching posts are now available. This is the highest level of SNA and resource teaching allocations that we have ever had, and will ensure that children with special educational needs can continue to participate in education and be supported in a manner appropriate to their needs.

With regard to the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, a number of sections have been commenced, including those establishing the National Council for Special Education and those promoting an inclusive approach to education of children.

The NCSE report on 'Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools' which was published in 2013 and is available on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie, recommends that the EPSEN Act be fully implemented as soon as possible. The report also states that the NCSE recognises that the current economic climate makes it unlikely that the Government will be able to implement this recommendation in the short to medium term.

It is therefore intended to bring into effect many of the good ideas contained in the EPSEN Act, on a non-statutory basis initially, through policy developments across a range of areas, in conjunction with NCSE policy advice.

This includes the National Council for Special Education's (NCSE) Report on a Proposed New Model for Allocating Teachers for Students with Special Educational Needs, published on 18th June 2014.

I hope to make an announcement in relation to this report shortly, in order to give clarity to

schools regarding the allocation process for the coming school year.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

530. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if Student Universal Support Ireland can assess a person (details supplied) as an independent student, in view of their circumstances; her plans to introduce discretionary measures in order to avoid situations like this in the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5895/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): For student grants purposes, students are categorised according to their circumstances either as students dependent on parents or a legal guardian, or as independent mature students.

A student may be assessed as an independent mature student if he or she has attained the age of 23 on the 1st of January of the year of first entry to an approved course or of re-entry following a break in studies of at least three years and is not ordinarily resident with his/her parents from the previous October. Otherwise he or she would continue to be assessed on the basis of parental income.

Only in exceptional cases, where compelling evidence of estrangement from parents/guardians is provided, can candidates who are under 23 be assessed without reference to their parents/guardians income or address, Article 21(3) (b) of the Scheme refers.

The assessment of a case of estrangement is carefully considered to ensure there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the exceptional circumstances pertaining in such cases genuinely exists. The type of evidence required is dependent on the applicant’s individual circumstances.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

531. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will allow a late student grant application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary in view of the personal circumstances involved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5907/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that their application for a student grant is submitted before the deadline.

The national student grant awarding body, SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland), opened its online application system for the 2014/2015 academic year on 8 May, 2014 with the closing date further extended to 06 November 2014. Late applications may be accepted by SUSI, where a student has had an exceptional change of circumstances as outlined in Article 32 of the Student Grant Scheme 2014; provided such application is not later than one month before the end of the academic year to which the application relates. All requests for late applications are examined and considered on a case-by-case basis. In accepting a late application, SUSI will have established that an exceptional change of circumstance has occurred and will have considered why the request was not made before the deadlines. The student referred to by the Deputy may contact SUSI support desk at 076-108 7874 to enquire about making a late application for the 2014/15 academic year where exceptional change of circumstances have occurred.

Schools Designation

532. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to the fact that a number of schools (details supplied) in Dublin 10 have been provided with pre-approval to change their status, so that they can accept boys for admission after first class; if she approved this change; if her further attention has been drawn to the fact that a survey carried out in all the schools returned findings of 74% of parents who were against the introduction of co-education; if her attention was drawn to this when she approved this change; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5928/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that, to date, my Department has not received an application from the Patron to change the status of the schools concerned. Consequently, approval to change the schools' status has not been given by my Department. I understand that the Patron's office wrote to the Boards of Management of the four schools concerned last December indicating that the proposal to re-organise the schools from September 2015 will not be progressed. I understand also that the Patron indicated to the Boards that the three schools on the same campus may apply to the Patron for a change of status for September 2015 and that any change would be introduced on a phased basis. The Patron's office also advised that no change would be made to the school which is located on another site for the next three years and that the pupil enrolment at that school is to be kept under review during this period.

Schools Designation

533. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will respond positively to correspondence from eight schools (details supplied) who seek to have the catchment area for the new Educate Together secondary school expanded to reflect the coherence of the area between the county boundary and the motorway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5942/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department has recently received the correspondence referred to by the Deputy and a response will issue when the matter has been considered.

Child Abuse

534. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the State's legal reasoning (details supplied) behind the decision to only allow those who were abused after the date a complaint was made regarding a teacher to be entitled to compensation, leaving those abuse victims, who for whatever reason did not come forward or did so too late, without any acknowledgement by the State of what was done to them, and thereby leaving them without any entitlement to compensation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5951/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): In its response to the ECHR judgment, the Government agreed that out of court settlements be offered to those bringing cases of school child sexual abuse against the State where the cases come within the terms of the ECHR Decision and satisfy the Statute of Limitations. In pursuing settlements, the State Claims Agency will be considering cases of school child sexual abuse where there was a prior complaint about the teacher concerned to school authorities. The rationale for this approach is that these were the circumstances on which the European Court of Human Rights judgment was based.

Child Abuse

535. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills, in view of the Government's decision before Christmas 2014 to offer a settlement to those who were abused in school (details supplied), if she will provide information on the exact number of the 135 claims that were formally discontinued, as she referred to them, through the State Claims Agency; the number of the 135 cases, following examination by the State Claims Agency, that will be eligible for settlement; if the information is not available, the length of time it will take; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5953/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): When announcing details of the Government decision to seek to settle certain claims of school child sexual abuse that came within the parameters of the European Court of Human Rights judgment, I noted that there was also a group of school child sexual abuse cases which had not been progressed for a number of reasons, including those which might have been discontinued after receiving letters from the State Claims Agency. The Agency has been reviewing these cases to clarify the exact position and whether they had been formally discontinued or not. I expect to be in a position to report to Government on this matter shortly at which time the Government will consider whether any measures will be taken in relation to these cases.

Schools Amalgamation

536. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans regarding the much needed amalgamation of schools (details supplied) in County Kerry; and when will funding be provided for such works. [5970/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): An application in relation to the proposed amalgamation of schools referred to by the Deputy has recently been received by my Department. This proposal is currently under consideration and officials from my Department will be in contact with the Management Authority of the schools concerned shortly.

Departmental Records

537. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on concerns (details supplied) regarding information being sought by her Department. [5973/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Department of Education and Skills has consulted with the Data Protection Commissioner in relation to the collection of information on pupil ethnic or cultural background on the Primary Online Database. Some categories of ethnic or cultural background are required for international reporting purposes and in mainstream schools for enhanced capitation payments. The Data Protection Commissioner advises that the most equitable way to collect this type of sensitive information is to give all pupils an opportunity to identify their own ethnic and cultural background and consent to the information being passed to the Department, rather than targeting a particular ethnic or cultural group in the data collection, and so we have proceeded with the question on that basis. The question on Ethnic and Cultural background is not compulsory and parents have the option to choose no consent to answer the question.

We are committed to reviewing the questions asked in POD. As part of this we have reviewed our question in POD on the collection of information on Ethnic or Cultural Back-

ground. We feel that the question used to collect data on ethnic or cultural background should be harmonised across all the education partners and other bodies who collect this type of information. As the CSO is the National Statistical Office, we are taking our lead from them. However, while the question asked in POD is not the exact same as the question asked in the Census of Population, it is based on the question. The main difference between the Census of Population question and the question asked in POD was that we also included the category of Roma as Ireland has International data reporting requirements on this group. The Census does not have a category of Roma.

The Department is currently working on making changes to the text of some of the response categories to Ethnic and Cultural Background question. This includes changes to the suggested consent form for schools to collect the information for POD and to the categories as they appear on the POD database. An updated consent form (in both English and Irish) will be available for downloading from the Department's website in the coming week. These changes will also be reflected on the POD database in the coming weeks.

The changes that will be made to the question asked in POD are outlined as follows. Black African will be replaced with, Black or Black Irish - African, Any other Black Background will be replaced with, Black or Black Irish - Any other Background, Chinese will be replaced with, Asian or Asian Irish-Chinese, Any other Asian will be replaced with, Asian or Asian Irish - Any other background.

While we accept the point that not everyone is happy with the a list of categories as they are laid out, it is very difficult to agree a list of categories that can satisfy everyone when discussing such a subjective matter, particularly the range of possible categories is infinitely wider than what is outlined in our question. In this regard the Statistics Section of the Department met with the CSO's Census of Population Division to discuss concerns such as yours. They too accept that the variant of the ethnicity question on the 2016 census may fall short of what could be expected in today's multi-racial Ireland. Unfortunately, given the no-change' census approach being adopted for Census of Population 2016 it is not possible to change the CSO question at this stage. However the CSO has indicated that it is considering holding a seminar to examine how the data in this area can be improved from the point of view of maximising the number of write-in responses to increase the variety of ethnic descriptions captured, the classification system used, and also looking at the nationality vs. citizenship issue and examining generally how the outputs from the census can be improved in this important area. The Department of Education and Skills will be participating in this seminar. Note that the question on POD is intended to capture ethnic and cultural background only and there is a separate question on POD for nationality.

School Staffing

538. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools operating with four teachers or less. [5978/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The information requested is provided in the National School Annual Census Return. Results from the Census for the current school year (2014/2015) are not yet available. The data requested is available on my Department's website for the 2013/14 school year at the link below under the heading class Size Information at Individual Primary School Level. <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Data-on-Individual-Schools/>.

Physical Education Facilities

539. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools that currently do not have a physical education hall. [5979/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The specific information sought by the Deputy is not readily available. However, I wish to assure the Deputy that my Department fully recognises the key role of physical exercise within the school environment and continues to respond to the need to improve Physical Education facilities for all pupils attending schools within the constraints of the available funding.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that the Physical Education curriculum has been designed on the basis that facilities in schools may vary. Many post primary schools have a P.E. hall and practically all schools have outdoor play areas which are used for teaching different aspects of the P.E. programme. In addition, many schools use adjacent local facilities, including public parks, playing fields and swimming pools.

The provision of play space, where site conditions and circumstances allow, is one of the issues considered in the architectural design of new schools and major extensions. My Department's design guidelines for schools include guidance in the provision of P.E. Halls, general purpose rooms and outdoor hard play areas such as basketball courts.

Schools Building Projects Status

540. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide an update on the building project in respect of a school (details supplied) in Dublin 13; if planning permission for the project has been applied for yet; when the school will go to tender; when construction will commence; and when the new building will be completed. [5991/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The major building project to provide permanent accommodation for the school referred to by the Deputy is in architectural planning. The Design Team are currently finalising the Stage 2A report for presentation to my Department at the Stage 2A stakeholders meeting. A date for this meeting is being agreed between my Department, the Boards of Management and their Design Team.

Following that meeting, and subject to no issues arising, the project should then be authorised to progress to Stage 2B - Detailed Design, which includes the application for statutory approvals (including Planning Permission) and the preparation of tender documents.

Until Planning Permission and the other statutory approvals have been secured it will not be possible to give an indicative date for progression to tender and construction stages.

School Enrolments Data

541. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she is satisfied that her Department is planning for sufficient school places in an area (details supplied) in Dublin 13, in view of the number of children in the area and the fact that the existing school is heavily over-subscribed. [5992/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): A recent nationwide demographic review carried out in my Department concluded that, with the addition of both planned

and recently delivered infrastructural provision in the area referred to by the Deputy, the existing schools between them are expected to be able to cater for the overall level of demand for places in the area.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department's main responsibility is ensure that schools, in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking places. This may result, however, in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice.

The Forward Planning Section of my Department will continue to monitor demographic data for all areas of the country to ensure emerging needs are met in a timely manner.

School Accommodation

542. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount her Department has spent on the current building in respect of a school (details supplied) in Dublin 13, since the school opened; the amount that was spent on the main building; the amount that was spent on pre-fabricated units; and the additional cost of providing more pre-fabricated units for the next school year. [5993/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the school in question was established as an 8 classroom school in 2008. Since then, the building has been expanded and modified to facilitate additional classrooms.

The total cost to date of providing this facility, including its rental, amounts to €4.6 million. The cost of providing prefabs amounted to €354,692. Two additional prefabs are required for the next school year and the school is in the process of sourcing these. The costs are not known at this stage.

The Deputy will be aware that the school is included in the 5 Year construction Plan for the of a new school. The project is currently at Stage 2(a) (Developed Sketch Design) and a draft Stage 2(a) report was recently submitted for review by my Department. A Stage 2(a) stakeholders meeting with the school and its design team is currently being arranged. Subject to no issues arising, the project will then be authorized to progress to Stage 2(b) – Detailed Design, which includes the application for statutory approvals (including Planning Permission) and the preparation of tender documents.

Schools Building Projects Applications

543. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of applications currently in the schools building programme; and the number of applications currently progressing through architectural planning, on a county-by-county basis. [5995/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that 275 major school projects were included in the 5 year programme announced in March 2012. The announcement also included a commitment to publish an annual construction programme. The current status in relation to each of the individual projects on the annual construction programme announcements for 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 are available on my Department's website and are updated regularly.

In addition, in June 2013, my Department announced a further 28 additional major projects to proceed to construction under the Investment in Infrastructure and Jobs programme.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that a further 51 projects, in 16 counties, detailed below, are currently progressing through the architectural planning process. They will continue to be progressed up to tender stage so that they will be well placed for progression in anticipation of further funds being available to the Department.

No. of projects County

2 Cavan

1 Clare

1 Cork City

2 Cork County

5 Donegal

13 Dublin Fingal

1 Galway City

5 Galway County

1 Kildare

1 Limerick County

1 Longford

4 Louth

3 Mayo

6 Meath

1 Tipperary

2 Waterford County

1 Westmeath

1 Wicklow

School Curriculum

544. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to promote science, technology, engineering and mathematics, STEM, subjects in schools; and her further plans to promote them specifically to girls of primary school age. [5996/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Primary Curriculum (NCCA, 1999), in particular the Science and Mathematics Curricula, governs provision in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) in Primary Schools. A high standard of scientific and mathematical skills for boys and girls is recognised to be critical in Ireland's economic development.

Science became a compulsory subject for all primary pupils with the introduction of the Primary School Curriculum in 1999. Infant pupils receive 45 minutes of instruction per week

while 1st to 6th pupils receive one hour instruction per week.

Discover Primary Science is a national programme designed to foster interest in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) in primary schools. Last year they presented 517 schools with Awards of Science and Maths excellence.

EMC Robotics Initiative (VEX IQ) was launched on 05/09/2014 by Minister for Skills, Research and Innovation Damien English TD. EMC has teamed up with primary schools to design and build their own robots. The global initiative is designed to encourage STEM learning and drive interest in technology from a young age.

Scoilnet is the Department of Education and Skills (DES) official portal for Irish education. The website is managed by Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) in Education on behalf of the DES. The Sci-Spy Initiative which is a section of this website is aimed at primary students in 5th and 6th classes.

Science Week Ireland is an annual event established to promote the relevance of science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) in our everyday lives. It is coordinated by SFI Discover, the education-outreach programme of Science Foundation Ireland, who also help fund Engineers Week.

Significant system developments have been introduced in the primary school system to promote teaching and learning in Mathematics for boys and girls including standardised national assessments of reading and mathematics introduced in 2007; the National strategy to improve literacy and numeracy introduced in 2011 and School self-evaluation guidelines for primary schools published in 2012.

TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Studies) is a project of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). It is designed to assess the mathematics and science achievement of fourth class pupils. In 2011, Ireland took part in TIMSS for the first time since 1995. Ireland's mean score of 527 is significantly above the TIMSS mathematics centre of 500. Ireland is in 17th position in the TIMSS mathematics table. In Ireland, girls averaged 526 and boys averaged 529. The 3-point gap is not statistically significant, and is broadly similar to the overall international average gender age gap.

Ireland is shown as 22nd position in the TIMSS science table. In Ireland, boys and girls obtained identical mean scores (516).

The evidence from TIMSS indicates that girls are performing as well as their male counterparts in Science and Mathematics in primary schools. The promotion of STEM subjects to girls only does not appear necessary.

In January this year, I launched the performance report on the 2014 National Assessments of English and Reading and Mathematics which was prepared by the Educational Research Centre. Their study of 8000 pupils in 150 primary schools found that overall performance in reading and maths in second and sixth classes was significantly higher than for the 2009 assessments. These are the first significant improvements in over 30 years. Such improvements are to be welcomed.

The NCCA has recently provided me with new specifications for Leaving Certificate Physics, Chemistry and Biology. The NCCA has notified the Department that before the specifications made available to all schools that it, working with the SEC and my Department, will trial, in particular the proposed new practical examination. It is expected, for example, that the new Physics specification, when it is introduced, will not attract more higher level students but it is hoped that it will also attract more girls and more students to study Physics at Ordinary level.

Work is underway on revising Leaving Certificate Applied Mathematics. One of its aims would be to broaden the possible content so that it will be attractive to a wider cohort, especially for girls.

The new Junior Cycle Science specification has been submitted to me, by NCCA, this month, for approval. This will form a firm foundation for the sciences at senior cycle. There is a significant overlap between the developments in the sciences at Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle. Thus the CDP provided for Junior Cycle Science will also start to prepare science teachers for the changes which will follow in the Leaving Certificate sciences. There will be many synergies between the two and there is a natural progression. Of course there will be dedicated CPD provided to Leaving Certificate science teachers to prepare them to introduce the new specifications not only in Physics but also in Chemistry and Biology. A unified CPD strategy will support a consistent experience of teaching and learning in the science curricula throughout post-primary education.

Schools Amalgamation

545. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on the introduction of cluster policies for small schools as set out in the Irish Primary Principals' Network's report entitled New Horizons for Smaller Schools. [5997/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Ireland has a high number of primary schools by international standards and a high number of these schools are small schools. The report to which the Deputy refers was produced ten years ago in 2005. It proposed that additional resources be allocated to small primary schools that were willing to engage in a cluster, including the appointment of a cluster co-ordinator. In the period since the report was written, the country has experienced record birth rates and this has required prioritising the provision of significant additional places at all levels of the education system, in a period of scarce resources. My Department therefore has no plans to allocate additional resources to facilitate clusters of small schools in the manner proposed in the report in question.

Teacher Exchange Scheme

546. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will review the teacher exchange programme to allow teachers to take up permanent posts if available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6011/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Circular letter 12/03 issued by my Department outlines the temporary exchange scheme for primary teachers.

The teacher exchange scheme provides a facility for primary teachers to voluntarily exchange with a teacher in another school. The minimum period for which an exchange may occur: Is one year and the maximum is five years.

The exchange scheme was agreed under the auspices of the Teacher's Conciliation Council, a body established in accordance with the terms of the Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme for Teachers. The Council is comprised of representatives of teachers, school management, the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, chaired by an official of the Labour Relations Commission. Any changes to the exchange scheme are therefore a matter for consideration in the first instance at the Teachers' Conciliation Council.

Schools Review

547. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she has received the value for money review of small rural schools; the date on which it will be published; the reasons for the delay in this; the persons responsible for conducting the review and drafting the report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6018/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I have received the report of the value for money review of small primary school provision. It is under consideration by Government. Decisions on school provision and any possible reorganisation must be widely perceived to be cost-effective, equitable and reasonable. These decisions need to be based on a rigorous evaluation of requirements and needs, not just at a local level but also at both regional and national levels. It is my intention that the report will be published as soon as my Government colleagues and I have finalised our consideration of the report and its recommendations. I cannot give a precise publication date at this time. The review was conducted by a Steering Committee, which was appointed in line with the standard procedures for the conduct of a value for money review. The Committee comprised civil servants from relevant Government Departments and was led by an independent external chairperson.

Education Policy

548. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her Department rural-proofs education policy. [6019/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department aims to ensure that all learners are provided with a high quality, inclusive education experience in state-funded educational establishments including schools, further education and training centres and higher education institutions throughout the country. It is indeed a challenge to do this in light of our current rapidly rising enrolment at all levels of the education system, our uneven population distribution and our limited financial resources.

School Transport Provision

549. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her Department has examined the possibility of introducing a grant scheme to purchase bicycles under the school transport scheme; and if further consideration to same will be given. [6020/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English): The purpose of my Department's Primary and Post Primary School Transport Schemes is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school or education centre.

The distance eligibility criterion is 3.2 kilometres and 4.8 kilometres for primary and post primary children respectively.

Bus Éireann is responsible for the planning and timetabling of school transport routes and endeavours to ensure that each eligible child has a safe and reasonable level of school transport service while at the same time, ensuring that vehicles are fully utilised in the most efficient and cost effective manner.

The cost of the School Transport Scheme was over €172m in 2014.

There is no specific grant available to purchase a bicycle under the terms of the Scheme and I have no plans to introduce such a grant.

Education Expenditure

550. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding education issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6066/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Budget 2015 included an increase in spending on education for the first time in recent years, amounting to additional funding of €60m during 2015.

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

With regard to Resource Teachers for Travellers, the principle of inclusion is at the core of the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy published in 2006 and, accordingly, the focus of both current and future provision is on the development of a more inclusive school environment. In keeping with this principle, additional resources provided in the education system are allocated on the basis of identified individual educational need rather than that of ethnic or cultural background.

Following decisions of the last Government, as part of the December 2010 budgetary process, Traveller pupils who are eligible for learning support teaching now receive this tuition through the existing learning support provision in schools. This is in keeping with the policy of inclusion and the 2006 report.

The General Allocation Model, which provides additional learning support and English as an additional language allocations for primary schools, was updated for all primary schools from the 2012/13 school year and now includes the Traveller pupils who had previously been supported by Resource Teacher for Traveller (RTT) posts.

Limited alleviation measures were put in place to assist schools who had high concentrations of Traveller pupils previously supported by Resource Teacher for Traveller posts/hours, in the context of the limited resources available.

A total of 141 posts have been allocated to schools for this purpose. 81 posts were also provided to readjust Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) allocations to include Traveller pupils previously supported by Resource Teacher for Traveller posts.

38 alleviation posts were provided for schools that had high numbers or concentrations of Traveller pupils who were previously supported by RTT posts and a further 22 alleviation posts were allocated to schools who had the highest percentage of traveller pupils previously supported by RTT posts, in comparison to other schools, taking into account their overall pupil populations, and who had not qualified for the first round of alleviation posts.

This Government has been resolutely committed to protecting, and where possible, increasing, the level of investment being made to support children with special educational needs at a time when there has been a requirement to make expenditure reductions across a range of areas. It is an area of spending which has been prioritised above most other areas by this Government, despite the enormous pressures on all areas of public spending.

Some €1.37 billion will be spent in support of children with Special Educational Needs this year, which represents approximately 15% of my Department's budget.

365 new Special Needs Assistant (SNA) posts and 480 resource teaching posts have been provided to support children with special educational needs in schools in 2015, bringing the total number of SNAs available for allocation in 2015 to 11,330 posts and the total number of resource teaching posts to 6,705. Over 11,000 resource and learning support teaching posts are now available. This is the highest level of SNA and resource teaching allocations that we have ever had, and will ensure that children with special educational needs can continue to participate in education and be supported in a manner appropriate to their needs.

With regard to the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, a number of sections have been commenced, including those establishing the National Council for Special Education and those promoting an inclusive approach to education of children.

The NCSE report on 'Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools' which was published in 2013 and is available on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie, recommends that the EPSEN Act be fully implemented as soon as possible. The report also states that the NCSE recognises that the current economic climate makes it unlikely that the Government will be able to implement this recommendation in the short to medium term.

It is intended to bring into effect many of the good ideas contained in the EPSEN Act, on a non-statutory basis initially, through policy developments across a range of areas, in conjunction with NCSE policy advice.

This includes the National Council for Special Education's (NCSE) Report on a Proposed New Model for Allocating Teachers for Students with Special Educational Needs, published on 18th June 2014.

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

I hope to make an announcement in relation to this matter shortly, in order to give clarity to schools regarding the allocation process for the coming school year.

Medical Qualifications

551. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the involvement she and her Department have had with the request for Medical Council accreditation from the Royal College of Surgeons, Bahrain; if her attention has been drawn to concerns that have been expressed by Members of the Oireachtas and human rights bodies regarding the hospital environment in which the Royal College of Surgeons, Bahrain students have to complete their placements; her views on these concerns; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6102/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Section 88(2)(a) of the Medical Practitioners Act 2007 requires that the Medical Council consult with the Minister for Education and Skills before approving, or otherwise, basic medical programmes and the bodies that deliver them. The Act makes clear that my role in relation to this matter is to be consulted and that the ultimate decision regarding approval of programmes of medical education and the providers of those programmes rests with the Medical Council.

On 4 December 2014 I received, in accordance with section 88(2)(a), correspondence from the Medical Council setting out the recommendations of a Committee established to perform the relevant functions under the Act in respect of a number of institutions, including the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, Bahrain.

The Government's position has been articulated by successive Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Trade. Ireland was also one of 47 United Nations Member States who participated in a joint statement at the UN Human Rights Council expressing serious concern regarding the protection of human rights in Bahrain and calling on the Bahraini Government to expedite the implementation of the recommendations received from the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry. The issues involved have also been the subject of detailed consideration by the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Social Protection.

The Government has always sought to draw a clear distinction between the wider human rights situation and the involvement of Irish institutions in the education and training of Bahraini medical personnel. In that regard, I regard the process set out under Section 88 of the Act as a vital part of the quality assurance architecture for medical education and training in Irish institutions, ensuring compliance with relevant national and international standards.

Therefore, while the Government will continue to use all appropriate diplomatic avenues to express its concerns regarding the human rights situation in Bahrain, it was important to ensure that the Medical Council's consultation with me remained focused on the matters which have been properly identified by the Medical Council under both the Act and other relevant national and international standards.

In the context of the above, in responding to the Medical Council, I noted that it was proposed that "the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland Bahrain's six year programme of basic medical education and training should be approved for a period of five years under the terms of Section 88(2)(a)(i)(I) of the Act. This recommendation is made on the grounds that the programme adheres to the rules, criteria, guidelines and standards approved by Council, as specified in Section 88(2)(a) and 88(2)(d) of the Act." I also noted that "The Medical Council Team is satisfied that, while not a separate programme, and therefore not being separately accredited under the Act, the five year programme as delivered by RCSI Bahrain is satisfactory."

I also expressed my expectation that the Medical Council would have had regard to all of the information relevant to its consideration of national and international standards, including relevant legislation and the World Federation for Medical Education's (WFME) Standards in Basic Medical Education. In this regard, I understand that the panel of assessors were given a copy of the Ceartas report outlining that organisation's perspective on the human rights situation in Bahrain.

I also noted my expectation that appropriate engagement would have taken place with the "wider range of stakeholders" envisaged by the WFME in its Global Standards for Quality Improvement in Medical Education: European Specification, including representatives of "academic staff, students, the community, education and health care authorities, professional organisations and postgraduate educators."

State Examinations

552. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason students are now required to answer all the questions on the mathematics paper in the junior certificate examination, and no longer have a choice of questions, and her views and concerns

(details supplied) regarding same. [6103/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): There has not been a choice on the Junior Certificate Mathematics examination papers since 2003, when the revised syllabuses (introduced in 2000) were first examined. One of the principles on which assessment of that course was based was that ‘full coverage of both knowledge and skills should be encouraged’. Evidence from candidates’ scripts under previous examination arrangements indicated that some parts of the course were not being addressed in teaching and learning. The removal of choice in the examinations from 2003 sought to ensure that the whole course was studied. Since the vast majority of students proceed to senior cycle, where almost all study mathematics, it was seen as important that their study of mathematics in the junior cycle would lay an appropriate foundation for progression to subsequent study of the subject at senior cycle.

In the revised syllabuses introduced under the Project Maths initiative, this position was maintained. Given the inter-relatedness of the various syllabus strands and the requirement for students to integrate knowledge and skills from across the syllabus when solving problems – of a mathematical nature, as well as problems set in both familiar and unfamiliar contexts – it is important that all topics on the course are studied by all students, regardless of syllabus level. Furthermore, the absence of choice allows for questions of varying length and complexity to be included in the examination papers and removes the need for all questions to be of equal difficulty in terms of the challenge they present to candidates and the time taken for their completion.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

553. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if recognition will be provided by Student Universal Support Ireland towards insolvency arrangements in the calculation of reckonable income for the purposes of student grant awards; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6115/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Under the terms of the student grant scheme, grant assistance is awarded to students who meet the prescribed conditions of funding, including those relating to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment and means.

The Deputy will appreciate that, in the absence of all of the relevant details that would be contained in an individual’s application form and supporting documentation, it is not possible to say whether or not a particular student would qualify for a grant.

The eligibility of the individual to which the Deputy refers is a matter for SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland) to determine; upon receipt of the relevant application form and supporting documentation.

Education and Training Boards

554. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when guidelines will be issued by her Department to education and training boards on the appointment of representatives to school boards of management; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6117/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Boards of management of

schools and other centres of education operated by Education and Training Boards (ETBs) are subcommittees of an ETB.

ETBs have been instructed to establish new boards of management of schools and centres of education not later than the 1st April 2015. The ETBs have also been advised that the composition of boards of management shall be determined in the same fashion as was the case heretofore.

I have also advised ETBs that pursuant to Sections 44(11) and 44(12)(c) of the Education and Training Boards Act 2013, boards of management of schools and other centres of education established by an education and training board under section 44 may consist exclusively of members who are not members of the education and training board by which they were established.

I have no plans to issue any further guidance to ETBs concerning the appointments to boards of management.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

555. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the proposed new criteria for determining the allocation of additional educational resources are too restrictive, and that their narrow interpretation could work against the provision of additional supports; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6123/15]

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.

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.

In the course of the consultations a number of stakeholders raised the issue of the criteria which might be put in place to identify pupils with complex special educational needs, as recommended by the Working Group report. I can advise that this matter is currently under consideration and no final decisions have been taken in relation to this issue. I can also 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.

I hope to make an announcement in relation to the proposed new allocation model shortly, in order to give clarity to schools regarding the allocation process for the coming school year.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

556. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when it is proposed to introduce the new system for allocation of resources for special education needs; if the introduction of the new system will be piloted; if not, the reasons for not doing so; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6124/15]

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.

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.

In the course of the consultations a number of stakeholders raised the issue as to whether the proposed new allocation model could be piloted in some schools, prior to the full introduction of the model. Consideration is now being given to this issue.

I can also 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.

I hope to make an announcement in relation to the proposed new allocation model shortly, in order to give clarity to schools regarding the allocation process for the coming school year.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

557. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will reverse the current pupil-teacher ratio cuts; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6130/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My focus in Budget 2015 was on obtaining the additional funding that was necessary to provide for demographic growth. In the budget it was not possible to provide for extra teaching posts that would change the staffing schedule for primary schools, including small schools. The Government recognises that small schools are an important part of the social fabric of rural communities and will continue to be so. However, this does not mean that small schools can stand still or never have their staffing levels changed to something that is more affordable and sustainable. All public servants are being asked to do more with less and the teachers in our small schools cannot be exempt from this requirement. As part of the Budget 2012 decisions, the number of pupils required to gain and retain a classroom teaching post in small primary schools was gradually increased between September 2012 and September 2014. An appeals process is available to schools that are affected by this measure.

Our current configuration of small primary schools has been examined by the Department in a value for money (VFM) review. The report of the value for money review of small primary schools will be published as soon as my Government colleagues and I have finalised our consideration of the report and its recommendations.

The report contains much detailed and technical data in relation to the small schools in the primary sector and it also contains a suite of recommendations and options. Government needs time to properly consider the review report and its recommendations. There are a range of important matters to be considered. Decisions on school provision and any possible reorganisation must be widely perceived to be cost-effective, equitable and reasonable. These decisions need to be based on a rigorous evaluation of requirements and needs, not just at a local level but also at both regional and national levels.

Since becoming Minister each of the education partners that I have met have indicated their own set of priorities. In the school sector these priorities include school leadership, pay restoration, reductions in pupil-teacher ratios, increases to capitation, and the restoration of ex-quota guidance counsellors in schools. Outside of the schools sector, the list of demands includes funding of third level, investment in early years and investment in technology. It is not, and never will be, possible to satisfy all of the demands of the education system at one time. Hence the need to identify priorities for consideration as part of future budgets and as our economy recovers.

School Funding

558. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills, further to Parliamentary Question No. 547 of 3 February 2015, the criteria for a school to receive assistance for the refurbishment or construction of a physical education hall; and if a school (details supplied) in County Galway has been considered for such support. [6145/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As the Deputy is aware, my Department devolved very significant funding to the school in question in 2010 and 2011 to provide additional general classrooms, specialist rooms and ancillary accommodation to meet the schools accommodation needs.

I wish to assure the Deputy that my Department fully recognises the key role of physical exercise within the school environment and continues to respond to the need to improve Physical Education facilities for all pupils attending schools within the constraints of the available funding.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that the Physical Education curriculum has been designed on the basis that facilities in schools may vary. Practically all schools have outdoor play areas which are used for teaching different aspects of the P.E. programme. In addition, many schools, including the school in question use local facilities, which can include public parks, playing fields and swimming pools.

As the Deputy is also aware, due to the competing demands on my Department's capital budget imposed by the need to prioritise available funding for the provision of essential school classroom accommodation, it is not possible at this point to provide an indicative timeframe for the provision of funding towards a multi-purpose/PE hall for the school concerned.

School Services Staff

559. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will engage with the Department of Social Protection, on behalf of school secretaries, who have to sign on every time they take holidays, and who are not paid for the first days of their claim; if a more friendly efficient service will be put in place, where the person can sign on once a year at the start of the school term, if they have a letter from the schools. [6155/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The majority of primary and voluntary secondary schools in the Free Education Scheme now receive capitation grant assistance to provide for secretarial services. Within the capitation grant schemes, it is a matter for each individual school to decide how best to apply the grant funding to suit its particular needs and my Department does not stipulate how secretarial services are to be obtained. Where a school uses the grant funding to employ a secretary, such staff are employees of individual schools. My Department therefore does not have any role in determining the pay and conditions under which they are engaged.

Accordingly, the matters raised by the Deputy in relation to claiming social welfare benefits are solely a matter for the Minister for Social Protection.

Broadband Service Provision

560. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary schools and the number of secondary schools that are currently without access to broadband; the number of these schools that are in rural areas; and the percentage of total schools this equates to. [6157/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Under the Schools Broadband Access Programme, my Department provides for the supply of internet connectivity for all recognised primary and post primary schools.

Attached is a list of 106 schools that have declined to avail of the broadband connection offered by the Department of Education and Skills. This equates to 3% of primary schools.

Roll Number	School name	County
01583I	GLOUNAGUILLAGH NS	Kerry
01711O	S N CILL ROSANTA	Waterford
02124E	SCOIL NAIS MOLAISE	Carlow
02905J	S N NAOMH PADRAIG	Meath

Roll Number	School name	County
05070W	S N BAILE MUIRNE	Wexford
09537S	BALLINADEE NS	Cork
11363A	SCOIL ATHA NA MBLATH	Kerry
11367I	PORTROE N S	Tipperary
11978O	SCOIL MHUIRE NS	Meath
12231L	RUSH HALL MIXED NS	Laois
12741L	MARSHALSTOWN NS	Wexford
12841P	ST PATRICKS N S	Wexford
13910N	S N BUN AN TSABHAIRNE	Cork
14188A	BARNATRA N S	Mayo
14194S	SCOIL CHOLMCILLE	Donegal
14377D	S N CILL CONAILL	Galway
14448A	CLOUGHANOWER NS	Galway
14631O	SCOIL CHOLMCHILLE	Donegal
14829M	Scoil San Eoin	Wicklow
15370R	KILLALOE BOYS NS	Clare
15523Q	S N NAOMH IOSEF	Galway
15532R	CROAGHROSS NS	Donegal
15680J	SCOIL AN SPIORAID NAOMH	Limerick
15685T	ATHEA N SCHOOL	Limerick
15763N	MOVILLE NS	Donegal
16059W	EMLY NS	Tipperary
16281A	SN NAOMH GOBNAIT	Kerry
16283E	S N POL A TSOMAIS	Mayo
16384K	SN ARAINN MHOR II	Donegal
16608G	KILLYBEGS COMMON NS	Donegal
16667W	TOBAR AN LEINN	Laois
16850N	ST GARVANS N.S.	Donegal
16936A	S N NAOMH PADRAIG	Galway
16940O	DUNDAR MHUIGHE N S	Cork
16951T	S N NA CRAOIBHELEITHE	Leitrim
16976M	S N DEAGLAN	Waterford
17025K	S N NA NDUN	Westmeath
17064U	SCOIL PADRAIG	Laois
17110B	NAOMH LORCAN O TUATHAIL	Dublin
17125O	DIFFEREEN N S	Leitrim
17253A	S N CAISLEAN AN CUMAIR	Kilkenny
17459U	CHRIST THE KING IG	Dublin
17599N	S N BAILE AN LUIG	Sligo
17695J	S N MOLAISE	Laois
17725P	S N BHRIDE	Sligo
17761T	S N MHUIRE	Cork
17765E	S N RE NA SCRINE	Cork
17782E	S N BRIDE NAOFA	Galway

Questions - Written Answers

Roll Number	School name	County
17806P	CILL CLEITHE N S	Westmeath
17828C	SCOIL ADHAMHNAIN	Donegal
17890H	TEMPLE ST HOSPITAL NS	Dublin
18396E	S N RATH EILTE	Tipperary
18490T	SN M AN CROI GAN SMAL	Galway
18517N	SCOIL MHUIRE	Donegal
18602E	SCOIL MHUIRE	Dublin
18671A	ST MICHAELS HSE SPEC SC	Dublin
18689T	OUR LADY OF MERCY SENIOR P.S.	Waterford
18700E	S N BAILE AN CAISLEAN	Donegal
18702I	SPA NATIONAL SCHOOL	Kerry
18828H	ST. PAULS PRIMARY SCHOOL	Laois
18936K	ST ITAS SPECIAL SCHOOL	Louth
18939Q	S N DONAIGH	Donegal
18976W	S N CHOLMILLE B	Dublin
19032R	STEWARTS SCHOOL	Dublin
19246N	S N AN TSLANAITHEORA B	Louth
19249T	BARRYROE NS	Cork
19266T	OUR LADY OF FATIMA SPS	Wexford
19357W	SN TIR NA CILLE	Galway
19408N	RATHCORMACK NS	Sligo
19472W	ST MARKS JUNIOR NS	Dublin
19512I	ST OLIVERS NS	Kerry
19522L	ST CATHERINES SPEC SCH	Wicklow
19537B	ST ATTRACTAS JUNIOR NS	Dublin
19614Q	NAOMH BODAIN	Donegal
19679V	S N AODHAIN NAOFA	Cavan
19741A	SCOIL MHUIRE	Wexford
19814B	SCOIL GEARBHAIN	Waterford
19879G	NAOMH PADRAIG JUNIOR	Tipperary
19880O	NAOMH PADRAIG SENIOR	Tipperary
19894C	AN MHODH SCOIL	Limerick
19926M	GAELSCOIL CHOLAISTE MHUIRE	Dublin
19953P	ST MARYS NS	Waterford
19962Q	OBERSTOWN BOYS CENTRE	Dublin
20027I	GAELSCOIL THIOBRAID ARANN	Tipperary
20065Q	OUR LADYS MEADOW NATIONAL SCHOOL	Laois
20070J	ROSEDALE SCHOOL	Galway
20081O	GAELSCOIL PHORT LAOISE	Laois
20092T	ST ULTANS NS	Dublin
20119N	CORK UNIVERSITY HOS SCHOOL	Cork
20124G	ST MARYS NS	Longford
20203C	MOHILL NS	Leitrim

Roll Number	School name	County
20234N	THE CHILDRENS ARK	Limerick
20247W	Scoil Ghrainne Community National School	Dublin
20308Q	Belmayne Educate Together National School	Dublin
20312H	Raheen Wood Steiner School	Clare
20327U	Gaelscoil Lorgan	Monaghan
20329B	Tígh Nan Dooley Child Education and Development Centre	Galway
20330J	St. Oliver's Child Education and Development Centre	Galway
20331L	Scoil Aisling	Cork
20348F	Holywell Educate Together National School	Dublin
20351R	Naas Community National School	Kildare
20352T	ARD RÍ COMMUNITY NATIONAL SCHOOL	Meath
13856K	BUSHY PARK NS	Galway
16677C	BUNSCOIL NA MBRAITHRE	Clare
17891J	SCOIL MHUIRE	Dublin
19047H	ST JOSEPHS SPECIAL SCH	Galway

Property Tax Yield

561. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the restrictions in terms of categories of spending by local authorities, that have been applied to moneys raised from local property tax; the minimum or maximum spending caps that have been applied to the various spending categories; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5542/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department has advised local authorities of their provisional Local Property Tax allocations from the Local Government Fund for 2015. 80% of LPT will be retained locally to fund vital public services in 2015. The remaining 20% will be re-distributed to provide top-up funding to certain local authorities that have lower property tax bases due to the variance in property values across the State. Local Property Tax was introduced to provide an alternative, stable and sustainable funding base for the local authority sector, providing greater levels of connection between local revenue raising and associated expenditure decisions. Given that local authorities vary significantly from one another in terms of size, population, public service demands, infrastructure and income sources, the Government has decided that no local authority will receive less income from LPT in 2015 than they received for General Purpose Grants (GPGs) from the Local Government Fund in 2014. Certain local authorities, with stronger property bases, will receive greater levels of funding from local retention of LPT in 2015 than they received from the Local Government Fund in 2014.

The Government has decided that these latter local authorities will use this surplus funding in two ways, with a portion available for their own discretionary purposes and the remainder, if any, to fund some local services in the Housing and Roads areas for which they currently re-

ceive Central Government funding. The portion that will be retained for discretionary purposes by these authorities will be an amount equal to 20% of the total expected LPT income in the relevant local authority area (before any decision to vary rates) or, in the case where that surplus will be less than 20%, the full amount.

Accordingly, 10 local authorities will receive higher levels of LPT income in 2015 compared to GPG funding in 2014 that will enable them to fund local services of up to €131.7m in the Housing and €21.7m in the Roads areas, respectively, and, therefore, free up some Central Government funding for other purposes. Those local authorities are - Clare, Cork County, Dún Laoghaire Rathdown, Dublin City, Fingal, Galway City, Kildare, Meath, South Dublin and Wicklow. I have advised all local authorities of their individual provisional LPT allocations, totalling €458.9m, for 2015, of which up to €153.4m is ring fenced to fund local services in the Housing and Roads areas by the 10 local authorities as outlined above. Further details in relation to the specific obligations that my Department will seek to be satisfied from these self-funding levels in the Housing area will be provided as part of the overall Housing grant allocations process for 2015, which will be completed in due course. It is a matter for the individual local authorities to decide how to spend the remaining €305.5m, in the context of the annual budgetary process having regard to both locally identified needs and available resources.

The decision to allow local authorities to retain 80% of LPT locally and the power to vary LPT rates will facilitate further implementation of the overall objective of the local government reform programme, which is to achieve greater devolution to the local government sector, through supporting enhanced local decision making on spending priorities.

Commercial Rates Valuation Process

562. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on setting up an expert group to examine ways to rebalance and update the commercial rate structure, to make it fairer. [5554/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation under the Valuation Act 2001. The Commissioner of Valuation has sole responsibility for all valuation matters, including the method of valuation. The Valuation Act 2001 comes under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

The annual rate on valuation (ARV), which is applied to the valuation for each property determined by the Valuation Office to obtain the amount payable in rates, is decided by the elected members of each local authority in the annual budget and its determination is a reserved function.

The Commissioner of Valuation, who has sole responsibility for all valuation matters, is conducting a programme of revaluation of all commercial and industrial properties throughout the State on a county by county basis. The national revaluation programme is the first general valuation since the middle of the 19th century, and it is a significant undertaking. If there is to be a fair distribution of the rates burden then valuation should be based on modern rental values.

I am informed by my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, that, following the completion of the revaluation of the four local authority areas in Dublin, the three former local authorities in Waterford and the revaluation of Limerick, over 48,000 properties

have been revalued. While this represents in excess of 33% of all rateable properties, it constitutes about 57% of the valuation base for levying rates. The Valuation Act 2001 provides that the valuation be carried out on a rolling basis. This means that each rating authority area will be separately valued as part of a planned sequential valuation of the whole country. The sequence is decided by the Commissioner of Valuation, who is independent in carrying out his function. Valuation Orders for the revaluation of further Local Authority areas are expected to be made by the Commissioner in the near future.

The Valuation (Amendment) (No.2) Bill 2012, which was initiated in the Seanad, was passed by that House on 20th November 2014 and is scheduled to be introduced in the Dáil shortly. The primary purpose of the Bill is to introduce measures that will enable the Commissioner of Valuation to accelerate the national programme of revaluation of all commercial and industrial properties across the State. The measures included in the Bill include provisions for Outsourcing, Occupier Assisted Valuation and the use of computer-aided techniques.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

563. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown of the sources of CO2 emissions here. [5710/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): In Ireland, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) prepares inventories of greenhouse gas emissions, which are compilations of historical greenhouse gas emissions from sources such as transport, power generation, industry and agriculture. The most recent year for which provisional data are available is 2013. In that year, total national greenhouse gas emissions were estimated to be 57.81 Mt CO₂-eq. (million tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent). A percentage disaggregation of that total figure by source is set out in the table below:

Source	Emissions share (%)
Agriculture	32.3
Energy	19.6
Transport	19.1
Industry & Commerce	15.4
Residential	11.1
Waste	2.5

This and more information is available on the EPA's website at: <http://www.epa.ie/climate/emissionsinventoriesandprojections/nationalemissionsinventories/#.VNiHbmyvmfA>.

Water Conservation Grant

564. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if customers of Irish Water will be required to furnish their PPS number in order to avail of the water conservation grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5739/15]

565. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government regarding the water conservation grant, if this payment will be paid an-

nually for the period of the capped charge. [6110/15]

567. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the method of payment that will be used to pay the water conservation grant; if this will be done by credit transfer or through post offices; the conditions that will attach to this payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6183/15]

576. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the estimated cost of administering the conservation grant; and the amount to be paid out in respect of the conservation grant in 2015, 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5641/15]

586. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the arrangements in place for processing and administering the conservation grant on behalf of his Department; the agreements that have been arrived at in relation to the cost of administering this project; the amounts provided in his Department's estimates for 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5913/15]

587. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government regarding the administration and the payment of the conservation grants, if the project was put out to tender, or if another Government Department was requested to carry out this work on behalf of his Department, without a tendering process; the process and the budget agreed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5930/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 564, 565, 567, 576, 586 and 587 together.

To promote sustainable use of water and to enhance water conservation in households, the Department of Social Protection will administer, on behalf of my Department, a €100 water conservation grant for households (principal private dwellings) that complete a valid response to Irish Water's customer registration process. It is proposed that the grant will be paid in one instalment to all eligible households in September 2015 and on an annual basis thereafter.

The water conservation grant replaces the tax rebate and social protection measures previously announced, as it is a more straightforward means of addressing water issues for all households on equal terms and will reduce households' outlay on water services both now and in the future.

An allocation of €130m for the grant scheme has been provided in my Department's Estimate for 2015. This is based on an estimate of up to 1.3 million households applying for the grant. This estimated level of demand for 2015 takes account of the number of primary residences recorded in Census 2011 as well as experiences with other demand-led schemes. The provisions required in future years will be determined as part of the annual budgetary process, having regard to the take-up of the scheme and forecast growth in household numbers.

My Department, in consultation with the Department of Social Protection, is currently finalising the modalities of the water conservation grant. I will thereafter make Regulations under the Water Services Act 2014 which will provide for the terms and conditions attaching to the grant, including the date by which households will need to have responded to the Irish Water campaign if they are to be eligible for the grant. All households registered with Irish Water under its application campaign will be contacted directly by the Department of Social Protection in due course.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Data

566. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on amending the terms of the mortgage-to-rent scheme, in order to raise the threshold of house values from €220,000, to a level which reflects the increase in property prices since the scheme has come into being, as many families are still dealing with serious mortgage distress; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6142/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): In order for a property to be considered under the mortgage to rent scheme it must be purchased by an Approved Housing Body for less than €220,000 (per property) in the Greater Dublin Area and €180,000 (per property) in the rest of the country. These limits were determined by a working group which took account of available market data and the current social housing acquisition limits. These limits are considered to be reasonable in respect of the income bracket that is targeted by the scheme.

Question No. 567 answered with Question No. 564.

Water Quality

568. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the acceptable level of lime in drinking water to be provided on the public mains; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5499/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Under the European Union (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014, a copy of which is available in the Oireachtas library, suppliers of drinking water are required to ensure that the water supplied is wholesome and clean. Water which is wholesome and clean is defined as water which is free from any micro-organisms and parasites and from any substances which in numbers or concentrations constitute a potential danger to human health and which meets the quality standards specified in the Schedule to the Regulations.

The quality of water provided is very much dependent on local geological conditions and the source of the water supply. Many public water supply schemes supply hard water. Normally this means the water comes from groundwater sources, but it can also come from surface waters. The substances associated with hard water, such as lime, calcium and magnesium, are not included as parameters in the quality standards specified in the above Regulations as they do not pose a threat to human health.

Building Regulations

569. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding access to buildings, both public and private, for persons with a physical disability; and the percentage of all buildings that are wheelchair-friendly. [5504/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): My Department does not maintain a database on the percentage of buildings which are wheelchair friendly.

The Building Regulations 1997 to 2014 provide for the health, safety and welfare of persons

in and around buildings and set out the legal requirements for the design and construction of new buildings, including houses, extensions and material alterations and certain changes of use to existing buildings. The related Technical Guidance Documents provide technical guidance on how to achieve compliance with the Regulations. All buildings, both public and private, must comply with the Building Regulations that are in force at the time of their construction. The Building Regulations are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they remain in line with both national and international best practice.

Part M of the Building Regulations sets out the regulatory requirements in respect of access and use. Under the Building Regulations (Part M Amendment) Regulations 2010 and the associated Technical Guidance Document M – Access and Use (2010), which came into effect on 1 January 2012, adequate provision shall be made for people to access and use a building, its facilities and its environs.

The aim of Part M is to ensure that regardless of age, size or disability:

- new buildings other than dwellings are accessible and usable;
- extensions to existing buildings other than dwellings are, where practicable, accessible and useable;
- material alterations to existing buildings other than dwellings increase the accessibility and usability of existing buildings, where practicable;
- certain changes of use to existing buildings other than dwellings increase the accessibility and usability of existing buildings, where practicable; and
- new dwellings are visitable.

The underlying philosophy of Part M is to ensure that buildings and their facilities should be accessible and usable by persons of all ages and abilities and that the designers and builders of new buildings take accessibility issues into account throughout the design process in order to deliver a built environment that is more inclusive of all elements of society.

Notwithstanding requirements under the Building Regulations, the Disability Act 2005 requires public bodies to ensure that their public buildings are, as far as practicable, accessible to persons with disabilities. Under Section 25 of the Act, there is an obligation on public bodies to make their public buildings comply with Part M of the Building Regulations by 31 December 2015 [i.e. Technical Guidance Document M (2000 edition)]. Section 25 also requires that public buildings be brought into compliance with any amendments to Part M not later than 10 years after the commencement of such amendments [i.e. Technical Guidance Document M (2010 edition)]. The Act also provides that the Minister for Justice and Equality may request the National Disability Authority to prepare and submit a draft code of practice, which the Minister may approve, amend or refuse as the case may be, relating to the accessibility of public buildings to persons with disabilities for the purpose of giving guidance to public bodies in these matters.

Non-Principal Private Residence Charge Exemptions

570. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will review the non-principal private residence charge and the circumstances within which children are permitted to reside in a dwelling within two kilometres of their parents' home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5537/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Local Government (Charges) Act 2009, as amended, provides the legislative basis for the Non-Principal Private Residence (NPPR) Charge. The NPPR Charge, which has since been discontinued, applied in the years 2009 to 2013 to any residential property in which the owner did not reside as their normal place of residence. The NPPR Charge is based on self-declaration and therefore the onus is on the property owner themselves to register their property and make the payment. The 2009 Act places the Charge under the care and management of the local authorities and application in particular circumstances is a matter for the relevant local authority; Part 12 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 deals with the collection of undischarged liabilities relating to the NPPR Charge.

A number of exemptions from the charge are set out in section 4 of the 2009 Act and section 4(6) provides for an exemption from the charge in a situation where a residential property is occupied rent-free as the sole or main residence of a relative of the owner and the sole or main residence of the owner is either on the same property or within two kilometres of it.

I have no plans to revise the legislation.

Local Authority Housing Eligibility

571. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the reason prospective council tenants are not provided the opportunity to view a property before they accept or refuse it following an offer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5549/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Under section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, the allocation of dwellings in accordance with an allocation scheme is a matter for the housing authority concerned and I have no power to intervene in individual cases. It is of course important that dwellings are allocated efficiently and effectively by local authorities. If the Deputy wishes to send me specific information regarding the particular circumstances alluded to I will consider whether further guidance, from my Department, is required.

Local Authority Rates

572. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide in tabular form the total amount of moneys collected by each county council for commercial rates and commercial water rates in 2012, 2013 and 2014; and if he will provide a list of the uncollected amounts. [5553/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The levying and collection of rates are matters for each individual local authority. The annual rate on valuation (ARV), which is applied to the valuation for each property determined by the Valuation Office to obtain the amount payable in rates, is decided by the elected members of each local authority during the annual budget process.

Rates income data are published by local authorities in their Annual Financial Statements. 2012 is the latest year for which audited local authority Annual Financial Statement data are available.

The amounts of commercial rates collected, as reported by local authorities in their indi-

vidual audited financial statements for 2012, are set out in the reply to Question No.1577 of 17 September 2014. It should be noted that this income may include arrears collected in addition to current year rates income.

Similarly, the amounts relating to commercial water charges collected, as reported by local authorities in their individual audited financial statements for 2012, are set out in the reply to Question No.1578 of 17 September 2014. It should be noted that this income may include arrears collected in addition to current year water charges income. From 2001 to end 2013 the provision of water services was the responsibility of the City and County Councils. In some cases Town and Borough Councils entered into agreements with the relevant City or County Councils to provide water services including billing functions. As with all local charges, the invoicing and collection of amounts due is a matter for the local authority concerned to manage in light of prevailing circumstances and in accordance with normal accountancy procedures.

A total of €145,110,593 was owed to local authorities in respect of unpaid commercial water charges and €430,814,183 in respect of unpaid rates at the end of 2012, the latest year for which full audited data is available. A local authority breakdown of the information requested in relation to uncollected amounts is set out in the following table.

Local Authority	Total Rates Arrears - End 2012 - €	Total Commercial Water Arrears - End 2012 - €
Carlow County Council	2,285,542	511,221
Cavan County Council	3,611,492	1,744,410
Clare County Council	9,814,406	8,186,212
Cork County Council	26,383,087	12,572,204
Donegal County Council	10,146,835	11,289,265
Fingal County Council	22,532,759	7,063,652
Dún Laoghaire- Rathdown County Council	24,997,531	6,290,391
Galway County Council	8,336,795	4,082,935
Kerry County Council	3,935,069	1,983,468
Kildare County Council	12,626,660	7,196,468
Kilkenny County Council	1,736,776	781,735
Laois County Council	3,185,016	1,375,204
Leitrim County Council	1,997,904	1,370,449
Limerick County Council	5,174,029	1,914,414
Longford County Council	852,888	1,062,954
Louth County Council	5,042,202	5,440,193
Mayo County Council	2,724,384	5,039,979
Meath County Council	5,610,873	3,582,871
Monaghan County Council	2,290,962	1,094,813
North Tipperary County Council	1,815,829	1,802,059
Offaly County Council	584,258	1,200,833
Roscommon County Council	2,398,419	2,759,958
Sligo County Council	2,407,266	3,018,861
South Dublin County Council	39,940,231	8,176,487

Local Authority	Total Rates Arrears - End 2012 - €	Total Commercial Water Arrears - End 2012 - €
South Tipperary County Council	1,393,197	494,679
Waterford County Council	3,003,844	1,366,827
Westmeath County Council	2,165,820	2,315,042
Wexford County Council	7,673,932	8,356,663
Wicklow County Council	5,479,638	2,211,840
Cork City	18,558,716	1,372,804
Dublin City	76,298,631	15,970,773
Galway City	17,121,329	2,698,604
Limerick City	19,142,496	2,823,306
Waterford City	4,668,200	1,428,472
Clonmel Borough Council	1,236,634	36,937
Drogheda Borough Council	5,784,614	1,241,837
Kilkenny Borough Council	1,771,517	0
Sligo Borough Council	3,657,717	0
Wexford Borough Council	3,613,079	61,828
Arklow Town Council	2,801,094	684,702
Athlone Town Council	1,390,746	0
Athy Town Council	688,053	237,031
Ballina Town Council	914,531	0
Ballinasloe Town Council	566,294	0
Birr Town Council	429,421	-22,426
Bray Town Council	3,200,894	1,050,658
Buncrana Town Council	780,132	0
Bundoran Town Council	373,486	0
Carlow Town Council	2,377,620	41,131
Carrick on Suir Town Council	238,705	304,192
Carrickmacross Town Council	426,855	1,163
Cashel Town Council	82,870	24,880
Castlebar Town Council	1,266,141	0
Castleblayney Town Council	721,163	21,565
Cavan Town Council	1,070,182	0
Clonakilty Town Council	637,065	0
Clones Town Council	215,934	-24
Cobh Town Council	232,164	0
Dundalk Town Council	8,028,617	562,035
Dungarvan Town Council	2,068,831	0
Ennis Town Council	3,379,601	0
Enniscorthy Town Council	632,493	56,668
Fermoy Town Council	258,678	79,219
Kells Town Council	116,297	59,872

Local Authority	Total Rates Arrears - End 2012 - €	Total Commercial Water Arrears - End 2012 - €
Killarney Town Council	3,715,556	271,907
Kilrush Town Council	221,978	0
Kinsale Town Council	686,604	0
Letterkenny Town Council	3,998,079	0
Listowel Town Council	228,869	142,604
Longford Town Council	1,551,872	0
Macroom Town Council	189,002	0
Mallow Town Council	344,165	0
Midleton Town Council	452,415	0
Monaghan Town Council	1,541,395	0
Naas Town Council	1,966,714	288,568
Navan Town Council	1,629,592	197,475
Nenagh Town Council	907,807	14,219
New Ross Town Council	618,537	108,160
Skibbereen Town Council	340,529	0
Templemore Town Council	168,090	266
Thurles Town Council	990,522	0
Tipperary Town Council	326,856	74,930
Tralee Town Council	2,822,857	146,905
Trim Town Council	311,769	48,078
Tullamore Town Council	1,530,806	252,446
Westport Town Council	472,722	0
Wicklow Town Council	684,130	543,723
Youghal Town Council	214,877	0
Total	430,814,183	145,110,593

Housing Finance Agency Funding

573. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the burden being borne by the small number of mortgages in possession of legacy Housing Finance Agency loans; if there are any measures in prospect to alleviate that burden; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5559/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I assume that the Question refers to income-related loans that were advanced by individual local authorities to individual borrowers between 1982 and May 1986. The Housing Finance Agency (HFA) advanced the associated funds to local authorities.

A total of €403 m was advanced by local authorities under the pre - May 1986 income-related loan scheme for 15,571 mortgages. On 30 June 2014, 286 of these loans were still outstanding with a corresponding total loan balance of €10.5 m (i.e. an average loan amount of less than €37,000). Current interest rates are as listed in Schedule 1 A and 1 B of Circular HFA 236 which can be found on the HFA website at: <http://www.hfa.ie/WebPublication/Circulars/HFA%20236.pdf>.

Overall, the Scheme has successfully funded over 15,000 homes for families who would,

otherwise, not have obtained a house loan. No new loans have issued under this Scheme since 1986 and there are no plans to alter this position. Individual local authorities administer the Scheme and deal directly with borrowers.

As with all local authority mortgages, evidence of having been refused a loan by two financial institutions was necessary in order to apply under the Scheme. Less than 2% of borrowers under the Scheme have outstanding loans. In some pre-May 1986 loan cases, the income related repayment did not fully cover the interest charges on the loan and, as a result, the loan values appreciated. The outstanding loan balance, in most cases, relates to a property whose value greatly exceeds the outstanding debt.

Since the extension of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) Scheme to pre-May 1986 income-related loans in 1996, a borrower availing of SWA who has a loan balance that has increased since the time of advance can have the interest on the increased portion of the loan, less any arrears, provided for by the HFA. The interest on the original advance amount is covered by the SWA scheme through the Department of Social Protection, subject to borrower eligibility. This arrangement operates through local authorities.

To assist local authority borrowers in financial distress, 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>.

The Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process (MARP), 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.

In addition, the Local Authority Mortgage to Rent (LAMTR) scheme was rolled out nationally in February 2014. The Scheme 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.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Provision

574. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of contracts which were put out to tender by the local authorities in 2011, 2012 and 2013 for water services, that is for waste water treatment, water treatment, bore holes, pumping stations and so on; if he will provide a breakdown of these figures per each individual local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5564/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Water Services Investment Programme 2010 – 2013, which is available in the Oireach-

tas Library, lists the water services schemes and contracts that were to be progressed under the programme. The timing of the commencement of contracts within that period was a matter for individual Water Services Authorities, subject to the requirement for my Department's approval at key stages in the progression of projects through planning and on to construction.

Where a scheme had a procurement/construction stage budget of less than €5 million, following approval of the Preliminary Report by my Department, contracts within the scheme could proceed up to and including the seeking of tenders without the need for further Departmental approval, subject to the cost remaining within approved budgets. In these cases approval took the form of confirmation that funds were in place. For schemes/contracts in excess of €5m, approval to go to tender was also required.

Details of contracts with a value in excess of €5 million for which approval to go to tender was given is outlined in the following table.

The progression of these tenders was a matter for the individual Local Authorities.

Local Authority	Scheme/Contract Name	Estimated Contract Price	Date Approved to go to Tender
Cork County	Clonakilty Sewerage Scheme	€5,000,000	Sep 11
Cork County	Youghal Sewerage Scheme Network Contract	€7,300,800	May 12
Cork County	Youghal Sewerage Scheme treatment Plant	€10,910,567	May 12
Cork County	Carrigtwohill Sewerage Scheme	€17,480,000	Oct 12
Donegal	Dungloe and Glenties Sewerage Scheme	€10,240,000	Feb 11
Dublin City	Dublin Region Watermains Rehabilitation Project, Tranche 3 – Contract No. 8	€5,840,757	May 13
Fingal	Leixlip water treatment Plant expansion stage 5 - Contract 1	€30,000,000	Feb 10
Galway City	Galway Sewerage Scheme – Volume B – Mutton Island Wastewater Treatment Works Upgrade	€6,419,000	Oct 13
Galway County	Clifden Sewerage Scheme	€5,458,370	Jun 11
Galway County	Costelloe Regional Water Supply Scheme	€8,891,000	Jun 11
Galway County	Clifden Sewerage Scheme	€5,130,840	Aug 13
Kerry	Waterville Water & Sewerage Scheme Water & Wastewater Treatment Plants	€8,676,325	Dec 10
Kildare	Barrow Abstraction Rising mains Contract - Contract 3A	€11,000,000	Jan 11
Kildare	Barrow Abstraction Rising mains contract -Contract 2	€18,000,000	Jan 11

Local Authority	Scheme/Contract Name	Estimated Contract Price	Date Approved to go to Tender
Kildare	Kildare Water Supply Scheme Phase 2 - Castlewarden to Ballygoran	€15,000,000	May 11
Kildare	Lower Liffey Valley Sewerage Scheme - Upgrade and Extension of wastewater treatment Plant	€21,980,000	Apr 12
Kildare	Leixlip Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade and Expansion.	€29,023,838	May 13
Laois	Laois Grouped Towns Sewerage Scheme –Network Contract	€7,359,234	Oct 13
Longford	Longford Towns & Villages Sewerage Scheme	€7,137,820	Nov 11
Mayo	Lough Mask Regional Water Supply Scheme – Water Treatment Plant Upgrade.	€6,124,000	Jul 12
Meath	Oldcastle Sewerage Scheme	€7,660,000	Feb 12
Roscommon	Roscommon Town & Villages Sewerage Scheme	€6,495,550	Feb 11
Roscommon	North East Roscommon Regional Water Supply Scheme	€9,552,000	May 11
Roscommon	Four Roscommon Regional Water Supply Scheme	€18,900,000	Mar 13
South Tipperary	Burncourt Fethard Regional Water Supply Scheme	€16,702,813	Jul 12
Waterford City	Water Conservation Stage 3 Works - Watermains Rehabilitation Project Phase 3 - Contract No.1	€6,481,024	Dec 13
Waterford County	Waterford Grouped Towns and Villages Sewerage Scheme	€34,157,864	Jul 12
Wexford	Gorey Sewerage Scheme - Extension of Courtown Wastewater Treatment Plant (WTTP)	€6,346,023	May 13

Bituminous Fuel Ban

575. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on extending the Cork smokeless-coal-zone to include Midleton; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5613/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The ban on the marketing, sale and distribution of bituminous fuel (or ‘smoky coal ban’ as

it is commonly known) was first introduced in Dublin in 1990 in response to severe episodes of winter smog that resulted from the widespread use of smoky coal for residential heating. The ban proved very effective in reducing particulate matter and sulphur dioxide levels in Dublin. As well as bringing air quality levels into compliance with the then EU standards, the ban also had the effect of significantly improving human health in the capital. Research indicated that the ban in Dublin has resulted in over 350 fewer annual deaths. The ban was subsequently extended to other urban areas.

In August 2012, following a public consultation process, new solid fuel regulations were introduced with the aim of ensuring that the smoky coal ban remains fit for purpose in safeguarding air quality by limiting harmful emissions of air pollutants arising from the use of certain residential solid fuels. The ban now applies in 26 urban areas nationwide, including all Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) designated towns for the purpose of air quality management under the EU Cleaner Air for Europe Directive 2008/50/EC.

The ban has not previously been applied in Midleton, as it is not an EPA designated urban air quality management zone. However, the local authorities may at any time write to me to propose new towns for consideration for inclusion under the ban, if it is considered necessary to protect local air quality. It is suggested that, if a local authority is considering such a proposal, then this should first be debated as a Council motion and subject to a period of local consultation. This was the approach taken in relation to the recent consolidation of ban area boundaries in Celbridge/Maynooth and Wexford.

Air quality monitoring by the EPA has indicated that air quality is poorer in towns where the smoky coal ban does not apply, although smaller smoky coal ban areas may be more difficult to enforce. The further extension of the ban to smaller towns on an individual basis may not be the most effective solution to addressing the problem of emissions from residential solid fuel use in these areas. However, it is recognised that having different regulations between urban and rural locations is not ideal, as it results in different levels of environmental protection and clean air benefits for citizens in different locations.

Question No. 576 answered with Question No. 564.

Rural Development Policy

577. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a long-term strategic plan for rural economic development; the number of rural enterprises that have been set-up in 2014 and a breakdown per county; if he will provide an update on the establishment of a rural innovation and development fund; if he will provide an update on any pilot community-based broadband initiatives to provide adequate provision of next generation broadband services to rural areas; the future funding allocations and provisions per county, in tabular form, for community enterprise centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5656/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): The Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) outlined 34 recommendations to support rural economic development into the future and I, along with my Government colleagues, are committed to implementing these recommendations.

I am the Chair of the CEDRA Interdepartmental Group (IDG) that is working in a coordinated way to support the economic development of rural areas. In relation to the Rural Innovation

and Development fund, which the Deputy refers to, an amount of €1 million has been allocated for this purpose in 2015 and I am currently examining ways to distribute this funding in order to maximise its impact at local level.

A number of the recommendations contained in the CEDRA report relate to the provision of broadband infrastructure in rural areas and form part of the work programme of the IDG. The Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources is represented on the IDG and I am advised that the Department has recently launched a new website entitled www.broadband.gov.ie, which sets out the importance of all citizens having access to high speed broadband no matter where they live or work. The national broadband plan, which is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, is an ambitious initiative that will take time to implement but I am confident will deliver for rural areas.

The LEADER element of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2007-2013 which falls under my Department's remit did provide support to both new and already established enterprise in rural areas. Since the current programme period began in 2009, 8,698 enterprises have been supported and 4,084 jobs created. In 2014, 1,880 enterprises were supported with 1,148 jobs created. LEADER has also provided support in the past to Community Enterprise Centers in the context of the requirement for such centers having been identified in the needs analysis of the area concerned. As LEADER is a community led approach to development there are no allocations specifically for community enterprise centres; however, they are eligible for funding if the need for them is identified by the community concerned. LEADER is not the only avenue for funding to rural enterprise related activity, and in this context the information above should be supplemented by information from other relevant Departments.

It should be noted that support for rural enterprise development will also be available through the LEADER elements of RDP 2014-2020 where a total of €250 million euro will be available over the next 5-6 years to support the development of sustainable rural communities. LEADER is delivered through the medium of Local Development Strategies (LDS) by Local Action Groups and I hope to be in a position to launch the selection process for LDSs very shortly, with a view to having strategies operational towards the end of 2015.

The resources available through the LEADER elements of the RDP are critical to the future economic development of rural Ireland. However, it is also essential to ensure that these resources are working in a complementary way at a local level. In this context the delivery of a more coordinated approach to local development as envisaged by the local government reform process is also critical and I am confident that the delivery of LEADER and other resources in a coordinated way at a local level will provide strong support for the future sustainable development of rural Ireland.

Local Authority Rates

578. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount outstanding on commercial water rates; the estimate of the amount that can be recovered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5664/15]

583. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the most up-to-date compliance rates for payment of non-domestic water charges. [5830/15]

603. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount collected in commercial water rates in each of the local authorities in

2013 and 2014. [6047/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 578, 583 and 603 together.

With effect from 1 January 2014, Irish Water is responsible for public water services. The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides that Irish Water shall collect charges from its customers in receipt of water services provided by it. Accordingly, the collection of water charges is now the statutory responsibility of Irish Water. Local authorities have continued to bill for non-domestic water services as agents of Irish Water since 1 January 2014. My Department does not hold information on the amount of outstanding non-domestic water charges owed to Irish Water.

The collection of non-domestic water charges until 31 December 2013 was a matter for the local authority concerned. Income data is published by local authorities in their Annual Financial Statements. The latest year for which audited Local Authority Annual Financial Statement data are available is 2012. Commercial water charges billed in that year amounted to some €187.6 million, while €180.7 million was collected. However, due to the historical arrears which had accumulated in preceding years, a total of €145,110,593 was owed to local authorities in respect of unpaid commercial water charges at the end of 2012, representing a 55% collection rate of all revenues due. The Local Authority Annual Financial Statement 2012 is available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/LocalGovernment/Administration/FileDownload,39591,en.pdf>.

My Department understands that the amount billed to the non-domestic sector, excluding connection charges, for 2014 was approx €180m. Final figures for 2014 will be available in the Irish Water financial statements, later in the year.

Septic Tank Grants

579. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide, in tabular form county by county, the number of septic tank grant applications; successful applications; outstanding applications; the average time-frame for a grant decision; the total money spent to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5725/15]

582. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of money expended by his Department to date, broken down by local authority, under the private waste water remedial grant, introduced by the previous Minister, as part of the introduction of the mandatory registration of private waste water systems; the number of grants paid by each authority; the number that reached the maximum threshold allowed for an individual grant; the number of inspections carried out to date; the number of these that related to unregistered properties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5811/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 579 and 582 together.

Neither I, nor my Department, have any direct role in monitoring the implementation of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) National Inspection Plan for domestic waste water treatment systems by the local authorities. However, the EPA has conducted a review on the implementation of the Plan for the period from 1 July 2013 to 30 June 2014. The report contains

a breakdown by county of inspections that have taken place and includes details relating to non-compliant treatment systems and advisory notices. It is available on the Agency's website at the following link: <http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/water/wastewater/Report%20National%20Inspection%20Plan%20Web.pdf>.

Responsibility for the administration of my Department's Rural Water Programme, under which funding is provided to recoup local authorities the grants they pay in respect of domestic waste water treatment systems, is devolved to the local authorities. Information is not therefore held by my Department on applications in train with local authorities. Details of the grants recouped by my Department in 2014 to the local authorities in this respect are set out in the table below:

County	Grant Amount Recouped to Local Authority	Number of grants Recouped
	€	
Galway	15,300	4
Leitrim	2,500	1
Limerick	14,500	4
Longford	4,000	1
Louth	4,000	1
Meath	30,476	9
Roscommon	4,000	1
Sligo	11,161	3
Tipperary	9,741	4
Westmeath	2,896	1

Animal Welfare

580. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 61 of 28 January 2015 and Nos. 553 to 555, inclusive, of 20 January 2015, if his Department is responsible for the health and well-being of dogs seized and under the care of local authorities; if so, the measures in place by his Department to ensure that these dogs are adequately cared for with appropriate accommodation and veterinary care, including those put into the care of outsourced companies or institutions by local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5761/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): As indicated in my reply to Question Nos. 553, 554 and 555 of 20 January 2015, animal health and welfare policy is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine under the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013, the provisions of which apply to all animals including those in dog pounds. As indicated in the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine's reply to Question No. 61 of 28 January 2015, section 11 of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 provides that a person who has a protected animal, including a dog, in his or her possession or under his or her control, is obliged to ensure that the animal is kept and treated in a manner that safeguards the health and welfare of the animal and does not threaten the health and welfare of that animal or another animal.

This basic principle relating to duty to protect animal welfare is the same for any bodies, either governmental or non-governmental, who keep or have responsibility for animals including dogs. The Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 is enforced by officers of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and by An Garda Síochána and by Inspectors of the ISPCA

and the DSPCA under service provisions of the Act. The Act also provides for the authorisation by local authorities of persons to carry out functions under the Act.

In view of the provisions of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013, my Department has no responsibility for putting in place the measures identified in the question.

Local Authority Housing

581. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans for a social housing allocation and or development in the area of Dublin Bay North (details supplied) in Dublin 17. [5801/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): It is a matter for each local authority to bring forward proposals in relation to its proposals on social housing provision and in the context of the Social Housing Strategy 2020: Support, Supply and Reform published in November 2014, a Dublin Social Housing Delivery Taskforce has been established, to respond to the current supply challenge in the Dublin area, including facilitating mixed tenure developments and ensuring maximum value from Exchequer investment. I understand that as part of its work under the Dublin Social Housing Delivery Taskforce, Dublin City Council is currently assessing opportunities for procurement of private and public housing with a view to potentially commencing a competitive procurement process in relation to three sites, including the site referred to in the Question.

My Department is working as part of the Dublin Social Housing Delivery Taskforce and will consider any proposals that come forward from Dublin City Council once they have been further developed.

Question No. 582 answered with Question No. 579.

Question No. 583 answered with Question No. 578.

Road Projects

584. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the reason South Dublin County Council has not responded to correspondence (details supplied) regarding the provision of an underpass in Dublin 20. [5893/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The reply to correspondence is the responsibility of the local authority concerned and I have no function in relation to this particular matter. Responsibility for road matters rests with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

The Local Government Act 2001 (Section 237A) Regulations 2003 provide, inter alia, that it shall be an objective of a local authority to seek to deal with requests for access to information by a parliamentary representative as expeditiously as may be and in accordance with a proper level of customer service. Having regard to this and any other relevant matters, it is the responsibility of each local authority to keep under review their own systems and procedures.

Housing Assistance Payments

585. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in view of the fact that the current rates of housing assistance payment are below market rent in many areas, the action he is taking to ensure that those on the housing assistance payment are not forced to top-up the payment to meet their housing need. [5909/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): One of the main causes of rising rents in some areas is a lack of supply in the market. The Social Housing Strategy 2020, which I published in November 2014, sets out clear, measurable actions and targets to increase the supply of social housing, while the implementation of the range of actions under the Government's Construction 2020 Strategy will also support increased supply in the wider housing market. The implementation of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a key Government priority and a major pillar of the Social Housing Strategy 2020. The HAP scheme will bring all social housing supports provided by the State under the aegis of local authorities. The scheme will remove a barrier to employment by allowing recipients to remain in the scheme if they gain full-time employment. HAP will also improve regulation of the rented accommodation being supported and provide certainty for landlords as regards their rental income.

The statutory pilot phase of HAP commenced in September 2014 and is now in effect in 7 local authority areas, which are Limerick City and County, Waterford City and County, Cork County, Louth, Kilkenny, South Dublin and Monaghan. Some 800 households are in receipt of HAP at present across these 7 local authority areas. Dublin City Council is also part of the statutory HAP pilot with a specific focus on accommodating homeless households, as provided for in the Action Plan to Address Homelessness. Dublin City Council is implementing the HAP pilot for homeless households in the Dublin region on behalf of all 4 Dublin local authorities.

Section 43(2)(a) of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 provides for the making of Regulations to prescribe the maximum rent limits for different household classes that will apply in each local authority where HAP has been commenced. In prescribing these limits, household size and prevailing rents in the relevant areas are taken into consideration. These limits are based on the current rent supplement limits as set out by the Department of Social Protection, in advance of the introduction of a national differential rents framework for local authorities, as provided for under section 31 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, later this year. I understand that the Department of Social Protection is currently finalising a review of maximum rent limits.

There is evidence of a growing pressure on rents in the lower segment of the market in some high demand areas. In the context of the implementation of HAP, my Department works closely with the Department of Social Protection, and continues to closely monitor trends in the housing market and the potential impacts on housing supply, including data gathered by HAP pilot authorities in relation to this issue. These factors are being carefully considered in the context of the further roll out of HAP and particularly in relation to any future changes to maximum rent limits that apply in local authorities where HAP is operating.

Questions Nos. 586 and 587 answered with Question No. 564.

Building Regulations Compliance

588. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will include chartered architectural technologists in the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations (BCAR) process, in view of the fact that they are suitably qualified technical experts in the building construction field. [5932/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): I refer to the reply given to Question No. 519 of 18 November 2014 which sets out the position in relation to this matter. I welcome the decision by Quality Qualifications Ireland to facilitate the development of a common standard for architectural technology in line with the National Qualifications Framework which is an important step towards the development of a statutory register. I am committed to advancing plans for the statutory registration of architectural technologists as quickly as possible. I intend carrying out a public consultation on the matter over the coming months with a view to publication of legislative proposals by the end of this year.

Water Charges Administration

589. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update on his plans to make arrangements for the payment of water charges where tenants in private rented accommodation have not paid; if landlords will be deemed liable for unpaid water charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5950/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. The occupier of a property is liable to pay the water charges bill, and legislation provides that the owner is the occupier unless the contrary is proven. Irish Water is providing landlords with the opportunity to prove that they are not the occupier by providing the tenants name. This will allow Irish Water to contact the tenant to complete the registration and to bill the tenant. The tenant will have to register with Irish Water to avail of the water conservation grant or to get lower charges than the default capped charge (€260), where they are single adult occupants or their metered usage is less than the maximum charge.

My Department is consulting with the local government sector, social housing providers and landlord and tenant representatives in the course of drafting legislation to give effect to measures proposed in relation to tenants and unpaid water charges. Further details on the modalities involved will be available on publication of the draft legislation following the completion of the necessary consultations with relevant representative organisations.

Water Charges Yield

590. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the additional revenue that Irish Water will accrue as a result of householders who did not sign up by 2 February 2015 being subject to a flat charge of €260; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5954/15]

600. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the rate of compliance is factored into the figure of €271 million provided last week by him as the amount projected to be collected through domestic water charges; and the estimated rate of compliance. [6044/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 590 and 600 together.

Irish Water's costs in the coming years will be funded through a mix of revenue from the

domestic and non-domestic sector, third party finance and State support which may be in the form of both equity and subvention.

The Government decisions on levels of funding and the approach to free allowance were informed by a high level financial model prepared by NewERA, which was based on inputs provided by my Department and Irish Water. This model envisages that the total amount to be billed to domestic customers in 2015 will be approximately €271 million, which factors in properties with only one service and holiday homes. Irish Water's revenue forecasts are based on the expected occupancy, based on Census 2011 data, and expected consumption patterns based on surveys associated with metering.

Water Charges Administration

591. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government If it would be a breach of data protection for landlords to pass details of tenants residing at their properties to Irish Water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5955/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Under the Water Services Acts 2007-2013, Irish Water has statutory powers to request its customers and certain specified persons or bodies to provide it with information so that Irish Water can perform its functions under these Acts including the collection of data to develop its customer database. In particular, section 26 of the Water Services Act 2013 provides Irish Water with the power to obtain information on its customers from other third parties as listed in the section, including a local authority, the Revenue Commissioners, the Private Rented Tenancies Board, the Property Services Regulatory Authority, the Local Government Management Agency, the Minister for Social Protection or any other person or body to be prescribed by the Minister.

Irish Water is required to manage all personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003. Irish Water has an on-going engagement with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner, including in relation to the provision of tenant details by landlords, to agree the process for the capture, storage and usage of customer data.

Water Charges Administration

592. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding water and the Constitution of Ireland (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5968/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Article 10(2) of the Constitution states that "all land and all mines, minerals and waters which belonged to Saorstát Éireann immediately before the coming into operation of this Constitution belong to the State to the same extent as they then belonged to Saorstát Éireann".

With specific regard to Irish Water, the Water Services Act 2013 provides for the establishment of Irish Water as a subsidiary of Bord Gáis Éireann (now Ervia), conforming to the conditions contained in the Act and registered under the Companies Acts. Section 5 of the Act provides that one share in Irish Water shall be issued to Bord Gáis Éireann (now Ervia) with the remaining shares allocated equally between the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government and the Minister for Finance. Accordingly, Irish Water is in full State

ownership. Subsection 5(6) of Act, as amended by Section 46 of the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013, prohibits each of the three shareholders from disposing of their shareholding in Irish Water and thus places a statutory prohibition on the privatisation of Irish Water.

There are no plans to amend the Constitution with regard to Irish Water. The Water Services Act 2014 includes a provision whereby any future proposal for legislation that would involve a change in the State ownership of Irish Water must be put to a plebiscite of the people. This ensures that any proposed privatisation by a future Government could not proceed without the support of the Irish people.

Constitutional Convention Recommendations

593. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if consideration has been given to implementing a system of direct democracy here, similar to that in Switzerland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5977/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Fourth Report of the Convention on the Constitution included a recommendation in relation to direct democracy or citizens' initiatives. The recommendation was that there should be a right for citizens to petition on influencing the legislative agenda and to petition for referendums. In response, the Government has pointed to the fact that constitutional referendums are already common in Ireland and there is nothing to prevent citizens from presenting petitions. In addition, Article 27 of the Constitution already provides a facility for a Bill to be put to the people if it contains a matter of such public importance that the will of the people ought to be ascertained on it.

The Government has substantially opened up the legislative process through a number of initiatives. These include the work of the Constitutional Convention itself as well as significant packages of Dáil reform put in place since 2011. These reforms include the setting up of the Public Service Oversight and Petitions Committee. As part of its remit, the Committee receives and considers public petitions submitted to the Houses of the Oireachtas. It also engages regularly with the Ombudsman and other oversight bodies.

In 2011 the Government introduced a system of pre-legislative review before Oireachtas Committees. In 2013 this was expanded to become a pre-legislative stage before the relevant Oireachtas Committee, as a requirement for all non-emergency legislation. This system now allows for an extensive engagement by the public, civic society and other interested groups and academics in the law-making process.

The Government has indicated that it will bear in mind the particular Constitutional Convention recommendation on direct democracy when the latest package of Dáil reform measures and its success in opening up the legislative process is being reviewed.

Local Authority Housing Maintenance

594. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide additional funding to Laois County Council for housing repairs for persons with disabilities, who are local authority tenants; if consideration will be given to this as an area of priority, as funding has been very limited in this area in recent times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5984/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): In 2014, my Department provided funding of some €7.9 million to local authorities towards the cost of adaptations and extensions to social houses to meet needs of tenants with a disability or to address serious overcrowding. This was an increase of funding in excess of €1.0 million on the funding provided in 2013. Under the initiative Laois County Council received €53,957 in 2014. Funding provided by my Department meets 90% of the cost of the works, with each local authority providing the remaining 10%.

My Department is currently liaising with all local authorities in relation to requirements for 2015. The administration of this funding locally is a matter for each local authority, including decisions in relation to the projects to be implemented.

Foreshore Licence Applications

595. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update on the current status of foreshore seaweed harvesting licence applications in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6000/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): My Department is engaged with the Office of the Attorney General to establish how the provisions of the Foreshore Act interact with folio and other purported rights to harvest seaweed. Applications to harvest seaweed are being progressed as far as possible within this context. With regard to the application from the first named company, public and prescribed bodies consultations have been concluded and the application is at the environmental assessment phase.

The second named company was recently advised that a new application would be required and relevant guidance material was provided. The new application has not been received to date.

Irish Water Funding

596. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount Irish Water will be required to borrow in order to meet all of its expected costs in 2015 and 2016. [6015/15]

601. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount Irish Water plan to borrow to fund capital investment in 2015. [6045/15]

602. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount Irish Water will be allowed to borrow on the markets, based on expected revenue streams for both 2015 and 2016. [6046/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 596, 601 and 602 together.

Irish Water currently expects to increase its borrowings by some €900m in 2015, of which about €750m relates to the funding of capital expenditure, and a further €325m in 2016 to fund its capital expenditure programme in that year. Additional working capital loans of up to €96m and €58m are expected to be provided by Government in 2015 and 2016 respectively.

Under Section 35 (1) (b) of the Water Services (No 2) Act 2013 Irish Water's current borrowing limit is €2bn. Irish Water's current forecast of total borrowing at end 2016 of €1.7bn is within this limit. Under Section 35 (1) (a) any borrowing by Irish Water needs to be approved by the Minister for the Environment Community and Local Government, the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

Water Services Provision

597. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will confirm, that in order to comply with the water framework directive, legislation is required for the registration and licensing of all private wells; the charge that will be applied for private well registration and licensing, if water charges are applied to water extracted from registered and licensed private wells; is the forthcoming registration and licensing of private wells the reason Irish Water insists in retaining account records for those whose sole water supply is from a private well and who are not now and never intend to be, Irish Water customers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6028/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Water Framework Directive requires that abstractions of surface water or ground water which are likely to have a significant impact on water status must be regulated. As such, Ireland must develop a register of, and a regulatory control system for, water abstraction points. My Department is currently examining how best to address this requirement in a proportionate and efficient way and it has convened a working group to consider the issues arising and to make recommendations. While no decisions will be made on this matter until extensive research and public consultation is undertaken, it would be my intention that a proportionate abstraction control regime will effectively manage abstraction risks and pressures without imposing unnecessary regulatory burden. Recognising the relatively low abstraction pressures in Ireland it is expected that a regime would focus on the most significant abstraction volumes and pressures recognising that the Directive does not require the registration and licencing of private wells serving individual domestic dwellings. The initial research phase, which will take up much of 2015, will provide a basis for my Department to engage in extensive consultation with the key sectors and with the wider public.

Irish Water has sent out customer application packs and letters to all households to enable customers to confirm their details and to ensure that a correct and up-to-date database of customers exists. As part of this process, households who are not customers of Irish Water, such as owners of private wells and waste water treatment systems, are requested to confirm this to the company so that they are not charged as customers in error. Furthermore, by registering these details, such households become eligible for the water conservation grant if it is their primary residence. These are the only purposes for which such information will be used.

Local Authority Housing

598. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if discretion is being left to voluntary housing associations to allocate tenancies to returning emigrants under the safe home programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6031/15]

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

ly): Under my Department's Capital Assistance Scheme, funding of up to 100% of the approved cost of a social housing development can be provided where all prospective tenancies are taken from the local authority housing waiting list. Allocations are made by the approved housing body in consultation with the local authority. Where an approved housing body retains 25% of tenancy nomination rights, funding of up to 95% of the approved cost of a development is available. These tenancy allocations are made at the discretion of the approved housing bodies. This can allow flexibility within a housing project in order to accommodate those persons who may not qualify for the local authority waiting list but would be in need of housing. Tenancies can also be allocated to elderly returning emigrants who are taken off a list of persons assessed as in need of housing by the Safe Home organisation who carry out an assessment of applications for housing from such emigrants.

Full details in relation to the Capital Assistance Scheme including the lettings policy are available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload,2082,en.pdf>.

Severe Weather Events Expenditure

599. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of funds that will be allocated this year for the continuing programme of storm damage remediation and prevention work in 2015; the amount of this that relates to work sanctioned in 2014, but not completed; if he will provide details of these projects; when details of the projects to be approved in 2015 will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6032/15]

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 estimated initially for the first phase of severe weather. For the 2nd phase of severe weather, from 27 January to 17 February 2014, local authorities estimated current costs of €3.5 million and €8.5 million in capital costs. Some additional works beyond the original €7.5 m initially estimated were identified under the current costs heading covering clean-up and necessary immediate repairs and by the end of 2014 €7.859 m was disbursed by my Department. A further €5.994 million has been paid by my Department 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.

Although local authorities were asked to give priority to works which are significant for

economic activity and support for the tourism industry in particular, it is a matter for the local authorities to decide which projects are to be progressed and in which timescales. My Department does not have a role with regard to the sanctioning or ongoing monitoring of individual projects and local authorities recoup funding for these projects from my Department on the basis of the submission of certification that expenditure has been incurred within the overall expenditure ceilings allocated.

No funding has been drawn down from my Department by local authorities to date in 2015.

Question No. 600 answered with Question No. 590.

Questions Nos. 601 and 602 answered with Question No. 596.

Question No. 603 answered with Question No. 578.

Planning Issues

604. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on the provision of a specific class designation for the development of large scale studio infrastructure under the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, as there currently is no specific class of development that relates to the film industry, or exemption from fees under these regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6051/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey) (Deputy Paudie Coffey): Section 2 of Schedule 9 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001, as amended, prescribes the scale of fees for planning applications. Class 4 of section 2 provides that the fee for the provision of a building, other than a house, the alteration of an existing house, the construction of a structure within the curtilage of an existing house, or an agricultural building, shall be €80 for each building, or €3.60 for each square metre of gross floor space to be provided, whichever is greater.

While the Planning Regulations are generally kept under review in my Department, I have no plans to amend the planning fees at this time.

Irish Water Funding

605. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the purposes the €200 million supplementary capital grant from his Department to Irish Water will be used for in 2015. [6091/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The establishment of Irish Water is an integral component of the Government's water sector reform strategy and will lead to lower costs and improved services in the future, providing much better outcomes for customers and the environment. Irish Water is being funded by a combination of domestic and non-domestic water charges, Government subvention and the raising of debt.

Government funding in respect of 2015 is made up of €399 million in respect of operational subvention and €222 million in respect of capital expenditure. This funding, provided by the Minister for Finance, is for the purpose of supporting increased investment in public water services infrastructure by Irish Water.

EU Directives

606. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when the derogation under Section 9.4 of the European Union Water Directive came to an end; and if it will be re-applied for. [6092/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I refer to the reply to Questions Nos 185 and 197 of 11 December 2014, which sets out the position in this matter.

Regional Assemblies

607. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the progress to date in establishing three new regional assemblies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6133/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Northern and Western, Southern and Eastern and Midland Regional Assemblies were established with effect from 1 January 2015 in accordance with the Local Government Act 1991 (Regional Assemblies) (Establishment) Order 2014.

Noise Pollution

608. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on noise pollution (details supplied) caused by from flights from Dublin Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6148/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Environmental Noise Directive (END) 2002/49/EC sets out certain requirements for the assessment and management of environmental noise from transport sources, including from major airports with more than 50,000 aircraft take-off or landing movements per year.

The END was transposed into national law by the Environmental Noise Regulations 2006, which set out a two-stage process for addressing environmental noise. Firstly, environmental noise must be assessed through the preparation of strategic noise maps for areas and infrastructure falling within defined criteria. This is undertaken by prescribed noise mapping bodies, which includes Dublin Airport Authority (DAA) and local authorities. Secondly, based on the results of the mapping process, the Regulations require the preparation of noise action plans for each area concerned, which is undertaken by the relevant local authority, the prescribed noise action planning body. The fundamental objective of action plans is the prevention and reduction of environmental noise.

The Regulations require the review and revision of strategic noise maps and noise action plans on a five year cycle. A new round of noise mapping was conducted during 2012. Following the noise mapping exercise, the four Dublin local authorities prepared a new Noise Action Plan for the period 2013 – 2018. This plan sets out an approach to the strategic management and control of environmental noise. The plan is available on the Dublin City Council website at the following link -

www.dublincity.ie/WaterWasteEnvironment/NoiseMapsandActionPlans/Documents/DublinNoiseActionPlan2013-2018Final.pdf.

The most recent noise mapping exercise found that 200 people are exposed to undesirable night-time levels above 55 dB(A) from aircraft using Dublin Airport. As compared to the previous mapping exercise in 2007, there has been an overall reduction in the number of people exposed to undesirable night-time noise levels.

In 2008, Dublin Airport Stakeholders Forum set up an Environmental Working Group that works closely with Fingal County Council. This group provides an effective forum for the discussion of all environment matters concerning the development and operation of the airport that have an impact on users, customers of the airport and on people living and working in the surrounding communities.

The management of noise abatement of operational procedures at Dublin Airport is shared by the airport operator, the DAA, and the airlines operating at the airport. Under the European Communities (Air Navigation and Transport Rules and Procedures for Noise Related Operating Restrictions at Airports) Regulations 2003, the Irish Aviation Authority has the responsibility of ensuring that the airport operator has in place a system of noise monitoring.

I am informed by my colleague, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, that, in recognition of its responsibilities in this area, the DAA has introduced, and continues to evaluate, a number of initiatives to monitor aircraft noise levels and to mitigate their impact. A flight tracking system is now operated that allows aircraft movements to be analysed and to respond to any complaints relating to aircraft noise. The primary objective of the Noise & Flight Track Department of the DAA is to gather information on aircraft approach and departure routes and resultant noise levels at a number of key locations.

Hydraulic Fracturing

609. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding fracking; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5899/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh) (Deputy Joe McHugh): As has been outlined on a number of occasions, no decision will be made on any proposal for the use of hydraulic fracturing, as part of an unconventional gas exploration or extraction project, until there has been time to consider the outcome of a major research programme, directed at examining the potential environmental impacts of hydraulic fracturing, which was commissioned by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The key questions that this research programme, which is to be carried out over a minimum period of two years, needs to answer are:

- Can unconventional gas exploration and extraction projects and operations be carried out in the island of Ireland whilst also protecting the environment and human health; and
- What is 'best environmental practice' in relation to such projects and operations?

To this end this scientific research programme is based on the consideration of existing baseline data with respect to groundwater, air and seismicity and the potential implications and mitigations that are required to be considered in order to understand the possible environmental impacts of using this technology and whether or not it can be undertaken in an environmentally protective manner in accordance with the requirements of environmental law.

I can once again confirm that no decision will be made on any proposal for the use of hydraulic fracturing, as part of any unconventional gas exploration and extraction programme, until there has been time to consider the outcome of this EPA research.

Legislative Programme

610. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he has contacted the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Communications, Energy and Natural Resources concerning the pre-legislative consideration of the minerals development Bill; when he is likely to refer the Bill to the committee for pre-legislative scrutiny; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5628/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh) (Deputy Joe McHugh): As reported to the Deputy on the 20th January I have asked the Joint Oireachtas Committee to consider the Minerals Development Bill for pre-legislative scrutiny in advance of its submission to Government for approval to publish. I understand that the Committee expects to be in a position shortly to decide whether it can proceed with pre-legislative scrutiny in this case in the context of its work programme for 2015 and I await the Chairman's response.

Public Service Obligation Levy

611. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the purpose of the public service obligation levy on electricity bills; the rate at which it is levied; the reason for the recent increase in same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5694/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The Public Service Obligation (PSO) levy has been in place since 2001 and is the overall support mechanism for generation constructed for security of supply purposes, including peat generation, and for the development of renewable electricity. It is designed to compensate electricity suppliers for the additional costs they incur by purchasing electricity generated by these producers. The PSO levy is also vital to enable Ireland to meet its 2020 40% target for electricity generated from renewable sources by 2020, which in turn is important for the achievement of Ireland's 16% EU 2020 target for renewable energy.

The Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) determines the PSO levy which is a charge on all electricity customers without exception. The legal basis for the PSO levy and its method of calculation are set out in Regulations made under the Electricity Regulation Act 1999 (S.I. 217 of 2002). The annual PSO levy amount for 2014/2015 is €335.4 million. This equates to €64.37 per annum for residential customers, €221.66 per annum for small to medium sized business customers and €34.20/kVA for medium and large customers.

The biggest driver for the levy rise for this year is the lower predicted wholesale market electricity price, which is estimated to be around 10% lower than last year. This results in lower predicted market income for the PSO plants and, therefore, a higher levy is required to cover their allowed costs. The lower wholesale electricity price is currently being driven by lower international gas prices in evidence since mid-2013. This drives up the proposed PSO levy. However, if these lower gas and wholesale prices are sustained, the lower wholesale prices would reduce the wholesale cost of electricity that suppliers pay. In turn, suppliers would be in a position to reduce their retail prices and potentially offset the PSO levy increase. Increased

competition in the retail electricity has led to some suppliers reducing their retail prices. The CER is tasked with retail market monitoring and executes this role vigorously to ensure competition leads to the fairest prices for customers.

Telecommunications Infrastructure

612. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide a guarantee for the extension of the fibre optic cable (details supplied) from Ballinaboy, County Roscommon to Belmullet, County Mayo. [5956/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The State can only become active in the telecommunications market in cases of clear market failure. The provision of telecommunications services, including broadband and fibre optic backhaul cables are a matter, in the first instance, for the commercial players who operate in the Irish market.

The Government's intervention under 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, including Erris and the West of Ireland. The commercial telecommunications sector is currently investing approximately €2.5 billion in network upgrades. Approximately 1.6 million of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland are expected to have access to commercial high speed broadband services over the next two years. These very significant investments represent a step-change in the quality of broadband services available.

On the 24th November last, a public consultation on a national high speed coverage map 2016 was launched. This consultation will close on Thursday next, 12th February 2015. The map can be accessed at www.broadband.gov.ie. The areas marked BLUE represent those areas that will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016 and includes Belmullet. I understand that at least one operator has committed to bringing high speed broadband of 30mbps to 100mbps to Belmullet by mid-2016. The AMBER areas show the target areas for the State intervention.

In tandem with the mapping consultation, intensive design and planning work is under way in my Department to produce a detailed intervention strategy. I intend to launch a further public consultation on the detailed intervention strategy in mid-2015.

In relation to the telecommunications duct which was installed adjacent to the Galway Mayo Gas Pipeline, my Department has commenced a procurement process for the appointment of a Management Services Entity to operate the Galway-Mayo Telecommunications Duct.

The question of whether the duct should be extended to Belmullet will be considered in light of the anticipated commercial developments in the area and the proposed State intervention under the National Broadband Plan.

The State's intervention under the National Broadband Plan aims to deliver speeds of at least 30Mbps through a network that will also be designed to cater for future increased demand from consumers and business. This means that every premises in Ireland, including those in Belmullet and surrounding areas, will have access to high speed broadband provided through commercial operators or through the State's intervention strategy.

Better Energy Homes Scheme

613. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on a matter (details provided) regarding a Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6043/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): In October last year, I published a Draft Bioenergy Plan which is available on my Department's website (www.dcenr.gov.ie). The draft Plan will undergo Strategic Environmental and Appropriate Assessments, including public consultation, which will inform the content of the finalised Plan.

The analysis underpinning the draft Plan is that an additional bioenergy focused measure in the heat sector would represent the most cost effective means of meeting a number of different policy goals. Therefore, the draft Plan recommends the introduction of a Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) for larger heat users to change to heating solutions that produce heat from renewable sources. There are no plans at this time to introduce such a scheme for domestic heat users.

However, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) administers the Better Energy Programme on my behalf. This includes the Better Energy Homes scheme, the Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme and the Better Energy Warmer Homes Area based programme, which has subsequently been merged with the Better Communities programme.

Better Energy Homes provides a financial incentive to private homeowners who wish to improve the energy performance of their homes. The Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme delivers a range of energy efficiency measures to low income households who meet the defined eligibility criteria and who are vulnerable to energy poverty. The Better Energy Areas scheme, which is free of charge to the customer, delivers energy upgrades to low income homeowners experiencing extreme energy poverty in all housing sectors including Local Authority houses, Housing Association houses and private homes. The Better Energy Communities programme supports sustainable energy upgrades to existing buildings, services, facilities and processes in the community sector. Under all of these schemes, high efficiency heating system upgrades are eligible for grant support. Any query regarding whether or not a particular technology is considered to be high efficiency should be addressed to the SEAI.

Natural Gas Grid

614. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to make gas available at a location (details supplied) in County Galway; if he will agree to put all the necessary infrastructure in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6060/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) is the statutory independent body charged with the assessment and licensing of prospective operators seeking to develop and operate a gas distribution system within the State. In 2006, the CER approved a new network connections policy which enabled assessment of the feasibility of connecting certain towns to the gas network. In order for any town to be connected to the network, certain economic criteria need to be met as a prerequisite. The policy allows for the appraisal of a town either on its own or as part of a regional group of towns.

The policy framework provides that, over a certain period, the costs of connecting a town or group of towns to the network are recouped through the actual economic consumption of gas and the associated tariffs. Uneconomic projects would increase costs for all energy consumers.

Under the connections policy framework, Bord Gáis Networks and more recently Gaslink carried out a comprehensive assessment of towns not already connected to the national gas network. A “New Towns Analysis Phase 1” report was published in 2006. The study included a review of the feasibility of connecting towns to the natural gas network in Galway/Mayo and the CER made the decision to allow Gaslink to extend the network to eleven of these towns, including Athenry. Prior to the roll out of gas to each town, a detailed analysis of the loads within the town and the revenues associated with them is carried out. There is also a requirement to secure a certain level of customers prior to the development commencing. The gas network has been extended to eight of these towns. Work is ongoing to secure economic loads in the three remaining towns, i.e. Athenry, Knock and Balyhaunis, prior to the commencement of construction. To date, the projected loads are insufficient to justify commencement of construction.

The CER is currently consulting on a submission received by it from the gas transmission system operator Gas Networks Ireland, the successor to Gaslink, on revisions to the existing connections policy as set out above.

Semi-State Bodies

615. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Bord na Móna, as part of its restructuring, is requiring some staff to re-apply for their positions, many of whom have worked in the company all their adult lives; the reason this is necessary; if it proceeds, if he will confirm that decisions on those appointments will be made by way of a transparent and fair process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6069/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): Bord na Móna is a commercial semi-state company established under Section 7 of the Turf Development Act, 1946 to produce, market and foster the production and use of turf and turf products. The company also provides products and services in the environmental, renewable energy, electricity generation and waste management business sectors. Under its “New Contract with Nature” strategy, Bord na Móna is managing the transition away from its traditional peat businesses, to becoming a leading supplier of renewable and sustainable products and services.

As the Deputy will be aware, Bord na Móna is facing significant business challenges in the context of the deregulation of the electricity market and increasingly competitive and challenging environments across all its business areas. In order to ensure its continued success and survival, the Company is implementing a programme to transform all areas of its operations and structure, the key objective of which is to improve business effectiveness and efficiency.

The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for the company and not one in which I, as Minister, have any role or function. However, I have raised the matter with Bord na Móna and I am advised that the company is currently implementing a transformation project in its finance operations to introduce a best practice Shared Services Model. The introduction of this model will take two years to complete and I am informed that no employee is required to re-apply for their existing position. Furthermore, I am advised that the new positions are being filled progressively in a fair, transparent and competitive manner in line with industry best practice.

Inland Fisheries Stocks

616. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural

Resources if he will review the selection process for draft salmon licences, in view of the complete inequity of the process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6132/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh): Salmon stocks in Ireland are assessed on an individual river basis because each river contains a genetically unique stock. The annual assessment is carried out by the statutorily independent Standing Scientific Committee on Salmon and underpins management decisions for the coming season.

This committee comprises scientists from IFI, Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM), Loughs Agency, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Marine Institute, Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI-Northern Ireland) other State bodies and third level institutions. The scientists act independently of their parent organisations

Following scientific assessment and management advice, the surplus (if any) available in each river is established so that it may be apportioned between anglers and commercial fishermen.

The annual Control of Fishing for Salmon Order comes into force around March each year prior to the commencement of the commercial salmon fishing season. The schedule to this Order sets out the maximum number of public draft net licences that are available for fishermen in the public salmon fishery in the specific Fishery Districts where a commercial fishery exists and where it is 'open' for fishing.

This Order authorises the issue of commercial fishing licences by Inland Fisheries Ireland, sets out the clear criteria under which those licences may be issued and prescribes the maximum number of commercial licences which may be issued in line with the conservation imperative. The criteria are openly and transparently based principally on the track record of applicants within the relevant fishery and I am advised by IFI that this is the most equitable manner in which licences can be awarded

I am arranging for a copy of the most recent order (S.I. No. 132 of 2014 for the 2014 season) to be forwarded to the Deputy and this is also available online at

<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2014/en/si/0132.html>.

If the Deputy has a specific case in mind, I would be happy to have IFI personnel locally brief him on how the process is implemented.

Road Traffic Legislation

617. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on amending the Road Traffic Act or introducing new legislation to allow gardaí apprehend those driving quads or scramblers illegally in public parks. [5563/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The use of mechanically propelled vehicles of any kind in a public place is subject to the relevant requirements of road traffic legislation which An Garda Síochána have responsibility for enforcing. I am satisfied that the current legislation in this regard is adequate.

For the purposes of road traffic legislation a 'public place' means any public road, and any street, road or other place to which the public have access with vehicles whether as of right or by permission and whether subject to or free of charge. While this would include car parks and

the road leading to them in public parks, it does not include parts of a park where mechanically propelled vehicles are not allowed to operate.

The rules governing such places are generally contained in bye-laws made by the relevant local authority and I understand that the use of scrambler motorcycles and quad vehicles are not permitted in parks. However, responsibility for public parks, including enforcement of the applicable bye-laws, is a matter for the relevant local authority.

Driver Licences

618. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a trailer licence, category BE, will be reinstated in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5540/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The operation of the driver licensing service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority, and I cannot intervene in individual cases. I have therefore referred the matter to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Bus Éireann Services

619. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for the privatisation of Bus Éireann routes, in particular route 7, Clonmel to Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5544/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Bus Éireann is not being privatised. The licensing of bus routes is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Public Transport Provision

620. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amounts allocated by the National Transport Authority for public transport investment in counties Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford respectively in calendar year 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5560/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The NTA administers capital funding available for investment in public transport in the Greater Dublin Area and under the regional cities programme.

Noting this, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Authority for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Roads Maintenance Funding

621. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will ensure funding is made available to all local authorities so that cul-de-sac roads and boreens are

maintained to a proper standard, as these roads have been severely neglected over recent years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5568/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The improvement and maintenance of public regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority. The grant allocations to local authorities for this year were released on the 3rd February and the details are in the allocations booklet in the Dáil Library.

As regards roads not taken in charge by local authorities, the maintenance and improvement of these is, in the first instance, a matter for the relevant landowner. The Local Improvement Scheme for regional and local roads does remain in place and under this Scheme Councils can provide funding for roads and laneways not taken in charge.

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.

Road Traffic Offences

622. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on revising the system of speeding fines and introducing graduated fines for infringements of the limits at the lower levels and larger fines and penalty points being reserved for those doing reckless and dangerous speeds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5668/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): One of the main causes of road crashes on Irish roads is excessive and inappropriate speed. My Department, in conjunction with the Road Safety Authority, An Garda Síochána and other stakeholders, is continuing to examine this area to identify measures that can be taken to bring about future reductions in fatalities and serious injuries.

The main goal of the penalty point system is to make drivers more aware of unsafe driving behaviour and by doing so, improve that behaviour. I have no plans in the near future to change the current system in relation to speeding offences, although I will keep the Deputy's suggestion in mind when the penalty point offences are next reviewed.

Road Traffic Offences

623. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on facilitating a system of payment of unpaid fines where the outstanding money is added to the amount due on motor tax for a vehicle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5669/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A Criminal Justice Working Group, jointly chaired by my Department and the Department of Justice and comprising representatives of all relevant State bodies, was established in March 2014 to oversee

and facilitate the implementation of the recommendations of a report by the Garda Inspectorate into the Fixed Charge Processing System. As part of its deliberations, the Working Group is examining the solutions for addressing the collection of all outstanding road traffic related fines and charges, including the possibility of associating such amounts with the motor tax on a vehicle.

I will await the outcome of the discussions at the Working Group before deciding what approach might be taken in this matter.

Sports Events

624. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update on bid preparations for the 2023 Rugby World Cup. [5728/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Following on from the report of the working group set up to examine key issues in relation to the possibility of Ireland hosting the Rugby World Cup, the Government and the Northern Ireland Executive announced their support in Armagh on 5th December last for the preparation of a joint bid for the Rugby World Cup by the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU). Since then the bid group working in the IRFU has commenced work on compiling the bid, with the support of the two administrations and their agencies. To oversee progress on the bid and guide the bid preparation, an Overview Group will be appointed and I hope to be in a position to announce the details of the group in the near future.

Road Safety Strategy

625. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if further drug-testing devices will be supplied for road safety enforcement to An Garda Síochána or if the 50,000 units currently being tested with the Medical Bureau of Road Safety are the total that will be allocated; if he will report on whether these 50,000 are single-use or multi-use; and the lifespan of the chosen devices. [5798/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The procurement, assessment and testing of devices to detect the presence of drugs at the roadside is the responsibility of the Medical Bureau of Road Safety (MBRS).

The MBRS invited tenders for the provision of roadside devices to test for the presence of drugs in August 2014 and is currently assessing the tenders submitted. Neither I nor my Department are involved in the procurement or selection process.

The devices will be tested for their suitability in due course by the MBRS in conjunction with An Garda Síochána. I understand that this process will take some time and that the selection of a preferred device is expected to take place later this year. I understand that the MBRS will liaise with An Garda Síochána as to the number of devices that will be necessary.

Primary legislation to allow An Garda Síochána to undertake roadside drug tests is currently being prepared by my Department. The enabling provisions will be included in the Road Traffic Bill 2015, the main focus of which will be to provide for the testing of drivers for drugs at the roadside.

Road Traffic Offences

626. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the Road Safety Authority figures stating that from the date it took over as the single licensing authority, on 29 October 2013, to 17 December 2014, 14 months, there were 9,611 drivers disqualified in court but 8,137 did not surrender their licences; the number of drivers prosecuted for the offence of failing to surrender their licence when disqualified in 2013, 2014 and to date in 2015. [5799/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Under regulation 45 of the Road Traffic (Licensing of Drivers) Regulations 2006 (S.I. No. 537 of 2006), as amended by S.I. No. 6 of 2013, it is a legal requirement that people who are disqualified from driving must surrender their driving licences to the Road Safety Authority (RSA), in its capacity as the national driver licensing authority. Not to do so is an offence.

I understand that the RSA currently has a manual procedure for notifying An Garda Síochána in relation to cases where people who are disqualified do not surrender their licences and that the two organisations are in discussions about putting in place an electronic system of notification of non-surrender of licences. This should assist the Gardaí in expediting enforcement in these cases.

Prosecution in these cases is a matter for An Garda Síochána, and I would suggest that the Deputy might direct his queries on prosecution numbers to my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality.

Roads Maintenance Funding

627. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the consideration being provided to increasing the amount of funding that will be provided to Meath County Council, through the National Roads Authority, to maintain roads in north Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5803/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads, is a matter for the National Roads Authority under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting this I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Improvement Schemes

628. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a breakdown, in tabular form, of the funding allocations to local authorities, under the regional and local roads investment programme for each local authority, and on a county basis; if he will provide comparable figures for same for previous years 2010 to 2014, inclusive. [5818/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Details of the regional and local road grant allocations to local authorities for the years 2010-2015 are out-

lined in the regional and local road grant allocations booklets which are available in the Dáil Library.

Roads Maintenance Funding

629. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a breakdown, in tabular form, of the figures for the amount of local property tax which is to be assigned to roads by each local authority. [5819/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Arising from the introduction of the Local Property Tax and the Government commitment that local authorities will retain 80% of the tax revenues from 2015, the Department for Environment, Community and Local Government issued a Circular to five Councils in October 2014. The Circular informed the Councils that in view of the fact that they would be in a surplus position as a result of local retention of the Local Property Tax they would be required to self-fund some services, including roads.

The Councils and the amount of roads self-funding required is as follows:

Local authority	Roads self-funding required
Cork County Council	€5,616,315
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown	€3,497,531
Dublin City Council	€5,780,600
Fingal County Council	€3,914,446
South Dublin County Council	€2,886,859

It is a matter for these Councils to decide on additional spending on roads from their own resources, including Local Property Tax receipts.

As regards the other Councils which will continue to receive Exchequer road grants, my Department has emphasised in the grant allocation Circular issued on 3rd February that the commitment of local authorities to contribute significantly from their own resources towards the cost of improving and maintaining the regional and local roads network is essential and that full consideration needs to be given to utilising the Local Property Tax to boost own resources expenditure on regional and local road maintenance and renewal.

Tourism Project Funding

630. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding allocation towards the development of tourism facilities along the Wild Atlantic Way route in County Sligo; the projects that have received this funding in the county; the status of funding not yet drawn down; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5834/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): While my Department provides the capital funding for investment in tourism projects such as the Wild Atlantic Way, it is not directly involved in their development or management.

The development of the Wild Atlantic Way is an operational matter for Fáilte Ireland. Accordingly I have referred your question to Fáilte Ireland for further information and direct reply.

Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Tourism Project Funding

631. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there is funding available, this year, for communities to attract tourism from the Irish diaspora; if so, the amount which will be available; the way it will be allocated; and the criteria required by applicants. [5836/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The National Community Tourism Diaspora Initiative was launched in 2014 to support up to 700 local community based events and festivals with the capacity to deepen diaspora links and networks. The initiative will have funding of €1 million a year from 2014-2016, to enable local communities to harness diaspora links for the benefit of local tourism. The initiative is a three-way partnership between Failte Ireland, the Local Authorities and IPB Insurance. Each partner is contributing €333,000 per year towards community events with a strong Diaspora element. It is expected that the Community events will take place from June to October in each of the years.

Local Authorities are implementing the initiative at county/city level through the directorates of Community and Enterprise development and are responsible for funds administration including grant applications and awards. Event organisers will be able to access the guidelines, criteria and application forms for 2015 via their Local Authority website in the coming weeks.

EU Regulations

632. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the North Sea - Mediterranean corridor study released by the European Commission; his further views that Ireland will be in compliance with the TEN-T guidelines for the core network corridor; the work plans his Department has in place to ensure Ireland will be in compliance with the requirement that core airports have connections to both TEN-T road and rail networks by 2050, with links to the high-speed rail network where possible and feasible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5880/15]

633. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views that the proposed bus rapid transit service to Dublin Airport would make Ireland compliant with its responsibility under Article 41.3 (European Union Regulation 1315/2013) with regard to technical requirements for the core network infrastructure. [5881/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 632 and 633 together.

The Report on the North Sea-Mediterranean Corridor has been prepared by consultants, with inputs from stakeholders including Member States on this corridor, through Corridor Forum Meetings chaired by the European Coordinator for the North Sea-Mediterranean Corridor, Professor Peter Balazs.

The Work Plan for the North Sea Mediterranean Corridor for the North Sea prepared by Professor Balazs, focusing on the period to 2030, is being considered by my Department.

The TEN-T regulations requirements for core airports include road and rail links and the Department is considering how these can be achieved over the timeframe set out in the Regulations. Clarification is being sought from the European Commission on interpretation of Article

41.3, technical requirements regarding rail connections to a core network airport.

Parking Provision

634. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will amend road traffic legislation to provide local authorities the power to designate, in very limited circumstances and where clear need has been shown, certain residential streets (details supplied) as being streets where it is lawful to park on the footpath up to a designated white line, which white line would not extend beyond lamp posts already built on the footpath, thereby causing no alteration in the position of pedestrians, especially vulnerable ones, but would assist in remedying the grievous and highly dangerous situation which prevails at present. [5891/15]

637. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, further to Parliamentary Question No. 287 of 25 September 2014, if he will provide an update on same; and if he will clarify the situation in view of his correspondence (details supplied). [5982/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 634 and 637 together.

Under the Traffic and Parking Regulations, partial parking of vehicles on pavements is currently not permitted.

In June 2014, following representations on the issue, my predecessor indicated that he would ask the National Transport Authority (NTA) to examine the issue further and to consider the possibility of introducing a pilot scheme for partial parking on pavements.

The NTA has recently responded and has indicated that, after extensive consideration of the request and consultation with local authorities and informally with An Garda Síochána, the introduction of permitted parking on footpaths is “highly undesirable and problematic”. The key concerns arising from permitting any partial parking of vehicles on pavements are that footpaths are intended to provide a safe route for pedestrians and to segregate them from other road users, thereby enhancing road safety and protecting the most vulnerable of our road users, including children, the impaired and the elderly. Furthermore, footpaths are not designed or constructed to take the weight of cars or heavier goods vehicles. Allowing footpaths to be so used for parking will lead to more rapid deterioration of the footpath surface, further increasing maintenance costs and providing greater trip hazards for pedestrians.

The safety of all road users must be at the core of traffic and parking regulations. In light of all the evidence, I am of the view that safety considerations for pedestrians outweigh any benefits from the proposal to allow partial parking on footpaths in any circumstances and I have no plan to change the Traffic and Parking Regulations to allow for this.

Taxi Licences Renewals

635. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide, in tabular form, the number of taxi licence renewals in the Dublin metropolitan region, according to regions based on postal code in the years 2012, 2013 and 2014; the number of new licences issued during the same period on the same basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5916/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including the issue and renewal of SPSV

licences, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Pension Provisions

636. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on a pension matter in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5963/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I would once again like to make it clear that resolution of the funding difficulties in the IASS is primarily a matter for the Trustees, the companies participating in the scheme, the scheme members and the Pensions Authority.

Pension schemes are closely regulated under Irish and European pension law and the Pensions Authority is the national statutory regulatory authority in Ireland. There are prescribed procedures and limitations in place governing any reductions in pension rights introduced to address funding difficulties in a scheme such as the IASS.

The IASS Trustee has confirmed that the proposals that are now being implemented are in the overall best interests of the members of the IASS as a whole. As you know, this was also the view of the Expert Panel.

I am very conscious of the difficulties these necessary changes cause for many scheme members, including pensioners, but the risks that would have arisen for all members, the companies involved and the wider economy if this solution had not been implemented were even greater.

It should be noted that no formal offer has yet been made by IAG for Aer Lingus. Remuneration matters in Aer Lingus are a matter for the Board of Aer Lingus in the first instance and the Remuneration report is considered at Annual General Meetings of the company. The Deputy will be aware that the State's shareholding voted against the non-binding resolution on the consideration of the Remuneration Report last year at last year's Annual General meeting at which the 2013 Annual Report and Accounts were considered due to circumstances that were outlined by my predecessor at the time and which are on the record of the House. While many other shareholders supported the government's position, most did not and the remuneration report was approved.

Question No. 637 answered with Question No. 634.

Roads Maintenance Funding

638. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the criteria under which each council was allocated funding for road improvements as announced recently; the amount requested by each local authority; the amount granted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5999/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Firstly I would like to explain that the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads, in its area, is

a statutory function of each road authority in accordance with the provisions of section 13 of the Roads Act, 1993. Works on such roads are a matter for the relevant local authority to be funded from its own resources supplemented by State road grants. I announced the 2015 regional and local road grant allocations on 3rd February providing €294 million to local authorities for works on regional and local roads.

The three main road grant categories are the Restoration Improvement, Discretionary Grant and the Restoration Maintenance grant programmes. All of these grants are allocated based on the length of regional and local roads within a local authority area. In the case of counties/cities that experience higher road traffic than the norm, a factor is applied to the kilometre length within the county or city. In the case of Meath and Kildare a factor of 1.3 is applied, while a factor of 2 is applied to the cities of Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford. A factor of 1.0 is applied to the remaining counties which receive funding. The three Dublin councils and Dublin City are no longer funded under these programmes as they have become self-funding under the new Local Property Tax arrangements.

Details of the 2014 regional and local road grant payments to local authorities are available in the Dáil library. Details of the 2015 regional and local road grant allocations to each local authority are also available in the Dáil library.

Cycling Facilities Provision

639. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the outcome of the meeting held on 4 February 2015 between officials of his Department and representatives of the Boyne trail cycling group and other groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6003/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I understand that Minister Nash and Deputy Fitzpatrick along with a deputation from Boyneside Trail met with officials from my Department on Wednesday 4th February. I understand that the meeting was useful and that a clear path was outlined to the delegation to assist them in bringing the project to the next step. The group were advised that full backing from both Meath and Louth County Councils was required and that further funding should be sought from both councils and the National Transport Authority and that a meeting with the National Transport Authority was advisable.

Roads Maintenance Funding

640. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of funds that will be allocated for the continuing programme of storm damage remediation and prevention work in 2015; the amount of this that relates to work sanctioned in 2014, but not completed; if he will provide details of these projects; when details of the projects to be approved in 2015 will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6035/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority. 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.

On 3rd February, I announced the 2015 regional and local roads allocations to local authorities and these allocations included €3.42 million towards costs related to severe weather events in addition to the €2.1 million carried over from 2014. The details of the allocations are in the regional and local roads allocations booklet which is in the Dáil Library.

Coast Guard Services

641. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to relocate the base for the Coast Guard service in north-west Connemara, County Galway to the airstrip owned by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht near Cleggan, County Galway; the discussions that have taken place with that Department regarding this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6036/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The volunteer Coast Guard unit based in Cleggan, Co Galway is designated as a shoreline search unit and operates out of a small facility, traditionally designated as a Rocket House. The Coast Guard which is a Division of my Department, is committed to securing a more suitable base or site, on which to situate the local unit. My Department has registered an expression of interest with the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht with regard to acquiring a site on the local airstrip. My Department has also requested the Office of Public Works to conduct a feasibility study with regard to the potential to siting a facility for the local unit on the site.

Sports Capital Programme Data

642. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the sports capital programme for 2015 will be announced; when the programme will be open for applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6050/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): I expect to be in a position to announce details of the 2015 Sports Capital Programme in the near future. Any interested group should register now on www.sportscapitalprogramme.ie as this will be the only way to apply under any future rounds of the Programme.

Road Safety

643. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding allocated to County Louth, by local authority area, to implement the 30 km/h speed limit in urban areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6058/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Last October, I issued a circular to all local authorities asking them to review the speed limits in place in residential and local housing estates in their area to determine whether or not appropriate speed limits and signage are in place, especially where children are at play.

As part of the overall allocation of €294 million in regional and local road grants announced on 3rd February, I have now set aside €2 million that I am making available to local authorities who have identified a need for traffic calming measures and a reduction in the current speed

limit. This funding will be allocated to local authorities as they come forward with their programmes to implement the lower speed limit and introduce new measures.

Tourism Industry

644. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will confirm that the tourist information office in a town (detail supplied) in County Kerry will continue, in the future, providing the same service as it has provided in the past; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6122/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The management of the Tourist Information Office network is an operational matter for the Board and management of Fáilte Ireland. Therefore I have referred the Deputy's Question to them for further information and direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

State Airports

645. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will support a matter (details supplied) regarding Dublin Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6149/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The matter which the Deputy refers to is an operational matter for daa, which has statutory responsibility for the management, operation and development of Dublin Airport. I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the daa in order for them to reply directly. If the Deputy does not receive a reply from the daa within ten working days, please advise my Private Office.

Wildlife Regulations

646. **Deputy Áine Collins** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if farmers on hen harrier-designated land will be included in the new threat response plan. [6022/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The composition of the Hen Harrier Threat Response Plan Consultative Committee is still under consideration. However, it is my intention that the Committee will include a farmer or farmers with lands designated as a Special Protection Area for the Hen Harrier.

Genealogical Services

647. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide the timeframe for the full implementation of the all-island approach, including a timeframe for all the measures involved, in facilitating genealogical research and heritage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5599/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In 2012, the Government approved plans for the implementation of a national policy for genealogy by way of a phased approach. Under Phase 1, it was proposed to make available online the ge-

neological records of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and of key agencies within its ambit, namely, the National Library of Ireland and the National Archives of Ireland, by developing the website *www.irishgenealogy.ie* as a virtual entry point and a portal for those wishing to search for genealogical records.

Under Phase 2, it was proposed, among other things, to advance agreement with other State entities, notably the General Register Office, to facilitate access to its primary historic records, which are register entries of births, deaths and marriages, through the *www.irishgenealogy.ie* website.

Under Phase 3, it was proposed to enter into negotiations with non-State bodies holding genealogy records, with a view to enabling access to them through the *www.irishgenealogy.ie* website.

To date, my Department has concentrated its resources on implementing Phases 1 and 2 of the national policy.

The *www.irishgenealogy.ie* website has been developed as a virtual entry point and a portal for those wishing to search for Irish genealogical records. This includes the following record sets, which are provided on an all-island basis:

- The 1901 and 1911 census records and partial census returns for parts of the 19th century;
- The tithe applotment records from 1823 to 1837;
- The Griffiths valuations published between 1847 and 1864; and
- A number of other smaller sets of records.

There are also plans to provide on-line access on this site to the indexes and registered images of civil records, covering all of the island of Ireland for the pre-1922 period.

The site also has a useful links page to allow visitors access to all of the main record repository websites on the island of Ireland. This includes the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland and the General Register Office, Northern Ireland. The site has proved very popular since the upgrades which began in 2009 and has facilitated research on an all-island basis.

While there are no plans at present to formally implement an all-island approach to facilitating genealogical research and heritage, my Department remains open to examining further ways of advancing such matters, within the available resources.

National Archives

648. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the progress that has been made in cataloguing the 70,000 boxes of uncatalogued material in the possession of the National Archives; the number of staff that have been assigned to this task; the number of new staff hired to assist in this work; if she will highlight all cases of record degradation that she has been made aware of; her views on the present quality and physical integrity of the records in storage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5601/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The National Archives is responsible by law for the acquisition of records of permanent value - referred to as statutory records - from Departments of State, the courts and 61 named bodies. The National Archives can also acquire archives from other sources, such as business, hospitals, chari-

ties and voluntary bodies, where it is considered that the archives are of outstanding quality and value. This can, on occasion, entail the rescue of archives that are in danger of destruction. I am advised that the National Archives has a historic backlog of approximately 70,000 boxes of archives, which need archival and preservation processing to varying degrees. These archives are non-statutory records and are held in safe and secure conditions but, in light of the pressure on resources, progress on cataloguing this historic backlog is likely to be slow.

I would like to make it clear that the National Archives annual intake of statutory records, amounting to some 5,000 boxes per annum, does not generate any backlog in cataloguing work and is catalogued within existing resources each year.

I am pleased that, after a number of years of funding reductions, I was in a position this year to increase the National Archives budget and, in addition, that sanction has been given to run a competition for additional archivists for the National Archives. I understand that these increased resources will be used, inter alia, to address the archiving backlog.

I am also very conscious that the storage capacity of the National Archives needs to be improved and, to that end, as part of its capital stimulus package, the Government agreed to provide funding this year for phase one of a development plan at the Archives headquarters in Bishop Street. The OPW will shortly go to tender for the project and it is anticipated that works could begin by mid-2015. This will greatly increase the storage capacity of the National Archives.

Heritage Sites

649. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on the restoration and development of a historical site (details supplied) in Dublin 1. [5484/15]

650. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views that the urgency of achieving a resolution to the outstanding issues relating to the battlefield site at a location (details supplied) in Dublin 1; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5485/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht(Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 649 and 650 together.

The Deputy will appreciate the constraints that apply in terms of replying to a “details supplied” Question.

My function in this case relates to the buildings which are the subject of a Preservation Order under the National Monuments Acts. Responsibility for planning and development of the area outside the bounds of the Preservation Order rests with Dublin City Council, as planning authority.

As a consequence of the Preservation Order, any works affecting the national monument requires the formal consent of the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, under the National Monuments Acts. After extensive deliberations, a final Ministerial consent was given to the owners in April 2014, inter alia, entailing the full repair and restoration of the structures comprising the national monument, both internally and externally.

For my part, I will continue to support all appropriate initiatives to secure the restoration of the national monument, consistent with my statutory function under the National Monuments

Acts and with the roles and responsibilities of the other interested parties.

Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge

651. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the consultations her Department has had with the Department of Education and Skills relating to the 20-year strategy for the Irish l

anguage 2010 - 2030, specifically with regard to the State's support for gaelscoileanna and gaelcholáisi; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5678/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): At the outset, I wish to inform the Deputy that my Department has the overarching responsibility for coordinating the implementation of the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030* in cooperation with a wide range of key stakeholders, including the Department of Education and Skills. In that context, my Department is in regular contact with these stakeholders with regard to progressing the implementation of a wide range of measures, including educational measures, under the Strategy.

I should also say that a number of structures have been established to progress the implementation of the Strategy and monitor progress in this regard. These structures include the Cabinet Committee on the Irish Language and the Gaeltacht, chaired by An Taoiseach, the Inter-Departmental Group, chaired by me as Minister of State for Gaeltacht Affairs, and various groups of officials dealing with different sectors, including education.

The Deputy may wish to note that I have been engaging on a bilateral basis with Ministerial colleagues with regard to the implementation of the Strategy. As part of this engagement process, I intend to discuss the support available for gaelscoileanna and gaelcholáistí at my meeting this week with the Minister for Education and Skills.

Commemorative Events

652. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide an update on the consultation process regarding the 1916 commemoration; the funding that will be made available; the specific projects that are under consideration; the timeframe for implementation of the commemoration; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5679/15]

656. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the extent to which preparations for the 1916 commemorations continue to progress apace; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6078/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 652 and 656 together.

The Ireland 2016 initiative, which I am leading, aims to develop, coordinate and deliver a programme to honour and remember those who fought and died in the 1916 Easter Rising. The Ireland 2016 initiative will reflect on the legacy of that period and look towards our future, based around 5 themes, as set out in the Government's framework plan:

- Remembering the past

- Reconciling and respecting all traditions
- Presenting Ireland to the world
- Imagining our future
- Celebrating our achievements.

The Ireland 2016 Project Team in my Department is currently engaged in an extensive consultation process across the Government, State agency and community sectors in order to progress the development of detailed plans for 2016. Meetings have taken place between the team and the various key Departments, agencies, local authorities and other interested parties and I am delighted at the level of interest and enthusiasm for the programme to date. I envisage that this formal consultation phase will be complete by end-February, but engagement will, of course, be ongoing with interested parties as the programme develops towards implementation.

In this regard, I have secured an amount of €4 million in current funding in the Revised Estimates for 2015 to support the development of an integrated plan – Ireland 2016 – focused on commemorating the centenary of the 1916 Rising. It is my intention to allocate this funding in a manner that will help to support a wide range of activities and events by interested groups, including local community groups, as well as the national cultural institutions, education, the Irish language and arts sectors. This funding is in addition to the capital provision of €22 million to be allocated in 2015 to a number of flagship commemorations projects.

Library Projects

653. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will reconsider current proposals to transfer Bolton Library in Cashel, County Tipperary, to the University of Limerick; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5898/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): While I am aware that there are some discussions taking place in regard to the issue referred to in the Question, my Department has no direct role in the matter, nor have I received any proposals in this regard.

Waterways Issues

654. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the extent to which she has received information from Waterways Ireland incorporating the review of the draft regulations appertaining to the cost and regulations associated with the use of canals in County Kildare for leisure and residential purposes; the degree to which the concerns expressed by the various interest groups have been addressed to date in this context; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6076/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Waterways Ireland proposes to make new bye-laws which are intended to enhance its ability to manage the canals for the benefit of all canal users. There are over 14,000 registered boat owners on the seven waterways managed by Waterways Ireland. These seven waterways make a vital contribution to tourism, attracting visitors from around Ireland and from abroad.

The proposed new bye-laws are intended to enhance the ability of Waterways Ireland to manage the Royal and Grand Canals and the Barrow Navigation for the benefit of all canal us-

ers. Investment by Waterways Ireland in these waterways has made them more attractive for boat owners and is helping to develop them as a vibrant recreational and tourist amenity for all waterway users. In this context, it is now necessary to update the bye-laws to ensure that the rules governing use of the waterways are fit for purpose and best meet the needs of all waterway users.

I am aware that concerns have been raised regarding certain aspects of the proposed bye-laws. Waterways Ireland undertook a public consultation process in relation to the proposed bye-laws in 2014. I am advised that the main stakeholders, including the Inland Waterway Association of Ireland, the Heritage Boat Association, the Royal Canal Amenity Group and the Irish Boat Rental Association, were contacted individually and invited to meet with the Chief Executive and the senior management team of Waterways Ireland prior to submitting their views. The current permit holders on the three waterways, including traditional canal users and canal dwellers, received individual written notices and were given the opportunity to make their views known.

I understand that over 2,000 submissions were made in the course of the public consultation process and that Waterways Ireland has concluded its analysis of the submissions received. A summary of the consultation process and of the submissions received is available on the Waterways Ireland website at <http://www.waterwaysireland.org/public-consultation>.

My officials are currently liaising with Waterways Ireland with a view to finalising draft bye-laws which will be referred to me, as Minister, with recommendations for consideration and final decision. It is my intention to afford interested Deputies and Senators an opportunity to discuss the proposals with me prior to making a final decision on the draft bye-laws.

EU Directives

655. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the extent of representations received by her Department over the past number of years on the impact of the habitats directive or similar directives; the extent to which those directly affected in a negative way have been consulted in regard to the issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6077/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Ireland, like all EU Member States, is bound by the requirements of the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive. These Directives aim to ensure the protection of habitats and species which have been selected for conservation within special areas of conservation and special protection areas. The Directives has been transposed into national law under the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 and the Wildlife Acts. In advance of the designation of a site, my Department writes to all identified land owners with a legal interest in the site, outlining the intention to designate the site, the appeals process and how to get further information. Public notices in relation to the proposed designation are also placed in local media.

Landowners may object to the proposed designation of a site as a special area of conservation or special protection area. Following the completion of a Departmental review of an objection to the proposed designation, landowners may opt to take their cases to the Designated Areas Appeals Advisory Board, an independently chaired Board which makes recommendations to me, as Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, on such cases. The appeals process includes an oral hearing.

The Board heard 17 appeals over the 2013-2014 period. In each case the recommendation

of the Board was accepted.

It is recognised that the nomination of a site for designation as a special area of conservation or special protection area may have an impact, for example, on the manner in which certain lands may be farmed. The designation of lands does not mean that the lands are subject to blanket restrictions. However, they must be managed appropriately.

In accordance with the relevant legislation, certain activities in protected sites may only be undertaken with my consent. Compensation may be payable where a person has been refused consent by me for a prescribed activity within a designated site that he or she had been undertaking in the five year period prior to the refusal. However, compensation schemes have generally been put in place, where required, without the need to undergo a formal process under the relevant legislation.

While my Department has the lead role in relation to the implementation of the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive, significant funding is provided through the rural development programme, operated by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. This programme provides for a range of supports for farmers, including payments in respect of sites nominated for designation or designated in accordance with the Directives. I understand that in future, EU financial supports for agri-environmental actions by farmers in special areas of conservation and special protection areas will be made through the green, low carbon agri-environment scheme (GLAS), to be operated by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Question No. 656 answered with Question No. 652.

Heritage Projects

657. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the extent to which she has had discussions with other Departments or interest groups, with a view to creating greater awareness of our national heritage and culture throughout primary and second level schools; if she continues to have discussions with the Department of Education and Skills in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6079/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): There are a number of initiatives in my Department that seek to generate increased awareness of our national culture and heritage among interest groups, including schools. The *Ireland 2016* Programme to mark the hundredth anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising is a major priority for me. This programme is underpinned by a €4 million current budget in 2015, which will support a wide range of activities across the arts, cultural and educational sectors. In particular, I have been working closely with my colleague, the Minister for Education and Skills, Ms Jan O'Sullivan, T.D., on the development of the formal education sector input into the Decade of Centenaries commemorations. As part of this overall programme, the Department of Education and Skills is planning a number of specific events to mark the centenary of 2016 across primary, post-primary and third level sectors.

It is very important to me that the arts are made more accessible. Immersing school students in the arts through a targeted strategy will benefit future generations and give young people a greater understanding and appreciation of the arts as they progress to adulthood. I have met my colleague, the Minister for Education and Skills, on a number of occasions to discuss the Arts in Education Charter. The Arts in Education Implementation Group has been proactive in meeting many organisations from both the arts and education sectors and progressing a number of initiatives. Of particular interest is the current development of a portal, which will form a key

communications and information channel for both the education and arts sectors.

The National Cultural Institutions include a diverse range of cultural institutions and agencies, which are involved in a wide number of initiatives with a view to engaging with a wide range of stakeholders, including schools, both primary and post-primary. Each of these cultural institutions has a range of education initiatives, including exhibitions, events and school outreach programmes, through which schools can explore and engage in our rich cultural heritage.

Another important priority for me is to deliver Ireland's first national cultural policy. Last June, the Government agreed to the drafting of a national cultural policy - *Culture 2025* – which will set out high-level policy for the period up to 2025. I intend to initiate a wide-scale consultation process shortly to ensure all interest groups, including the education sector, can make their views known.

There are many other ways in which my Department is supporting arts, cultural and heritage initiatives in conjunction with local groups and communities including schools. These include:

- The St. Patrick's Day celebrations;
- Culture Night;
- The Heritage in Schools scheme, one of many heritage programmes of the Heritage Council, which is supported by funding from my Department.
- The Archaeology in the Classroom initiative.
- The National Architects-in-Schools Initiative, funded by my Department under the Government Policy on Architecture 2009-2015.
- Funding Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann for the promotion of the Irish traditional arts;
- The development of web-based projects by my Department and others to promote greater appreciation and understanding of Ireland's culture and heritage for schools; and
- Funding by my Department to support the work of National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) in developing *Creative Engagement* an arts and culture programme in post primary schools.

Details on many of the events surrounding these initiatives are available to view on *Culturefox*, the free online arts events guide developed by the Arts Council.

Film Industry Promotion

658. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the extent to which she expects this country to be used as a film location in the current year; the extent to which she expects new enquiries from overseas in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6080/15]

662. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of films in respect of which this country was used as a film location in each of the past five years to date; her expectations in this regard for the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6084/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 658 and 662 together.

Primary responsibility for the support and promotion of film-making in Ireland, in respect of both the indigenous sector and inward productions, is the responsibility of the Irish Film Board (IFB). This includes assistance with locations for the making of films. The IFB is the statutorily independent agency responsible for the promotion and development of the Irish film industry and, as Minister, I have no responsibility in relation to its day-to-day operational matters, including the allocation of resources between the different support programmes and schemes for indigenous productions and incoming international productions.

For detailed information on the supports given and available, I would like to direct the Deputy's attention to the annual reports of the IFB, which are lodged periodically in the Oireachtas Library, and also to the publications by the Board itself on its website www.irishfilmboard.ie.

Arts Promotion

659. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the extent to which the arts and heritage sector continues to attract support from philanthropists; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6081/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Private support of the arts is very important and the Government supports this through tax incentives and other initiatives. In this regard, my Department introduced small philanthropy schemes in 2012 and 2013, both of which have helped to encourage arts organisations to build partnerships with potential sponsors. My Department also operates small capital grants schemes, which require to be co-funded from private or philanthropic sources.

The Arts Council operates the RAISE programme, which seeks to enhance fund-raising skills in arts organisations with a view to reducing the sector's dependency on funding from the taxpayer and moving it more towards the business sector.

These initiatives assist the sector in securing philanthropic contributions to the arts in Ireland.

Heritage Projects

660. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the extent to which the arts and heritage sectors continue to generate employment throughout the country; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6082/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The nature of employment within the arts sector encompasses a wide range of activities. It can include those engaged in the arts practice within specific artistic genres and can encompass areas that flow from such artistic pursuits. It may also embody the industrial creative sectors, including audiovisual production. The Government appreciates the importance of the arts, culture and the creative industries to our society and economy. Within the current economic constraints, investment in the arts, culture and creative sectors is more important than ever, having regard to the employment intensity of the sector.

The arts sector continues to offer vital opportunities for the provision of important cultural, social and employment benefits to communities throughout the country. Primary responsibility for the promotion of the arts at all levels throughout the country is devolved to the Arts Council. The Council is funded by my Department and is statutorily independent in its day-to-day

operations, including its funding decisions. Details of all funding provided by the Arts Council to arts practitioners, groups and venues, including arts centres, are available on its website at www.artscouncil.ie

Funding for the protection of heritage sites and buildings will continue to be provided by my Department in 2015 via a number of schemes, which will be either directly administered or delivered through local authorities or through the Heritage Council. This week I announced an allocation of €624,000 for the *Structures at Risk Fund 2015*, to enable conservation works to heritage structures, in both private and public ownership, deemed to be at significant risk of deterioration and which are protected under the Planning and Development Acts 2000–2012. In 2014, my Department awarded €5 million to conservation works to 540 heritage structures through the *Built Heritage Jobs Leverage Scheme*, which directly generated 175 full-time equivalent jobs across the country in the niche conservation sector of the construction industry and in associated areas. I also understand that the heritage grants programmes of the Heritage Council, which my Department funds, generated 19 full-time equivalent jobs in 2014, predominantly in rural Ireland, from a spend of €695,000. Capital investment in built heritage conservation also assists in developing and maintaining specialised skills among conservation professionals and craftspeople.

Research has shown that investment in heritage also generates significant indirect employment. The research report *Economic Value of Ireland's Historic Environment*, commissioned by the Heritage Council and published in 2012, established that Ireland's historic environment supports over 35,000 jobs.

Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme Payments

661. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the extent to which full and final settlement has been achieved in respect of displaced turf cutters in County Kildare, arising from the application of special areas of conservation and national heritage areas; if further issues that remain outstanding are being addressed in this context; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6083/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): 159 applications under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme for raised bog special areas of conservation have been received and acknowledged by my Department in respect of Mouds Bog and 60 applications in respect of Ballynafagh Bog in County Kildare. A total of 235 annual payments, 146 turf deliveries and 20 once-off incentive payments have been made in respect of the applications received from Mouds Bog and 86 annual payments, 18 turf deliveries and 9 once-off incentive payments have been made in respect of the applications received from Ballynafagh Bog. 66 applicants from Mouds Bog and 25 applicants from Ballynafagh Bog have expressed an interest in relocation to a non-designated bog. Progress has been made with a view to the relocation of 9 qualifying turf cutters from Ballynafagh Bog to Timahoe North, County Kildare, which is in the ownership of Bord na Móna. While the site had been available for turf cutting during the 2014 season, turf cutters had not agreed with my Department to cut turf there.

Lattins Bog, also known as Mouds North Bog, in County Kildare, has been assessed as a suitable relocation site for turf cutters from Mouds Bog. My Department had sought expressions of interest from qualifying applicants under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme with a view to relocation to this site. However, the level of interest received in relocation to this site has been muted to date.

The *Review of Raised Bog Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs)*, which is available to download from my Department's website at <http://www.ahg.gov.ie/en/Publications>, provides details on future arrangements regarding turf cutting on each of the 75 raised bog natural heritage areas.

Carbury Bog natural heritage area in County Kildare is one of the natural heritage areas which are to be conserved. In the case of this bog, the review envisages the cessation of turf cutting on the site by 1 January 2017 to preserve its conservation value. Turf cutting may continue on the bog until that date, on plots that have been cut in the five year period prior to the Government decision of 14 January 2014 on the NHA review.

To ensure that cutting does not intensify prior to 1 January 2017, owners of plots or of turbarry rights who have cut over the relevant 5 year period must obtain a permit to cut from my Department. Contractors are also obliged to obtain permits.

The cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme has been extended to land owners and turbarry right holders affected by the restrictions on turf cutting in raised bog natural heritage areas. No applications for compensation have been received, to date, in respect of Carbury Bog.

The NHA review also envisages the complete or partial de-designation of 46 existing natural heritage areas where turf cutting may continue into the future. In these de-designation cases, it is not necessary for individuals to seek consent to cut turf. Hodgestown Bog natural heritage area in County Kildare is one of those de-designation cases.

Question No. 662 answered with Question No. 658.

Arts Funding

663. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the extent to which her Department continues to provide funding for the arts at local and community level, directly or indirectly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6085/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Primary responsibility for the promotion of the arts at all levels throughout the country is devolved to the Arts Council. The Council is funded by my Department and is statutorily independent in its day-to-day operations, including its funding decisions. In 2015, there is an increased allocation to the Arts Council amounting to almost €59m, as published in December in the Revised Estimates Volume. Details of all funding provided by the Arts Council to arts practitioners, groups and venues, along with the reasons for funding, are available on its website at www.artscouncil.ie. My Department also provides some limited supports for the development of physical infrastructure for arts and cultural facilities through capital grants. The funding of projects selected under the second Arts and Culture Capital Enhancement Support Scheme (ACCESS II) still continues, although the scheme is now closed. My Department also provides small capital grant schemes from time to time, as well as support to local and regional museums.

Heritage Sites

664. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of historic, heritage and protected sites and buildings deemed to be at risk, at present, for whatever reason; the action proposed to address such issues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6086/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In rela-

tion to heritage buildings or sites deemed to be at risk, a single set of comprehensive statistics is not available in respect of the number and location of endangered heritage sites or buildings throughout the country. There is a number of ways in which my Department is made aware of possible risk to protected structures, sites or monuments, one of these being the receipt of applications for funding for their repair, conservation, preservation or safeguarding.

In that regard, funding for the protection of heritage sites and buildings will continue to be provided by my Department in 2015 via a number of schemes, which will be either directly administered or delivered through local authorities or through the Heritage Council. This week I announced an allocation of €624,000 for the *Structures at Risk Fund 2015*, to enable conservation works to heritage structures, in both private and public ownership, deemed to be at significant risk of deterioration and which are protected under the Planning and Development Acts 2000 – 2012.

In addition, my Department often receives information relating to existing or potential risks to protected structures, sites and monuments from local authorities, the Heritage Council, heritage-based NGOs and members of the public.

Part IV of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2012 provides for the protection of the architectural heritage. The Act gives primary responsibility to planning authorities to identify and protect the architectural heritage by including relevant structures on the Record of Protected Structures. Inclusion on the Record of Protected Structures places a duty of care on the owners and occupiers of protected structures and also gives planning authorities powers to deal with development proposals affecting them and to seek to safeguard their future.

Ireland, like all EU Member States, is bound by the requirements of the Habitats Directive. This Directive aims to ensure the protection of habitats and species which have been selected for conservation within Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). The Habitats Directive has been transposed into national law under the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011.

Departmental Funding

665. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the extent to which her Department directly, or through bodies under her aegis, continues to support various festivals or cultural events organised annually or on a once-off basis throughout the country; the amount of such support provided in the past three years to date under specific headings, directly, through the Arts Council or other bodies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6087/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): It is a key objective for my Department to maximise the economic and employment creation potential of the arts, heritage and Gaeltacht sectors. In this context, it will seek to continue to develop synergies between the arts, cultural, heritage and Gaeltacht sectors, most notably in the area of tourism product development and cultural tourism. Primary responsibility for the promotion of the arts at all levels throughout the country is devolved to the Arts Council. The Council is funded by my Department and is statutorily independent in its day-to-day operations, including its funding decisions. In 2015, there is an increased allocation of almost €59m to the Arts Council. Details of all funding provided by the Council to arts practitioners, groups and venues, along with the reasons for funding, are available on its website at www.artscouncil.ie

My Department also funds a small number of festivals and events. Details of this funding

over the past 3 years will be forwarded to the Deputy separately.

Hedge Cutting Season

666. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to extend the hedge cutting time period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6120/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Section 40 of the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2012 prohibits the cutting, grubbing, burning or destruction of vegetation, with certain strict exemptions, from 1 March to 31 August during the nesting and breeding season for birds and wildlife. Vegetation such as hedgerows and scrub is important as wildlife habitat and needs to be managed in the interests of both farming and biodiversity and therefore a review of the current legislation was initiated to ensure that it remains both effective and balanced.

Stakeholders had been seeking an opportunity to input their views on the operation of section 40 of the Acts and I announced, last year, a consultation process which provided that opportunity with a deadline for the receipt of submissions by 9 January 2015.

I have established a Working Group within my Department to consider all submissions received by this deadline. I have asked the Working Group to report back to me with a range of proposals promptly.

Any changes to the closed period for cutting, grubbing, burning or destruction of vegetation would require amending legislation. It will not be feasible to introduce any potential changes to section 40 of the Wildlife Acts prior to this year's closed period which commences on 1 March.

Hedge Cutting Season

667. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if a review of section 40 of the Wildlife Act, as amended, or any regulations under the same Act, has taken place, or is under way; the purpose of this review; the purpose of the consultation which took place over the Christmas 2014 period on section 40 of the Act; if amending legislation is planned to be moved, as a consequence, or if a new ministerial order is envisaged; the timeframe envisaged for same; if she will provide all ministerial orders and requests made under the terms of the Act in 2014 and to date in 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6126/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Section 40 of the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2012 prohibits the cutting, grubbing, burning or destruction of vegetation, with certain strict exemptions, from 1 March to 31 August during the nesting and breeding season for birds and wildlife. Vegetation such as hedgerows and scrub is important as wildlife habitat and needs to be managed in the interests of both farming and biodiversity and therefore a review of the current legislation was initiated to ensure that it remains both effective and balanced. Stakeholders had been seeking an opportunity to input their views on the operation of section 40 of the Acts and I announced, last year, a consultation process which provided that opportunity with a deadline for the receipt of submissions by 9 January 2015.

I have established a Working Group within my Department to consider all submissions received by this deadline. I have asked the Working Group to report back to me with a range of

proposals promptly.

Any changes to the closed period for cutting, grubbing, burning or destruction of vegetation would require amending legislation. It will not be feasible to introduce any potential changes to section 40 of the Wildlife Acts prior to this year's closed period which commences on 1 March.

No Ministerial Orders were made under the provisions of the Wildlife Acts in 2014 or, to date, in 2015.

Record of Protected Structures

668. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the process by which a protected structure can be removed from the record of protected structures; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6152/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My role, as Minister for Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht, with regard to the protection and management of our built and natural heritage, is set out in the provisions of relevant legislation, as are the role of local authorities and the responsibilities of owners as regards heritage assets. Part IV of the Planning and Development Act 2000 provides for the protection of architectural heritage and gives local planning authorities primary responsibility to identify and protect architectural heritage by including structures on the Record of Protected Structures. The making of an addition to, or a deletion from, the Record of Protected Structures is a reserved function of the relevant planning authority.