

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 13, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 14 to 119, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 120 to 129, inclusive, answered orally.

Child Care Costs

130. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his views on the Central Statistics Office figures, showing a rise in the cost of child care in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7751/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I am aware of the relatively high cost to parents of child care in this country and of the difficulties that this presents, particularly where both parents are in employment outside of the home. The figures produced by the CSO indicate that child care fees generally across the country increased by 2.4% in 2014.

To help address child care costs, in the region of €260 million is provided annually by my Department to support a number of child care programmes. These programmes are in addition to the support provided to all parents in the form of Child Benefit.

The objective of the investment by my Department is to assist parents in accessing quality and affordable child care. More than 100,000 children benefit from this investment each year. These programmes include the free pre-school year provided under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. In the region of 68,000 children benefit from the programme at a cost of €2,375 per child per year.

The CCS programme provides funding to community child care services to enable them to provide quality child care at reduced rates to disadvantaged and low income working parents. Parents qualify as disadvantaged or low income on the basis of means-tested entitlements. In the case of full day care, parents qualifying for the higher rate of subvention under the CCS programme can have up to €95 per week deducted from the overall charge for child care in the participating child care facility. In the region of 25,000 children each year benefit from this programme.

Further child care support is provided under a number of labour activation measures which support parents returning to the work force or availing of education or training opportunities.

Increased capitation and subvention payments under the child care support programmes would reduce the cost to parents, and support child care services to meet the overall cost of

child care provision. I have indicated that if resources become available, I will consider the scope for increasing the level of these payments.

However, I want to ensure a cohesive, whole-of-Government approach to investment in child care services. To ensure that all the benefits of child care investments are fully realised, future public investment in child care must be evidence-based and strategically co-ordinated. With this in mind, I have established an Inter-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. I have asked the Group to report to me by the Summer.

Child Care Services Funding

131. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his views on the adequacy of the capitation grant for the providers of the free pre-school year; and his further views that the current capitation grant to pre-schools is adequate for these providers to pay their care staff a professional wage. [7761/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Government provides €260 million annually to a number of child care support programmes that assist parents with the cost of child care. This figure includes €175 million provided annually to support the universal free preschool year under the Early Childhood Care and Education programme. These programmes are, of course, in addition to the support provided to all parents in the form of Child Benefit.

The funding provided through the child care support programmes has had a significant impact on child care provision and has enabled many child care providers to continue to deliver child care services at a time of economic difficulty. The funding has also ensured that employment levels across the sector have been maintained. The retention of the current level of investment in child care is a considerable achievement, given the pressure on the public finances over the last number of years.

I recognise the difficulties being faced by child care providers and I am aware of the concerns of child care professionals in relation to levels of remuneration in the child care sector.

The remuneration for child care workers is a matter for agreement between employers and employees. Staff remuneration does account for the great proportion of the overall cost of providing child care services and I acknowledge that increased capitation and subvention payments through the child care support programmes would assist child care services in addressing these cost issues. I have indicated that, if resources become available to my Department, I will consider the scope for increasing the level of these payments.

However, I want to look at the question of appropriate supports for child care in a wider context. It is crucial that we develop a coherent whole-of-Government approach to investment in child care services. To ensure that all the benefits of our full range of child care investments are fully realised, investment in child care must be evidence-based and strategically co-ordinated. I have established an Inter-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. I have asked the Group to report to me by the Summer.

Child Care Services Regulation

132. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the new child care regulations will revise the standards with regard to paediatric first aid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7699/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Preschool services are subject to the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No.2) Regulations 2006, as provided for under Part VII of the Child Care Act, 1991.

The Deputy may be aware that my Department is progressing the Early Years Quality Agenda which introduces a number of key reforms that provide for the further development of the child care sector. To underpin these reforms, it was necessary to amend the Child Care Act 1991 and these legislative changes were enacted through the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013.

To provide for the implementation of the changes, it is necessary to carry out a root and branch re-examination of the existing regulations including a restructuring of the regulations and guidance content in line with the latest drafting practices. This has proved more time consuming than originally envisaged. Officials in my Department are working closely with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to develop a comprehensive draft of the new regulations, which will include a requirement that early years services have a person trained in paediatric first aid available at all times.

I am very anxious that all people working directly with children in the early years sector have an appropriate Paediatric First Aid qualification. However, there is no accredited award in Paediatric First Aid at any level on the National Framework of Qualifications. There is an accredited award in Occupational First Aid and it is a stipulation that the training can only be provided by organisations or individuals on the Register of Occupational First Aid Training Providers. This register is maintained on behalf of the Health and Safety Authority by the Occupational First Aid Assessment Agent.

The delivery of Paediatric First Aid courses could be regulated by developing a Special Purpose Award through Quality and Qualifications Ireland and my Department has already sent such an award proposal to them. However, the same standards that apply to the delivery of the Occupational First Aid award should also apply to Paediatric First Aid courses. At the moment, there are a lot of companies delivering 1 day courses in Paediatric First Aid and offering their own certificate of accreditation. I would like to see an external quality assurance process in place to ensure that these companies have the skills and competences to deliver a nationally accredited course.

My Department has been in touch with the relevant agencies seeking to progress the development of a Special Purpose Award in Paediatric First Aid and the external quality assurance of the delivery of such an award. I have asked my officials to keep me informed of developments in this matter.

Child Care Costs

133. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the cost of child care in counties Kildare and Meath and similar high-pressure commuter belt areas has increased dramatically, in recent years; if targeted measures are being considered under the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures programme, including the option of targeting resources in very high-pressure areas where a greater demonstrable need is evident; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7746/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I am aware of the relatively high cost to parents of child care in this country and of the difficulties that this presents, particularly where both parents are in employment outside of the home. Recent figures supplied by the CSO indicates the child care fees generally across the country increased by 2.4% in 2014. I do not have specific figures for the level of increase in the counties referred to by the Deputy.

Child care surveys carried out by Pobal indicate that the average fee for a child care place is higher in child care facilities in urban centres than in child care facilities in rural districts. The Pobal Annual Early Years Survey of 2013 show that the average fee for a full day place for a child older than 1 year, for example, is €174.48 in urban services. This is 9.2% higher than the average cost of €159.76 for similar services in rural settings. The cost of many goods and services tend to be more costly in urban centres but it is not the practice to increase State supports to meet these additional costs.

To help address child care costs, in the region of €260 million is provided annually by my Department to support a number of child care programmes. These programmes are in addition to the support provided to all parents in the form of Child Benefit.

The objective of the investment by my Department is to assist parents in accessing quality and affordable childcare. More than 100,000 children benefit from this investment each year. These programmes include the free preschool year provided under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. In the region of 68,000 children benefit from the programme at a cost of €2,375 per child per year. In the region of 3,750 children in County Kildare are availing of the ECCE programme this year and in the region 3,400 children are availing of the programme in County Meath.

The CCS programme provides funding to community child care services to enable them to provide quality child care at reduced rates to disadvantaged and low income working parents. Parents qualify as disadvantaged or low income on the basis of means-tested entitlements. In the case of full day care, parents qualifying for the higher rate of subvention under the CCS programme can have up to €95 per week deducted from the overall charge for child care in the participating child care facility. In the region of 25,000 children each year benefit from this programme. In the region of 260 children in County Kildare are registered CCS support this year and in the region 450 children are registered in County Meath.

Further child care support is provided to support a number of labour activation measures which assists parents returning to the workforce or availing of education or training opportunities. In the region of 250 children in County Kildare and 150 children in County Meath have received such support to date in the current school year.

To ensure that all the benefits of child care investments are fully realised, future public investment in child care must be evidence-based and strategically co-ordinated. I have established a Inter-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 child care services. I have asked the Group report to me by the Summer.

Child Care Costs

134. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his views on the survey by the Irish Independent (details supplied) on the rising cost of child care; and if he

will make a statement on the matter. [7750/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I am aware of the relatively high cost to parents of childcare in this country and of the difficulties that this presents, particularly where both parents are in employment outside of the home. The article referred to by the Deputy refers to figures produced by the CSO which indicates that child care fees generally across the country increased by 2.4% in 2014.

To help address child care costs, in the region of €260 million is provided annually by my Department to support a number of child care programmes. These programmes are in addition to the support provided to all parents in the form of Child Benefit.

The objective of the investment by my Department is to assist parents in accessing quality and affordable child care. More than 100,000 children benefit from this investment each year. These programmes include the free preschool year provided under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. In the region of 68,000 children benefit from the programme at a cost of €2,375 per child per year.

The CCS programme provides funding to community child care services to enable them to provide quality child care at reduced rates to disadvantaged and low income working parents. Parents qualify as disadvantaged or low income on the basis of means-tested entitlements. In the case of full day care, parents qualifying for the higher rate of subvention under the CCS programme can have up to €95 per week deducted from the overall charge for child care in the participating child care facility. In the region of 25,000 children each year benefit from this programme.

Further childcare support is provided under a number of labour activation measures which support parents returning to the workforce or availing of education or training opportunities.

Increased capitation and subvention payments under the child care support programmes could reduce the cost to parents, and support child care services to meet the overall costs of child care provision. I have indicated that if resources become available, I will review the scope for increasing the level of payments.

Reference is made in the newspaper article to tax relief as a means of supporting parents to meet child care costs. The question of tax relief or tax credits as a means of supporting working parents was looked at previously but was considered to be unsuitable for a number of reasons. For example, the introduction of tax credits would not help to support quality improvements within the child care sector and would not help those families on low pay who may not have any tax liability. There is also concern that the application of tax credits could lead to increased prices and therefore have limited impact in terms of savings to parents.

I want to look at the question of appropriate supports for child care in a wider context. It is crucial that we develop a coherent whole-of-Government approach to investment in child care services. To ensure that all the benefits of our full range of child care investments are fully realised, future public investment in child care must be evidence-based and strategically coordinated. I have established an Inter-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. I have asked the Group to report to me by the Summer.

Preschool Services

135. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will

provide a second full free preschool year for all children in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7741/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Early Childhood Care and Education programme provides a free pre-school year to all eligible children before commencing primary school.

There is an increasing body of Irish and international evidence quantifying the benefits of early years interventions in terms of improving outcomes for children and in delivering significant economic and societal return to the State. In this context, I believe the introduction of a second year would benefit children's educational and developmental outcomes.

Despite the challenging budgetary situation, the preschool year has been maintained as a universal and free programme, ensuring that a significant number of children can avail of quality preschool services who would not otherwise be in a position to do so.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020, recognises the value of early childhood care and education in supporting children's early cognitive, social and emotional development, and the Government is committed to the introduction of a second free preschool year within the lifetime of the Framework once the required quality standards are achieved and subject to the availability of resources.

However, the introduction of a second preschool year would require considerable additional funding, broadly in line with the cost of the current provision, which is €175 million per annum. This additional funding is not currently available due to the financial constraints under which the Government is operating. In addition, all of the available evidence indicates that the quality of the preschool provision is key to good outcomes for children. The Early Years Quality Agenda is being progressed by my Department. This involves a range of actions in key areas aimed at improving quality within early years services and enhancing the regulatory regime. These reforms are key building blocks for any further extension of universal child care provision.

I want to ensure a cohesive, whole-of-Government approach to investment in child care services. To ensure that all the benefits of child care investments are fully realised, future public investment in child care must be evidence-based and strategically coordinated. With this in mind, I have established an Inter-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. I have asked the Group report to me by the Summer.

Ministerial Responsibilities

136. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his responsibilities in the area of child mental health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7756/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People has as one of its five key outcomes that children and young people are active and healthy, including having good mental health. The sponsor for this outcome is the Department of Health, who lead an interdepartmental group as part of the implementation structures for the framework.

The remit for the development of policy relating to mental health and mental health promotion lies mainly with the Department of Health, and with the HSE as the main provider of mental health services for children and young people.

The HSE has responsibility for a wide range of other child and adult psychological services such as:

- Child and Adolescent Mental Health services including psychiatric and psychological services associated with the provision of specialist mental health services to children,
- adult psychological services other than services which relate to the effective functioning of families and the improvement of relationships between parents and children, including effective parenting,
- psychological services to a child in respect of a disability, and
- psychological assessments in accordance with section 8 of the Disability Act 2005 or with section 4 of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004.

Tusla, which reports to my Department, has responsibility for supporting children and young people across special care and high support settings, as well as the children's detention schools. Clinical Psychologists are employed by the Child and Family Agency in the Assessment, Consultation and Therapy Service (ACTS). They provide assessment and focused interventions for children and young people with complex clinical needs and high risk behaviours in the context of multidisciplinary teams. They also provide support to other professionals in order to guide interventions with children and families.

With regard to promoting mental good mental health, The National Youth Health Programme is a partnership operated by the National Youth Council of Ireland with the Youth Affairs Unit of my Department and the Health Promotion Unit of the HSE. The Programme aims to provide a broad-based, flexible health promotion/education support and training service, including making healthy choices in relation to mental health and alcohol and substance misuse, to youth organisations and to all those working with young people in the non-formal education setting.

Early Childhood Care Education

137. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the level of consultation with the Department of Education and Skills and-or the Department of Health on necessary supports for children with a disability who are in mainstream early childhood services; and if he will provide an update on plans to publish a national strategy to support these children. [7763/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Early Childhood Care and Education programme is a free and universal programme to which all children, including those children with special needs, have access. The objective of the programme is to make early learning in a formal setting available to all eligible children before they commence primary school.

The issue of access to the free preschool year for children with special needs was taken into account when the free preschool year was launched, and measures were introduced to make the programme more accessible for these children. These measures include an exemption from the upper age limit and permission to have the preschool year split over two years on a *pro rata* basis, where it would be in the child's best interest.

Most children with special needs avail of the free preschool year in mainstream child care services. 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. However, I am aware that this support is not consistent nationally.

My Department meets regularly with the Department of Education and Skills to discuss issues of common concern, including supports for children with disabilities in mainstream pre-schools. In particular the two Departments and the Department of Education and Skills have been working on how best to build better supports that facilitate children who have special needs. The aim is to develop an agreed framework for the provision of resources to support children with special needs in mainstream childcare settings.

Early years settings should of course be supported to provide an inclusive environment and I would like to be in a position to provide further supports. Some of the measures I have taken include the establishment of Better Start, a national approach to improving quality, which provides advice and support to early years settings on quality improvement. I also introduced a Learner Fund to support staff in the sector to up-skill. While modules on working with children with special needs or on equality/diversity are elective modules in Early Childhood Care and Education Courses at Levels 5 and 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications, I have encouraged the take up of these modules by offering Learner subsidies where a training provider runs these elective modules as part of the Major Award.

I have also established a high level Inter-departmental Group to examine the issue of future investment in early childhood care and education, and child care for school-going children. As part of its work, the Group will consider how best to make appropriate provision for children with special needs who are accessing mainstream child care services. I have asked the Group to report to me by the Summer.

Direct Provision Data

138. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his views on the infant mortality rate of children in direct provision, where, according to the Department of Justice and Equality figures, 61 persons living in direct provision have died since its establishment in 2002, of which 16 were infants or young children under five years of age, in other words, infants and very young children account for 25% of deaths of persons living in direct provision; and his views that his Department has a responsibility to ask why children between the ages of zero and five years account for 25% of these deaths. [7768/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Department of Justice and Equality has primary responsibility in the area of asylum and immigration, accordingly the direct provision system is under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality.

The death of any child is obviously of great concern, and most particularly so when they are in the care of the State. However, from what has been reported, I don't have sufficient information to draw any reliable conclusions about the causes of death, or mortality rates among this group. However, the Deputy can be assured that I will be discussing this with my colleagues in the Department of Health and the Department of Justice and Equality to examine the matter further.

The Department of Justice and Equality has established a working group to review a range of issues pertaining to asylum seekers and direct provision. The first meeting of the Working Group on the Protection Process was held on the 10th November 2014, chaired by Judge Bryan McMahon. The Working Group consists of children's rights advocates, organisations engaged with asylum groups and representatives from a range of relevant Government Departments,

including a representative from my own Department. I look forward to learning of the findings and recommendations of the working group in the Spring of 2015.

Child and Family Agency Expenditure

139. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his plans to provide funding for domestic abuse services on the basis of population; and the way this will impact in County Laois. [7692/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): In 2014, €17m in funding was provided by the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) by way of grant aid to 62 specialist Domestic Violence & Sexual Violence services. These include:

- 16 Rape Crisis Centres/Sexual Violence services
- 44 Domestic Violence services (including 20 Refuges)
- 2 National Networks

In addition, funding of €2.54m has transferred to my Department's 2015 Vote from the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, and in turn to Tusla. This funding was previously distributed under section 10 of the Housing Act 1988 and is for domestic violence refuge services. The purpose of this funding transfer is to ensure that the State's relationship with the domestic violence services is managed in a manner which is more coherent and adapted to the needs of service users i.e. victims of domestic violence.

In 2014 Tusla funded specialist domestic violence services in Co. Laois provided by Laois Domestic Abuse Services. The service received €64,900 in funding from Tusla last year.

The service involves the provision of domestic violence supports, including information, advocacy and counselling services to women experiencing or who have experienced domestic violence.

The work of Laois Domestic Abuse Services and other community-based domestic violence services is recognised and valued.

Tusla has recently completed an initial review of domestic violence and sexual violence services in order to identify strategic priorities and set out a Tusla roadmap for sexual violence and domestic violence services. There is for the first time a consolidated national budget for sexual violence and domestic violence services and an opportunity for more co-ordinated and equitable provision of violence and domestic violence services across the country.

Tusla will be communicating with funded services shortly to advise on the Tusla budget and funding for 2015. Individual domestic violence service provider organisations, including Laois Domestic Abuse Service, will be contacted about their specific funding and service arrangements for the current year.

Future planning for domestic violence and sexual violence services will seek to address gaps, avoid duplication and support effective delivery of frontline services nationally. Developments for domestic violence services in Co. Laois will be considered as part of Tusla's future commissioning process. Tusla has advised that population size will be one of the factors that will inform this process.

Bullying of Children

140. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the ongoing measures in operation to protect children or teenagers from bullying outside the classroom; if adequate provisions are in place to identify, address and rectify such situations with particular reference to the need to ensure recourse for the victims; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7767/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children has as one of its outcomes that children are active and healthy, and another that children are safe and protected from harm.

Bullying Data from Wave One Data Collection from the Child Cohort in Growing Up in Ireland (at age nine) revealed:

A total of 40% of nine-year-olds reported being victims of bullying in the past year, and boys and girls experienced similar rates of victimisation.

Consultation with Young People

A national consultation was conducted with children and young people during 2011 and the report, *Life as a Child and Young Person in Ireland: Report of a National Consultation*, was published in 2012. Bullying and peer pressure emerged in the top eight ‘not good’ things for both children (aged 7-12) and young people (aged 12-18).

The Action Plan on Bullying

The Action Plan On Bullying: Report of the Anti-Bullying Working Group to the Minister for Education and Skills was published in January 2013 clearly recognised the necessity to tackle this issue in a holistic way which saw schools as pivotal but placed the issue within a much wider social context. One of the recommendations was that a single national anti-bullying website is to be developed to provide information for parents, young people, youth workers, sporting and cultural associations and school staff on types and methods of bullying and how to deal with bullying behaviour. This is now being considered as part of the implementation plan for Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures.

Cyberbullying

The Minister for Communications established an Internet Content Governance Advisory Group under the chair of Dr. Brian O’Neil in December 2013 to ensure our national policy represents best practice in offering the same online protections to our citizens as those available in the offline world.

The Group’s report was approved by Cabinet and published in May 2014 and makes several recommendations aimed at protecting children and young people without unduly limiting their opportunities and rights online. Along with changes to institutional, administrative and legal structures, the report makes four specific recommendations on cyberbullying aimed at providing stronger supports for tackling this issue through primary and post-primary curricula, and additional training and awareness measures.

In Ireland Safer Internet Day is promoted by the PDST Technology in Education and Web-wise.ie. It is also strongly supported by the Safer Internet Ireland Project. This was held earlier in February with the theme “Let’s create a better internet together”.

Work with Youth services

Schools are strengthening collaboration and interaction with youth services and promote the active participation by pupils in youth focused services within their local communities. DCYA supports the National Youth Health Programme which is in partnership with the HSE and the National Youth Council of Ireland. The programme's aims are to provide a broad-based, flexible health promotion/education support and training service to youth organisations and to all those working with young people in out-of-school settings.

Work with Primary Care Teams

Work is currently under way with primary care teams in the HSE to pilot 'social prescribing'. Social prescribing creates a formal means of enabling primary care services to refer young people with social, emotional or practical needs which include experience of being bullied or showing bullying behaviour to a variety of holistic, local non-clinical services.

Legislative Measures

141. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his plans to revise section 88 of the Children Act 2001 which relates to detention on remand, in view of the reply to Parliamentary Question No. 123 of 20 January 2015, that, of the 96 children remanded in detention schools in 2013, only 27% went on to receive a detention order, indicating high levels of the use of detention on remand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7752/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Section 88 of the Children Act 2001 allows that a court may remand a child in custody who is charged with or found guilty of an offence, who is being sent forward for trial or in respect of whom the court has postponed a decision. The section in question also provides that a court shall not remand a child in custody if the only reason for so doing is that the child is in need of care or protection or the court wishes Tusla to assist it in dealing with the case. Notwithstanding this provision, I understand there may be a range of other factors affecting the decision of a court on the remand of a child in custody. As well as a pattern of criminal behaviour, such factors may also include identified service needs in areas such as mental health supports, substance abuse or educational welfare.

Having regard to the wording of the section as it stands, the fact that children are at all times represented in court and the independence of the judiciary, it is unclear what amendments to the Children Act could address this issue. I note that the courts already have the power under section 76B of the Act to request Tusla to be represented in criminal proceedings involving a child and in addition, the courts also have the authority to require the attendance of parents or guardians to assist in dealing with any individual case. In addition, section 96 of the Act states that a court shall have regard to the principle that criminal proceedings shall not be used solely to provide any assistance or service needed to care for or protect a child and that a period of detention should be imposed only as a last resort.

The *Youth Justice Action Plan 2014-2018* commits to achieving better outcomes for children who get into trouble with the law, to reduce crime leading to safer communities and to use detention only as a last resort. In this context it is appropriate to review further the nature and pattern of remands in custody for children, which will allow for policy and the roles of the various statutory agencies concerned to be examined. To this end discussions involving the Irish Youth Justice Service and Tusla, the Child and Family Agency which have commenced on this issue will feed into the development of policy priorities for the Youth Justice Action Plan for 2015. While the main priority under the plan this year is to end the practice of detaining children in adult prison facilities, this exercise will inform any future actions in this area.

Youth Services Expenditure

142. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the total funding, in each scheme, provided in 2014, under his Department's youth services grant scheme to special projects for youth, the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund, local drugs task force projects, local youth club grant scheme and youth information centres; the bodies which benefited and their geographic locations; the total capital funding in each case; the way the spread of funding is calculated, based on need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7747/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work provision to some 380,000 young people and involve approximately 1,400 youth work staff in 477 projects and 40,000 volunteers working in youth work services and communities throughout the country. In 2014, funding of €49.78m was provided to my Department for these schemes.

The funding allocated by my Department in respect of the schemes indicated in the Deputy's question is set out in the table below.

Scheme	2014
Youth Service Grant Scheme	€9.949m
Special Projects for Youth	€14.4m
Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund (Round 1 and 2)	€18.397m
Local Youth Club Grant Scheme	€1.035m
Youth Information Centres	€1.234m
Local Drug Task Force projects	€1.151m

In addition, in 2014 a capital allocation of €500,000 was made available to fund small capital projects in the youth services. Some 50 local youth projects received grants under the scheme.

Details of the youth organisations and youth projects throughout the country that received funding under each of the schemes are being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy.

My Department is developing a National Youth Strategy. The new strategy will be based on Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People. It will be a universal strategy for all young people aged 10 to 24 years. It will have a particular focus on those who are most disadvantaged or at risk and who have the poorest outcomes and therefore are in most need of support.

A consultation on the new strategy is under way at present. It includes consultation on the priorities for the new strategy and the findings of the recently completed Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Programmes that targets disadvantaged young people. The review makes recommendations for the future operation of youth funding schemes and their development in the years ahead to ensure effective, evidence based value for money programmes designed to ensure the optimal outcomes for young people who are at risk of disadvantage and in need of additional support. It is my intention that the recommendations in the review will be progressed over 2015 and 2016 in the context of the new Youth Strategy.

The consultation on the new National Youth Strategy will run to the end of this month and I

anticipate that the strategy will be completed promptly thereafter.

Preschool Services

143. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will report on consideration being given to extending the free year of preschool education; if this will involve extending the daily hours provided; the number of weeks covered in the year; or introducing a further year; and when such enhancements may be introduced. [7758/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Early Childhood Care and Education programme provides a free preschool year to all eligible children, in the age range 3 years and 2 months to 4 years and 7 months, before commencing primary school.

The objective of the free preschool year is to improve children's readiness for entry to primary school. It is considered that the 38 week model of delivery in one school year is the optimal model in terms of ensuring a high-quality early years experience for preschool children. The *Síolta* and *Aistear* frameworks, which are central to quality preschool provision, were developed to support this objective. The current model of delivery also helps to ensure that children and parents become accustomed to the weekly discipline of school attendance with the number of days and hours on which the programme is delivered being approximate to the primary school requirement of 5 days over 38.6 weeks. There are no plans to increase the current provision within the preschool year or to extend the age range for eligibility.

There is an increasing body of Irish and international evidence quantifying the benefits of early years interventions in terms of improving outcomes for children and in delivering significant and societal return to the State. In this context, I believe that the introduction of a second free preschool year would benefit children's educational and developmental outcomes.

The introduction of a second preschool year would require considerable additional funding which is not currently available. In addition, all of the available evidence indicates that the quality of the preschool provision is key to good outcomes for children. The actions contained in the Early Years Quality Agenda, which involves a range of measures in key areas aimed at improving quality within early years services and enhancing the regulatory regime, are currently being implemented.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020, recognises the value of early childhood care and education in supporting children's early cognitive, social and emotional development, and the Government is committed to the introduction of a second free preschool year within the lifetime of the Framework once the required quality standards are achieved, and subject to the availability of resources.

Children in Care

144. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his plans to combat the poor oversight in some State-run care homes, where the use of drugs, and daily anti-social behaviour, has become prevalent, and his action plan for dealing with the rise in numbers of 16 and 17 year olds entering State care. [7769/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I reject the sweeping characterisation of residential children centres portrayed by the Deputy in framing this question. There is a great deal of oversight and effort put into creating a homely and safe residential

setting, something which has been missing in the lives of these vulnerable children. The use of residential accommodation is a relatively small part of the overall care provision, with residential placements accounting for 5% of children in care. Most children in care, 93% at October 2014, are in family based foster placements, with the remaining 2% being cared for in other placements. Unfortunately some children have deep and challenging issues that make it unsuitable to place them in foster care and require the use of a residential place. The interventions for children in residential care aim to support them in coming to terms with the impact of the hurt they have suffered through neglect or abuse.

The children entering residential care are as open to the types of risks that would be encountered by any child in their age cohort. Services around the individual child in care will address needs identified as part of their care plan, which can include interventions on alcohol, drugs and challenging behaviour. That being said, it is not the case that a child's negative actions would be condoned nor would the child be shielded from the consequences of their actions.

Registration, inspection and monitoring ensure that residential services are operating according to the national standards and regulations. The Health Information and Quality Authority has responsibility for inspecting centres operated by the Agency. Generally the reports in 2014 indicated that management and staff were found to be knowledgeable, experienced and committed to the care of the children. However, the complex interaction of the children's needs meant that a placement that was appropriate on admission may not be suitable over time and may require the updating of plans and behaviour supports. Separately the Agency registers, inspects and monitors the private and voluntary children residential centres. The Agency has completed 100% of its programme of inspections and monitoring for 2014. Inspections identify compliance with standards, inform service delivery and give an oversight of significant events that have been notified in line with standards for residential care.

The number of 16 and 17 year olds admitted into care, 14% in 2013, is not the largest age group entering care but is significant. This age cohort has different needs compared to younger age groups and need different responses. The experiences common to teenagers in any community are compounded for children in care by their complex needs, which may result from effects of abuse, neglect, substance misuse and domestic violence. Strategies and processes are in place for managing care services for older children, resulting in plans that address these age appropriate issues. It is the case that targeted interventions need time, patience and understanding for their effect to take hold and develop, and can only be effective when the child is ready and able to participate in the process. It is useful to note that the majority of 16 and 17 year olds entering care are in foster placements, similar to other age groups, and that progress is achieved by building up relationships for the child, both with professionals and the wider community in which they live. My Department will continue to engage with the Agency on how best to meet the needs of this older population of children in care and how the Agency can incorporate learning from inspection and monitoring that takes into account the ever changing profile of young people in society.

School Completion Programme

145. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his plans for funding the school completion programme 2015. [7759/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The School Completion Programme aims to retain young people in the formal education system to completion of senior cycle and to generally improve the school attendance, participation and retention of young people who are at risk of educational disadvantage. The Programme is a targeted in-

tervention aimed at school communities identified through the Department of Education and Skills' DEIS Action Plan for Educational Inclusion. It provides targeted supports annually to approximately 36,000 children.

Since 1st January 2014, the Child and Family Agency has operational responsibility for the School Completion Programme, including the allocation of funds to local projects. In 2014, an allocation of €24.756 million has been provided for the School Completion Programme. The Agency has approved local projects' school retention plans for the 2014/2015 academic year. The first two instalments of 2014/15 funding have been issued to local projects, with a third instalment planned for payment in May 2015.

The estimate for the Child and Family Agency for 2015 is €631 million, a 4.3% increase on its 2014 allocation. My Department has recently issued a Performance Statement to the Agency under Section 45 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013. This includes my priorities for consideration in the development of the Agency's 2015 Business Plan. The Business Plan will set out the Agency's proposed activities, programmes and priorities for 2015, including provision for the School Completion Programme, in the light of the moneys available. A review of the School Completion Programme has commenced. It is being carried out by the ESRI following a procurement process managed by the Agency. It will assist in identifying the reforms necessary to consolidate the programme on a sustainable footing for the future. Preliminary information gathered in the review indicates that the School Completion Programme encompasses a broad and diverse range of measures and interventions that have been developed by local projects over the years. The intention is to learn more about the most successful of these, share the learning across the programme and ensure that available funds are targeted to those services that provide the greatest contribution to good educational outcomes for children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage. The Review is an important initiative to plan for the future development of this Programme. It is envisaged that the review will be completed during the current academic year.

Child Care Services Funding

146. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will increase the capitation fee payable under the early childhood care and education scheme to the level required to provide the service; if he will re-instate 2011 levels of capitation as an interim measure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7740/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Early Childhood Care and Education programme provides a free preschool year to all eligible children, in the age range 3 years and 2 months to 4 years and 7 months, before commencing primary school.

A total of €175 million is spent on the free preschool year annually. This funding enables some 67,000 children each year to receive free preschool education. The Government succeeded in maintaining the preschool year on a universal and free basis despite the difficult budgetary situation that prevailed in recent years. While considerable progress has been made in correcting the overall budgetary situation, the funding available to my Department does not allow for an increase in the capitation rate paid to child care providers. I have indicated that, if resources become available to my Department, I will consider the scope for increasing the level of payments.

However, I want to look at the question of appropriate supports for child care in a wider context. It is crucial that we develop a coherent whole-of-Government approach to investment in child care services. To ensure that all the benefits of our full range of child care investments are

fully realised, future public investment in child care must be evidence-based and strategically co-ordinated. I have established an Inter-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. I have asked the Group to report to me by the Summer.

Child Protection

147. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the degree to which the welfare and well-being of children is adequately protected, in all circumstances and situations throughout the country, including children whose parents may have suffered socially and economically in the past number of years, those in direct provision, and children born here whose parents are not naturalised and who may be excluded from employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7766/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures, the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020* represents a whole-of-Government approach to improving the lives of children and young people. The Policy Framework outlines five national outcomes which all of Government and indeed all of society should work towards. Children and young people should be:

- Active and healthy with physical and mental wellbeing,
- Achieving full potential in all areas of learning and development,
- Safe and protected from harm
- Enjoying economic security and opportunity, and
- Connected, respected and contributing to their world.

Obviously my Department alone could not achieve all of these outcomes. Therefore primary responsibility for the outcome areas belong to the Department of Health, the Department of Education and Skills, my Department, the Department of Social Protection and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government respectively. *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* details 163 key policy commitments for children and young people. These cover a wide variety of policy areas, and are being progressed by the relevant departments.

The Child and Family Agency (Tusla) under the remit of my Department, represents the most comprehensive reform of child protection, early intervention and family support services ever undertaken in Ireland. It is an ambitious move which brings together some 4,000 staff and an operational budget of approximately €600m.

The Agency is charged with:

- supporting and promoting the development, welfare and protection of children, and the effective functioning of families;
- offering care and protection for children in circumstances where their parents have not been able to, or are unlikely to, provide the care that a child needs;
- responsibility for ensuring that every child in the State attends school or otherwise receives an education, and for providing education welfare services to support and monitor children's attendance, participation and retention in education;

- ensuring that the best interests of the child guides all decisions affecting individual children;
- consulting children and families so that they help to shape the agency's policies and services;
- strengthening interagency co-operation to ensure seamless services responsive to needs;
- undertaking research relating to its functions, and providing information and advice to the Minister regarding those functions; and
- commissioning services relating to the provision of child and family services

One of the main challenges in the area of physical well-being is childhood obesity. In the latter part of 2013, in my role then as the Minister of Health, I jointly launched with my predecessor, Minister Fitzgerald, a three year media and social media campaign aimed at giving practical tips to parents on managing their children's weight.

As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs I have responsibility for Play and Recreation Policy which have been set out in the policy documents, 'READY, STEADY, PLAY! A National Play Policy' and the 'Teenspace, National Recreation Policy for Young People'. Initiatives being developed at local community level are designed to encourage awareness of the importance of play and recreation throughout the whole of life from early childhood to adulthood and through to later life.

Additionally, my Department administers funding schemes and programmes to support national and local youth work provision to some 380,000 young people which involves approximately 1,400 youth work staff in 477 projects and 40,000 volunteers working in youth work services and communities throughout the country. I am pleased that Budget 2015 has confirmed that funding of €49.78m will again be provided to my Department in 2015 to support the provision of youth services. Many of the youth services operate with young people's physical and mental well-being as the central pillar of their services and programmes. The Youth Work Sector has particular expertise in working with young people and provides non-formal and informal learning opportunities to support their well-being.

I can inform the Deputy that the direct provision system is under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality. The Department of Justice and Equality has primary responsibility in the area of asylum and immigration.

The Department of Justice and Equality has established a working group to review a range of issues pertaining to asylum seekers and direct provision. The first meeting of the Working Group on the Protection Process was held on the 10th November 2014, chaired by Judge McMahon. The Working Group consists of children's rights advocates, organisations engaged with asylum groups and representatives from a range of relevant Government Departments, including a representative from my own Department. I look forward to learning of the findings and recommendations of the working group in the Spring of 2015.

Child and Family Agency Staff

148. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide details of the high turnover of social workers employed by Túsla, the Child and Family Agency, in view of the fact that these workers are more than twice as likely to resign their positions when compared to other employees in the health and social services generally;

his plans to ensure that this does not occur; his plans to ensure that any child at risk and not currently under the care of a social worker will be catered for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7694/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): It is recognised by management in Tusla and my Department that stability, experience and capacity of staff working in the area of child protection and child welfare is extremely important. Accordingly, workforce development is an important element of TUSLA's strategic approach to HR, which will include consideration of issues around recruitment, retention and turnover of key staff.

Tusla has already commenced a number of workforce reviews to assist with an evaluation of appropriate staff skill mix with a view to service enhancement. This involves reviewing the roles of family support workers, social care workers in the community and administrative structures to support the delivery of more efficient and more cost-effective services. Part of this evaluation includes looking at enhanced job roles, increasing multidisciplinary team working to help alleviate pressures and increasing collaborative approaches, redesigning tasks and promoting overall greater efficiency in working. The workforce development plan will also take account of further developing supports through structured professional and career development.

During this process, Tusla continues to actively recruit social workers as vacancies arise and 164 social workers took up positions during 2014. A further 219 social workers are under active recruitment. As in any employment situation, turnover of staff does occur and 112 social workers left the Agency during 2014. While Tusla is experiencing some recruitment and retention issues, the turnover of social workers in the Agency's first year of operation was 7.3%. This turnover rate includes those who have retired or left for other reasons. There is limited published international research on job turnover and retention in child protection and welfare. However, it is recognised that recruitment and retention in this area is a key issue internationally. While not minimising the impact of the turnover rate in Tusla, a turnover rate of 10% or below is considered a low turnover rate that is achieved by very few organisations in the field of child welfare and protection.

The impact of vacancies on service provision is risk-assessed on an ongoing basis to ensure that social work team members are never allowed to fall below what is considered necessary to provide a safe service. Such risk-assessments take account of issues such as caseloads and referral numbers. Where necessary, temporary staff are brought in immediately to cover vacancies until such vacancies are filled on a permanent basis. This assessment takes account of all absences, including those on maternity related leave. There were 124 such temporary staff in place across the four regions covering vacancies at the end of December 2014.

I am currently considering the Tusla Business Plan for 2015 which was recently submitted to me and I will be monitoring the ongoing review, assessment and management of the cases awaiting assignment to social workers throughout 2015.

Child Care Costs

149. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his views on the findings of the Think-tank for Action on Social Change report, which sees Ireland second in the European Union, when it comes to child care costs (details supplied). [7743/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I am aware of the difficulties that parents are experiencing in meeting current childcare costs. To help address this situation, my Department supports the provision of early childhood care and education by pro-

viding annually in the region of €260 million to support three childcare programmes that make childcare services more affordable. This investment ensures that more than 100,000 children have access to quality childcare. This high level of support has been maintained despite the difficult budgetary situation that prevailed in recent years.

I wish to point out to the Deputy that, while the annual spend on childcare related programmes has been in the region of 0.2 per cent of GDP in recent years, this does not include expenditure under other programmes or by other Departments. It therefore does not represent the full extent of State expenditure. In fact, Ireland spends 0.4% of GDP relative to the OECD average of 0.7%. The funding provided by my Department has a considerable impact on the level and quality of childcare services provided.

It is clear that accessibility, affordability and high quality childcare can play a critical role in achieving a number of Government priorities, including improving educational outcomes for children, reducing poverty and increasing parents' participation in the labour market.

I would like to be in a position to increase our investment in childcare-related programmes as resources allow. However, I am determined that all such spending, whether existing or additional, will be based on good evidence, and co-ordinated strategically, so that we achieve the best possible benefits for children.

To this end, I have established an Inter-departmental Group which will 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.

This new Group will include representatives of the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the Department of Finance and the Department of the Taoiseach and will be led and supported by my Department. I have asked the Group to report to me by the Summer.

National Youth Strategy

150. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the progress that has been made by his Department regarding the development of a youth policy framework; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7754/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The National Youth Strategy will focus on the youth-related policy commitments outlined in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People. It will be a universal strategy for all young people aged 10 to 24. It will have a particular focus on those who are most disadvantaged or at risk and who have the poorest outcomes and therefore in most need of support.

A National Youth Strategy Task Group, convened by my Department, is overseeing the development of the new Strategy. This Task Group comprises statutory youth interests and voluntary agencies and organisations working with young people.

I am keen that all stakeholders have a role to play in the development of the new National Youth Strategy and a comprehensive consultation process is underway at present. This consultation process includes online surveys of young people and those working with young people and three major stakeholder events that will conclude at the end of this month. These events are for young people, the youth sector, NGOs working for and with young people, Education

and Training Boards, Government departments, agencies, business and academia and other youth interests. The events include consultation on the priorities for the new strategy and the findings of the recently completed Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Programmes. The review makes recommendations for the future operation of youth funding schemes and their development in the years ahead to ensure effective, value for money services that will be evidence based and improve outcomes for young people.

The consultation will run to the end of this month and I anticipate that the National Youth Strategy will be completed promptly thereafter.

Legislative Measures

151. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if all sections of the Youth Work Act 2001 have been commenced; if the reviews of the Act and the National Youth Work Development Plan have been completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7755/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Youth Work Act 2001 provides for certain arrangements to do with the organisation and administration of youth work policy and provision. Sections 2-7, 17, 18 and 24 of the Act have been commenced. Sections 17 and 18 of the Act provide for the appointment of a National Youth Work Advisory Committee. The Committee has an advisory and consultative role to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in matters to do with youth work, including the coordination of youth work programmes and services. In line with these provisions, a new National Youth Work Advisory Committee was appointed by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs with a term of office of one year with effect from 28 January 2013. The Committee continues to work with the Department and is currently assisting with the development of the new National Youth Strategy, in particular in identifying in what ways the youth sector can contribute to shared policy objectives for young people.

The National Youth Work Development Plan (2003-2007) was prepared by the first National Youth Work Advisory Committee at the request of the then Minister for Education and Science and published in 2003.

Since the enactment of the Youth Work Act, in 2001 and the publication of the National Youth Development Plan in 2003, there have been significant policy and legislative developments that are relevant to the provision of youth services. These include, the introduction of Better Outcomes Brighter Futures, the national policy framework for children and young people, the setting up of the North South Education and Training Standards Committee for youth work and the introduction of the Education and Training Boards, Act 2013 which, *inter alia*, provides for a statutory function for Education and Training Boards in supporting the provision and assessment of youth work services at local level. At EU level, the Council of Ministers for Youth has adopted an EU Youth Strategy and has taken a number of policy initiatives to promote quality in the provision of youth work services.

Following the completion of the new National Youth Strategy, I intend that the provisions of the Youth Work Act 2001 will be considered in the light of these developments and in relation the implementation arrangements to be put in place to achieve the strategy's objectives and to secure the best possible outcomes for young people.

The consultation on the National Youth Strategy will continue until the end of this month and I anticipate that the strategy will be completed promptly thereafter.

Child Care Services Regulation

152. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his plans to publish the revised child care regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7698/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Pre-school services are subject to the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No.2) Regulations 2006, as provided for under Part VII of the Child Care Act, 1991.

My Department is progressing the Early Years Quality Agenda which introduces a number of key of reforms that provide for the further development of the childcare sector. To underpin these reforms, it was necessary to amend the Child Care Act, 1991 and these legislative changes were enacted through the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013.

To provide for the implementation of the changes, it is necessary to carry out a root and branch re-examination of the existing regulations including a restructuring of the regulations and guidance content in line with the latest drafting practices. This has proved more time consuming than originally envisaged. Officials in my Department are working closely with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to develop a comprehensive draft of the new regulations, and I have asked my officials to have this matter finalised as expeditiously as possible.

Child Care Services Funding

153. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide a capitation grant for all children in child care until they are eligible to attend primary school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7742/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme provides for one free pre-school year for all eligible children before commencing primary school. Almost every pre-school service in the State is participating in the programme with approximately 67,000 children availing of free pre-school provision each year.

The standard capitation currently provided is €62.50 per week for each eligible child enrolled with a capitation of €73 per week provided where services have staff who hold higher qualifications. A total of some €175 million is spent on the free pre-school year annually.

The Government succeeded in maintaining the pre-school year on a universal and free basis despite the difficult budgetary situation that prevailed in recent years. While considerable progress has been made in correcting the overall budgetary situation, the funding available to my Department does not allow for any increase in the current provision within the pre-school year or to extend the age range for eligibility. Consideration will be given to the introduction of a second free pre-school year when quality issues in the sector have been addressed and the necessary funding becomes available.

In addition to the children supported under the ECCE programme, my Department also provides support to approximately 35,000 children in the 0 to 6 age group and children availing of after-school care. These supports are provided through the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) programme, which provides subvention payments to disadvantaged and low income families availing of childcare services in community childcare facilities, and through a number of labour activation measures that have been introduced to assist parents who are returning to

the work force or engaging in training or education opportunities.

Together these childcare support programmes represent an annual investment of €260 million by my Department. I would like to be in a position to increase our investment in childcare-related programmes as resources allow. However, I am determined that all such spending, whether existing or additional, will be based on good evidence, and co-ordinated strategically, so that we achieve the best possible benefits for children.

To this end, I have established an Inter-departmental Group which will 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.

This new Group will include representatives of the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the Department of Finance and the Department of the Taoiseach and will be led and supported by my Department. I have asked the Group to report to me by the Summer.

Aftercare Services

154. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide an update on the resources being made available for aftercare services for children and young persons leaving State care. [7764/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Aftercare is a term used to describe the planning and support put in place to meet the needs of a young person who is leaving statutory care at 18 years of age, to assist him/her in making the transition to independent living. Current aftercare provision incorporates advice, guidance and practical (including accommodation and financial) support. The Child Care Act 1991 provides that the core eligible age range for aftercare is from 18 years up to 21 years. The Agency has advised me that a number of areas of action have been prioritised and work has commenced on the development of dedicated aftercare services, on the standardisation of a range of financial packages, on the introduction of Aftercare Steering Committees at local level, and on the further development of the provision of information on aftercare services in Ireland.

The Agency has further advised that at December, 2014, excluding staff costs, approximately €14.3 million was spent on the provision of statutory aftercare services.

Between 450 and 500 young people leave care annually upon turning 18. According to the Child and Family Agency, at the end of September, 2014 there were 1,698 young people aged 18 to 23 years (inclusive) in receipt of an aftercare service. Of those, 946 (56%) were in full time education.

A significant number of these young people are supported financially to remain living with their foster carers, in addition to having access to an aftercare worker. The most vulnerable group of children are those leaving residential care or short term foster care placements. Children, who come into care late, in their mid to late teens, may not have developed the relationships with staff or aftercare workers that help them achieve good outcomes.

Young people who do not have family support from a foster carer or family base are assisted in finding accommodation in supported lodgings, sheltered housing or independent accommodation and encouraged and supported financially in furthering their training and education.

A protocol developed by the Child and Family Agency and the County and City Management Association, in relation to dealing with accommodation issues of young people leaving care, has been completed. This will see the relevant local authority housing representative attend aftercare planning meetings with social workers of the Agency in relation to those young people for whom social housing has been identified as the most appropriate form of accommodation support.

Furthermore, as the Deputy is aware, it has been decided to strengthen the legislative provisions regarding aftercare. This is in response to concerns that there was insufficient focus in this area and that such planning was not taking place on a properly structured and consistent basis. The approach adopted is to impose a statutory duty on the Child and Family Agency to prepare an aftercare plan for an eligible child or eligible young person. The aim is to create an explicit, as opposed to implicit, statement of the Agency's duty to satisfy itself as to the child's or young person's need for assistance by preparing a plan that identifies those needs for aftercare supports.

It is anticipated that the Aftercare Bill will be published in the early part of 2015.

School Completion Programme

155. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide a detailed update on the review of the school completion programme, which has been in operation since 2002; and the plans in place for its development. [7770/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The School Completion Programme aims to retain young people in the formal education system to completion of senior cycle and to generally improve the school attendance, participation and retention of young people who are risk of educational disadvantage. The programme is a targeted intervention aimed at school communities identified through the Department of Education and Skills' DEIS Action Plan for Educational Inclusion. It provides targeted supports annually to approximately 36,000 children.

Since 1 January 2014, the Child and Family Agency has operational responsibility for the School Completion Programme. The review of the School Completion Programme, indicated in the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure 2012-2014, is under way. The objectives of the review are to examine the programme's structures, clarify roles and responsibilities, to analyse the interventions and supports provided and identify best practice and make recommendations for the future of the programme.

The review is being carried out by the ERSI following a procurement process which was managed by the Agency. The plan for the review includes arrangements to capture the views of a range of stakeholders, including staff and all those involved in the organisation and administration of the School Completion Programme. It includes a survey to gather the views of project coordinators and chairpersons of the 124 local school completion programme projects throughout the country, case studies of projects involving staff and participating schools and interviews with national stakeholders who have a direct interest in the programme.

The review of the School Completion Programme is an important initiative in planning for the future development of the programme. It will assist in identifying the reforms necessary to consolidate the programme on a sustainable footing for the future. Preliminary information gathered in the review indicates that the School Completion Programme encompasses a broad and diverse range of measures and interventions that have been developed by local projects

over the years. The intention is to learn more about the most successful of these, share the learning across the programme and ensure that available funds are targeted to those services that provide the greatest contribution to good educational outcomes for children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage.

The review is being overseen by a steering group comprising officials from my Department, the Department of Education and Skills and the Agency. Work is at an advanced stage and it is anticipated that the review will be completed during the current academic year.

Youth Services Funding

156. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his plans for greater investment in community youth clubs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7748/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): My Department is responsible for the administration of funding for the provision of youth services. The funding schemes support the delivery of a range of universal and targeted youth work programmes and services for young people throughout the country, including those from disadvantaged communities.

The schemes include the youth Services Grant Scheme, under which funding is provided to 30 national and major regional organisations to support their services. Targeted supports for disadvantaged, marginalised and at risk young people are provided through the Special Projects for Youth Scheme, the Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund, Rounds 1 and 2, and the Local Drugs Task Force Projects Scheme. Other schemes administered by my Department include the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme and Youth Information Centres.

In 2015, an allocation of €49.78m has been provided to my Department to support the provision of youth services.

The Local Youth Club Grant Scheme supports youth work activities at a local level. These grants are made available to all youth clubs and groups through the local Education and Training Boards. The scheme is open to some 1,600 youth groups and clubs, with an estimated 89,000 club members around the country. In 2015, €1.035m has been allocated to this scheme. The scheme, which is open to new entrants, will be advertised locally and applications for funding will be invited by the Education and Training Boards from local groups in their respective areas. It is anticipated that the grants will be advertised in the coming weeks with a closing date of April 17th. Each year, some 600 local youth clubs benefit from the scheme.

Care Orders

157. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his views on care orders; and the steps that are open to parents when they are dissatisfied with the manner in which Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has conducted matters. [7706/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Child Care Act 1991, as amended, sets out the different types of care order that can be sought, including an emergency, interim, full or special care order. The Act outlines the procedures and the conditions under which a Court may grant a care order, including the relevant period for review by the Court. While the Child and Family Agency has a duty to receive a child who requires care

or protection into its care under the Child Care Act 1991, it does not have the power to impose a care order. A care order, in the case of emergency, interim or full care orders, can only be issued by a member of the judiciary sitting in the District Court, which may be part of a special sitting as the Children Court, as indicated in the Act. In the case of special care orders, an application must be made to the High Court. Decisions on the variation or discharge of a care order are also a matter for the relevant Court and lie outside the powers of the Agency. If a person is unhappy with a care order itself then an appeal can be lodged with the Courts, which, normally, in the case of an order from the District Court is to be lodged within 14 days of the order being made. Under the Child Care Act 1991, as amended, it is possible for a child to be placed with the Agency in care on a voluntary basis but this is not a care order and can be rescinded by the parent or guardian at any time.

If there is dissatisfaction on the outcome of a case or any other aspect of the service provided by the Agency then this may be referred to the Agency's complaints service, under its complaints policy 'Your Service Your Say'. The Agency's website outlines a number of routes by which a complaint can be made and includes comprehensive guide on feedback and complaints, including contact information for a number of advocacy groups (www.tusla.ie).

There is also the option of referring the complaint to the Ombudsman for Children, who can look into how complaints with a child protection concern may have been handled. The Ombudsman can instigate investigations on its own volition. Complaints can be made directly by anyone under the age of 18, or by an adult on behalf of a child or young person. If the concern is in relation to professional misconduct or poor performance of a social worker, a complaint can be made to CORU, Ireland's health and social care regulator using their complaints procedure, 'Fitness to Practice'.

Child Care Services Expenditure

158. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in view of the findings by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development that Ireland's investment in child care is one of the lowest in the world, if he will make a commitment to child care facilities, and workers, by acknowledging the severe pressures the industry is under, with increases in costs of food, fuel and rates; and the way he will support the industry. [7709/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): My Department supports the provision of early childhood care and education by providing annually in the region of €260 million to provide for three child care support programmes that make childcare services more affordable and ensure that more than 100,000 children have access to quality child care. This high level of support has been maintained despite the difficult budgetary situation that prevailed in recent years.

I wish to point out to the Deputy that, while the annual spend on child care related programmes has been in the region of 0.2 per cent of GDP in recent years, this expenditure does not include expenditure under other programmes or by other Departments and therefore does not represent the full extent of State expenditure. Ireland spends over 0.4% of GDP relative to the OECD average of 0.7%.

It is clear that accessibility, affordability and high quality childcare can play a critical role in achieving a number of Government priorities, including improving educational outcomes for children, reducing poverty and increasing parents' participation in the labour market. To ensure that all the benefits of child care investments are fully realised, future public invest-

ment in child care must be evidence-based and strategically coordinated. I am establishing an Inter-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 child care services.

This new Group will include representatives of the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the Department of Finance and the Department of the Taoiseach and will be led and supported by my Department. I have asked that the work of this Group be carried out within a relatively short time frame and I expect that the Group will be in a position to report to me in the Summer.

Youth Justice Strategy

159. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he is satisfied that detention for children is used only in cases of last resort, as mandated in the Youth Justice Action Plan 2014-2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7753/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The youth justice system has to be considered in its entirety, from the Garda Youth Diversion Programmes, through to the Children's Court, the Probation Service and the Children Detention Schools. The principles of the Children Act 2001 include that detention should be imposed as a last resort and may only be imposed if it is the only suitable way of dealing with the child, and that the various areas in the youth justice system apply a series of 'filters' or tests in each case. In examining each case, it is important to note that it is not a simple question of choice between the Diversion Programme, community sanctions and detention.

The first main filter is the Garda Diversion Programme, which at different stages and depending on the seriousness of the offence, may involve the informal caution (without supervision) and the formal (supervised by a Garda Juvenile Liaison Officer) caution, including possible involvement with a Garda Youth Diversion Project. The second main filter is provided by the non-custodial sanctions available to the Courts, including dismissal under the Probation Act and unsupervised sanctions (e.g. fines, disqualification, peace bond, curfew etc.). The next stage involves the Probation Service's supervised sanctions (i.e. community service and other community sanctions). Finally, as a last resort, detention may be used.

I have on-going policy cooperation with the Minister for Justice and Equality regarding our shared goal to minimise the rate of juvenile offending under the Youth Justice Action Plan 2014-2018. The Minister for Justice and Equality has overall responsibility in the area of crime and anti-social behaviour and her Department funds a range of community based responses to youth crime, in particular the Garda Diversion Programme and the Young Person Probation Community Projects. These programmes are specifically targeted at young offenders and those at serious risk of offending. Funding support of approximately €17m has been allocated by the Minister for Justice and Equality to this area in 2015. This budget has been maintained in recent years notwithstanding financial constraints.

In the year 2012, there were a total of 12,246 children referred to the Garda Diversion Programme and a total of 134 children either remanded or sentenced to a period of detention in the children detention schools. This would seem to indicate that when all children in contact with the criminal justice system are considered, detention is being used to a much less degree than non custodial options and the Garda Diversion Programme. However, I can assure the Deputy that I will continue to work with my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality in continu-

ing to promote the use of non custodial options where appropriate in line with the objectives of the Youth Justice Action Plan.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

160. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if there will be a separate and distinct module for those of mixed race, as part of the mother and baby homes inquiry, that is explicitly focused on experiences of racism in institutions; and his views that, without implementing this module, the inquiry will be incapable of properly acknowledging the existence of, and consequences of, such abuse. [7708/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and certain related matters was established by Government on the 17th February 2015.

The comprehensive Terms of Reference for this investigation will thoroughly examine the experience of mothers and children who were resident in Mother and Baby Homes and a representative sample of County Homes. The Commission is required to address issues related to the practices and procedures regarding the living conditions, care, welfare, entry arrangements and exit pathways for residents of these institutions. In particular, I would refer the Deputy to Section 1 (VIII) of the Terms of Reference in which Government has tasked the Commission with identifying the extent to which any group of residents may have systematically been treated differently on any grounds, including religion, race, traveller identity or disability.

In accordance with the Commissions of Investigation Act 2004, it is essential to recognise that a Commission is independent in the performance of its functions. It is a matter for the Commission to decide how best to conduct the various modules of its investigations. As the Minister with responsibility for overseeing administrative arrangements for this Commission I have no role in decisions relating to the conduct of the investigation. It would therefore be inappropriate for me to comment further in respect of the matters raised by the Deputy.

Child Care Services Funding

161. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide the minimum salary levels for employees of child care providers, who are in receipt of the capitation fee, in view of the fact that the capitation rate for the free preschool year is a major factor affecting salary levels in child care provision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7739/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Government provides €260 million annually to a number of childcare support programmes that assist parents with the cost of childcare. This figure includes €175 million provided annually to support the universal free pre-school provision under the Early Childhood Care and Education programme. These programmes are, of course, in addition to the support provided to all parents in the form of Child Benefit.

The funding provided through the childcare support programmes has had a significant impact on childcare provision and has enabled many childcare providers to continue to deliver childcare services at a time of economic difficulty. The funding has also ensured that employment levels across the sector have been maintained. The retention of the current level of investment in childcare is a considerable achievement, given the pressure on the public finances over

the last number of years.

I recognise the difficulties being faced by childcare providers and I am aware of the concerns of childcare professionals in relation to levels of remuneration in the childcare sector. I met recently with their representatives to discuss a range of issues relating to childcare provision and I am giving careful consideration to their views on future developments in the sector.

The remuneration for childcare workers is a matter for agreement between employers and employees. Staff remuneration does account for the great proportion of the overall cost of providing childcare services and I acknowledge that increased capitation and subvention payments through the childcare support programmes would assist childcare services in addressing these cost issues. I have indicated that, if resources become available to my Department, I will consider the scope for increasing the level of these payments.

However, I want to look at the question of appropriate supports for child care in a wider context. It is crucial that we develop a coherent whole-of-Government approach to investment in childcare services. To ensure that all the benefits of our full range of childcare investments are fully realised, future public investment in childcare must be evidence-based and strategically coordinated. I have established an Inter-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. I have asked the Group to report to me by the Summer.

Child Care Qualifications

162. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the level of engagement between his Department and the Department of Education and Skills, in establishing greater professional recognition, through qualifications, for child care staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7745/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): My Department works very closely with the Department of Education and Skills on quality improvement within the early years sector. This includes the qualifications profile of the sector.

There is an increasing recognition of the importance of skilled and appropriate qualified staff in this sector. Indeed, in recent years, with the introduction of the free pre-school year in 2010, early years practitioners have had to become increasingly qualified. Prior to 2010, there was no education qualification requirement for staff working with children in the early years sector. This changed with the introduction of the free pre-school year under the Early Childhood Care and Education programme, whereby pre-school leaders are required to have a minimum of a Major Award at Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications (or equivalent) to qualify for the standard capitation rate and a Level 7 Major Award (or equivalent) to qualify for the higher capitation rate.

The introduction of the Learner Fund in 2014 has also served to improve qualification levels within the sector and there is considerable evidence that the early years sector is becoming increasingly upskilled. Data from Pobal's Annual Survey (2013) shows that 99.4% of early years settings that responded have at least one staff member qualified to National Framework Qualification Level 5 or higher. 86.3% had at least one staff member qualified to Level 6 or higher and 39.5% had at least one staff member qualified to Level 7 or higher.

While the qualifications profile of the sector is on an upward trajectory, we need to be sure that their education and training is equipping them to become competent professionals. My colleagues in the Department of Education and Skills are taking the lead in carrying out a review

of ECCE education and training programmes which will examine the extent to which such programmes are being delivered as efficiently as possible; are subject to appropriate quality assurance procedures at institutional level; meet the demands of the learning community, including the extent to which they incorporate flexible learning, modular delivery, progression routes, and opportunities for recognition of prior learning (RPL); equip graduates with the skills, knowledge and dispositions to work in the area of early years education, which is one element of the overall education continuum; prepare graduates for social diversity; and are delivered by appropriately qualified experts in the field of early years education.

While the profession is not regulated, the developments in the last few years have seen Government recognition of the importance of skilled and appropriately qualified staff as central to the achievement of quality standards. The introduction of the higher capitation rate for early years practitioners educated to degree level is proof of this.

National Carers Strategy

163. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his assessment of the level of support that is currently available for young carers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7749/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The National Carers Strategy is led by the Department of Health and many Departments including the Department of Children and Youth Affairs have a role to play in its implementation. In September 2014 officials from my Department and the Child and Family Agency met with the National Carers' Association to discuss the role of the Department and the Agency in relation to the National Carers' Strategy.

The Child and Family Agency Act 2013 brings together a range of existing services for children and families to one agency. As of 1st January 2014, the Child and Family Agency is responsible for the former Family Support Agency, the National Educational Welfare Board and also for the functions of Child and Family services previously provided by the HSE. The Agency's functions include maintaining and developing services in order to support and promote the development, welfare and protection of children and to support effective functioning of families. In so doing the Agency will promote enhanced interagency cooperation to ensure that services are coordinated on the principle of the best interest of all children and their families.

The Educational Welfare Service (EWS) of the Child and Family Agency is in the process of refining and implementing a new strategic approach to service delivery through an integrated model of service committed to the principle of "One Child, One Team, One Plan". The EWS of the Child and Family Agency is developing national guidelines as a practical support for schools in the preparation of School Attendance Strategies as outlined in Section 22 of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000. The guidelines will assist schools to implement effective measures to support children at risk of poor attendance and participation, including those with caring responsibilities. It is anticipated that the guidelines will be completed before the beginning of the 2015/16 academic year.

In order to learn more about children that undertake caring roles, my Department requested the Central Statistics Office to help to identify the extent to which children have caring responsibilities. The Census of Population 2011 found that 6,449 children, or 5.6 per 1,000 children provided regular unpaid personal help for a friend or family member with a long-term illness, health problems or disability. Rates ranged from 4.3 per 1,000 in Co. Louth to 8.2 per 1000 in

Co. Leitrim. Under the National Strategy for Research and Data on Children's Lives (2011-2016) analysis of those figures in the 2011 Census will help to inform future policy as to how best to address the support needs of children and young people who undertake caring roles. This analysis will be published in 2015.

A National Youth Strategy is also being developed by my Department. It will be a universal strategy for all young people aged 10 to 24 years. It will have a particular focus on those who are most disadvantaged or at risk and who have the poorest outcomes and therefore in most need of support. The consultation process in the development of this strategy has included a number of major stakeholder consultation events and I am pleased that representatives of the Carers Association participated in these consultations.

Child and Family Agency Expenditure

164. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will address the funding crisis affecting domestic abuse services, including the County Laois domestic abuse service. [7691/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): In 2014, €17m in funding was provided by the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) by way of grant aid to 62 specialist Domestic Violence & Sexual Violence services. These include:

- 16 Rape Crisis Centres/Sexual Violence services
- 44 Domestic Violence services (including 20 Refuges)
- 2 National Networks

In addition, funding of €2.54m has transferred to my Department's 2015 Vote from the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, and in turn to Tusla. This funding was previously distributed under Section 10 of the Housing Act, 1988 and is for domestic violence refuge services. The purpose of this funding transfer is to ensure that the State's relationship with the domestic violence services is managed in a manner which is more coherent and adapted to the needs of service users i.e. victims of domestic violence.

In 2014 Tusla funded specialist domestic violence services in Co. Laois provided by Laois Domestic Abuse Services. The service received €64,900 in funding from Tusla last year.

The service involves the provision of domestic violence supports, including information, advocacy and counselling services to women experiencing or who have experienced domestic violence.

The work of Laois Domestic Abuse Services and other community-based domestic violence services is recognised and valued.

Tusla has recently completed an initial review of domestic violence and sexual violence services in order to identify strategic priorities and set out a Tusla roadmap for sexual violence and domestic violence services. There is for the first time a consolidated national budget for sexual violence and domestic violence services and an opportunity for more co-ordinated and equitable provision of violence and domestic violence services across the country.

Tusla will be communicating with funded services shortly to advise on the Tusla budget and funding for 2015. Individual domestic violence service provider organisations, including Laois Domestic Abuse Service, will be contacted about their specific funding and service arrange-

ments for the current year.

Future planning for domestic violence and sexual violence services will seek to address gaps, avoid duplication and support effective delivery of frontline services nationally. Developments for domestic violence services in Co. Laois will be considered as part of Tusla's future commissioning process.

Ombudsman for Children Remit

165. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his plans to extend the power of the Ombudsman for Children, including areas actively under consideration, and a timeframe for delivery, in view of the urgency, in relation to children in direct provision. [7707/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I have no immediate plans to amend the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002 for the purposes outlined by the Deputy.

The direct provision system is under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality. The Department of Justice and Equality has primary responsibility in the area of asylum and immigration.

The Deputy may be aware that a report 'Review of the operation of the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002', was submitted by the former Ombudsman for Children, Ms Emily Logan to the then Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in March 2012. One of the recommendations contained in that report was that "... section 11(1) (e) should be amended to clarify that the exclusion regarding the administration of law in the area of asylum, immigration, naturalisation or citizenship relates solely to decisions taken by the relevant authorities in accordance with statutory procedures for determining whether a person is entitled to a particular status." My Department engaged with the Department of Justice and Equality on this recommendation, among others. The then Minister for Justice and Equality considered that no legislative change was required and this position has been reaffirmed by that Department.

In a reply to a question by Deputy Brendan Griffin (Reference No. 31092/14 on 15th July 2014), the Minister for Justice and Equality addressed, among other issues, the question of the Ombudsman for Children being given jurisdiction in the direct provision system and for the Health Information Quality Authority (HIQA) to be allowed inspect direct provision hostels. In replying, the Minister made reference to provisions in both the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002 and Ombudsman Act 1980 which excludes either Ombudsman from investigating any action taken by or on behalf of a person in the administration of law relating to, inter alia, asylum. If I may quote from Minister Fitzgerald's response, she said "Whilst there are no plans to change those legislative provisions, the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) including RIA, has administrative arrangements in place with both Offices to assist and provide information on matters brought to its attention by them".

The Department of Justice and Equality has established a working group to review a range of issues pertaining to asylum seekers and direct provision. The first meeting of the Working Group on the Protection Process was held on the 10th November 2014, chaired by Judge Bryan McMahon. The Working Group consists of children's rights advocates, organisations engaged with asylum groups and representatives from a range of relevant government departments, including a representative from my own Department. I look forward to learning of the findings and recommendations of the working group in the Spring of 2015.

Child Poverty

166. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the measures taken to tackle the rise of child poverty as outlined in the report of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (details supplied). [7744/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 (BOBF)*, which was published and launched by Government in 2014, provides the overarching framework for the development and implementation of policy and services for children and young people. As provided for in the Framework, the Department of Social Protection is the lead department on child poverty and has lead responsibility for the commitment to lift over 70,000 children out of consistent poverty by 2020, a reduction of at least two-thirds on the 2011 level. The Department of Social Protection also has lead responsibility for the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. The outcomes of the recent European Commission/ Departmental of Social Protection/Department of Children and Youth Affairs national seminar will inform the development of an implementation plan for tackling child poverty.

My Department is working on a number of initiatives which are relevant in addressing issues related to children poverty. My Department is leading the implementation of the Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme (2013-2016). The ABC Programme is being co-funded by Atlantic Philanthropies and will have a total funding allocation of up to €29.7 million. The ABC Programme draws on best international practice to break the cycle of child poverty where it is most deeply entrenched, and improve the outcomes for children and young people and existing services.

My Department is spending €260 million annually on childcare support programmes which provide childcare to 100,000 children. A number of these programmes are targeted at those on lowest incomes. We know from experience of other countries that investment in quality early childhood care and education is important in breaking the inter-generational cycle of poverty.

I have established an Inter-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. The Group's work involves, inter alia, identifying policy objectives to guide investment in contributing towards improvements in social inclusion and poverty reduction. It is crucial that we develop a coherent whole-of-Government approach to investment in childcare services. I have asked that this work be carried out within a relatively short time frame and I expect that the Group will be in a position to report me in the Summer.

My Department also provides targeted support for disadvantaged, marginalised and at risk young people are provided through the Special Projects for Youth Scheme, the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund, and Local Drugs Task Force projects. In addition, some 31 national and major regional youth work organisations are supported under my Department's Youth Service Grant Scheme. Other grant schemes include the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme and Youth Information Centres. In 2015, current funding of €49.93m will be provided to my Department for these schemes.

School Completion Programme

167. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his priorities for the school completion programme 2015. [7760/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The School Completion Programme aims to retain young people in the formal education system to completion of senior cycle and to generally improve the school attendance, participation and retention of young people who are at risk of educational disadvantage. The Programme is a targeted intervention aimed at school communities identified through the Department of Education and Skills' DEIS Action Plan for Educational Inclusion. It provides targeted supports annually to approximately 36,000 children.

Since 1st January 2014, the Child and Family Agency has operational responsibility for the School Completion Programme, including the allocation of funds to local projects. In 2014, an allocation of €24.756 million has been provided for the School Completion programme. The Agency has approved local projects' school retention plans for the 2014/2015 academic year. The first two instalments of 2014/15 funding have been issued to local projects, with a third instalment planned for payment in May 2015. The estimate for the Child and Family Agency for 2015 is €631 million, a 4.3% increase on its 2014 allocation.

The planned programme review of the School Completion Programme, indicated in the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure 2012-2014 is underway. The objectives of the review are to examine the programme's structures, clarify roles and responsibilities, to analyse the interventions and supports provided and identify best practice for young people at risk of early school leaving and make recommendations for the future of the programme.

The plan for the review includes arrangements to capture the views of a range of stakeholders, including staff and all those involved in the organisation and administration of the School Completion Programme.

The review of the School Completion Programme is an important initiative in planning for the future development of the programme. It will assist in identifying the reforms necessary to consolidate the programme on a sustainable footing for the future. Preliminary information gathered in the review indicates that the School Completion Programme encompasses a broad and diverse range of measures and interventions that have been developed by local projects over the years. The intention is to learn more about the most successful of these, share the learning across the programme and ensure that available funds are targeted to those services that provide the greatest contribution to good educational outcomes for children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage.

The completion of the review is a priority for the Child & Family Agency and my Department. Work is at an advanced stage and it is anticipated that the review will be completed during the current academic year.

Early Years Strategy Implementation

168. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will extend eligibility for the existing learner fund to all child care staff, in order to enable all staff to access third level qualifications; if he will fund child-free continuous professional development days, in order to enable child care workers to implement the national curriculum and quality frameworks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7738/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): My Department is currently progressing the Early Years Quality Agenda with the objective of improving the quality of childcare services available to young children. As part of this process, all staff working directly with children in pre-school services must hold a major award in early childhood care

and education at Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications, or the equivalent. This minimum qualification, which will be a requirement under the Pre-School Regulations, will apply to all pre-school services from September 2015. Staff who wish to continue in employment in the childcare sector must satisfy the new qualification requirements.

In relation to the Early Childhood Care and Education programme, it will be a contractual requirement from the above dates that all pre-school leaders delivering the free pre-school year hold a major award in early childhood care and education at Level 6 or the equivalent.

Specific funding of €3 million has been provided in 2014/15 under the Learner Fund initiative to support childcare workers seeking to obtain the required qualifications. The first and most important objective of this funding is to ensure that all existing staff are in a position to meet the mandatory qualification requirements for the positions that they are currently occupying, otherwise it will not be possible for them to continue in these positions after September 2015.

The Learner Fund is linked to the introduction of the mandatory qualifications and while other training priorities can be examined at a future date, the priority for now must be to use the funding available for staff who must achieve mandatory qualifications.

A National Early Years Quality Support Service, *Better Start*, has been introduced under the Early Years Quality Agenda. Funding has been provided to allow for the recruitment of 30 graduates in early childhood care and education to work directly with services to assist services in implementing the Síolta Framework and the Aistear Curriculum and improving the quality of childcare provision.

The new support service will work closely with the City and County Childcare Committees and the Voluntary Childcare Organisations to support service providers in improving the quality of their services. The work of the service will be based on a new Practice Guide based on Síolta and Aistear, which is currently being developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

Census of Population Data

169. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Taoiseach the population changes in the Ballymun area, Dublin, from 1997 to date in 2015. [7726/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The total population of the Ballymun electoral divisions (Ballymun A, Ballymun B, Ballymun C, Ballymun D, Ballymun E and Ballymun F) in the 1996 Census of Population (no Census was held in 1997) was 21,366. According to the most recent Census of Population (2011), the population in this area was 20,141.

Electoral Division	Census 1996	Census 2011
Ballymun A	1,766	3,678
Ballymun B	4,431	4,012
Ballymun C	6,575	5,585
Ballymun D	3,794	2,961
Ballymun E	1,863	1,582
Ballymun F	2,937	2,323
Ballymun Total	21,366	20,141

Census of Population Data

170. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Taoiseach the percentage of the population in Ballymun, Dublin, that are lone parents; and the changes that have taken place since 1997. [7727/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): According to the 1996 Census of Population (no Census was held in 1997) there were 2,086 family units classified as lone parents in the Ballymun electoral divisions (Ballymun A, Ballymun B, Ballymun C, Ballymun D, Ballymun E and Ballymun F), accounting for 38.4 per cent of all families. According to the most recent Census of Population (2011), lone parents accounted for 41.5 per cent of all families, amounting to 2,246 families.

Ballymun	Census 1996	Census 2011
Actual	2,086	2,246
Percentage	38.4%	41.5%

Economic Management Council Meetings

171. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide a list of dates the Economic Management Council has met with the banks operating here; if he will provide the issues discussed at each meeting. [7939/15]

The Taoiseach: I refer the Deputy to my previous response to Question No. 124 dated 18 November 2014 on this matter, a copy of which is set out below. The position remains unchanged.

Departmental Communications

172. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Taoiseach if he is implementing a plain English policy, as outlined by the National Adult Literacy Agency, in his Department's communications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7291/15]

The Taoiseach: The use of Plain English by Government Departments and Offices is an important part of the Government's Public Service Reform agenda. The Public Service Reform Plan 2014-2016, published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in January 2014, contains an action to "Continue to centrally promote the benefits of the use of plain language including through guidelines, training and other supports". The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, in cooperation with National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), have produced a handbook on the use of plain language which is available on their website.

Consistent with my Department's commitment to Quality Customer Service under its Customer Charter, this guidance is availed of by my Department when appropriate in order to support effective public communications.

Unemployment Data

173. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Taoiseach the current unemployment rate in County Kerry; and the rate for each of the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7513/15]

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

The table below shows the unemployment rate of persons aged 15 years and over classified by NUTS3 South-West region in Q3 of each year from 2005 to 2014.

Unemployment rate of persons aged 15 years and over classified by NUTS3 South-West region, Q3 2005 - Q3 2014

	Q3 05	Q3 06	Q3 07	Q3 08	Q3 09	Q3 10	Q3 11	Q3 12	Q3 13	Q3 14
-										
Unemployment rate	3.8	4.0	3.9	6.5	11.9	13.6	14.1	12.9	11.3	10.5

%

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

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, Central Statistics Office.

Unemployment Data

174. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach the number of jobs lost and gained in County Louth in each of the past six years and in 2015, to date. [8089/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The exact information requested by the Deputy is not available. The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of estimates of employment in the State. The most recent figures available are for Q3 2014. Estimates of employment are produced by NUTS 3 Regions. The NUTS3 Border region includes Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo. Due to methodology and sample size it is not possible to produce reliable Louth County estimates from the QNHS.

Table 1a below shows the number of persons aged 15 years and over in employment classified by NUTS3 Border region in Q3 of each year from 2008 to 2014.

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

As Table 1a shows the overall stock of persons employed at given points in time, the annual changes which are calculated using these stock figures depend both on the number of jobs lost and jobs created over the period in question.

The QNHS does not record whether a job is newly created.

Table 1a Persons aged 15 years and over in employment (ILO) classified by NUTS3 Border region, Q3 2008 - Q3 2014

-	Q3 08	Q3 09	Q3 10	Q3 11	Q3 12	Q3 13	Q3 14
In employment	216.1	198.5	190.5	185.1	172.4	181.8	190.7

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

Reference period: q3=Jul-Sep.

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, Central Statistics Office.

Table 1b Persons aged 15 years and over in employment (ILO) classified by NUTS3 Border region, Q3 2009 - Q3 2014

Annual change

‘000

-	Q3 09	Q3 10	Q3 11	Q3 12	Q3 13	Q3 14
In employment	-17.6	-8.0	-5.4	-12.7	9.4	8.9

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

Reference period: q3=Jul-Sep.

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, Central Statistics Office.

Security Checks

175. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach if he or any predecessor in office has ever received a report from the complaints referee appointed under section 9 of the Interception of Postal Packets and Telecommunication Messages (Regulation) Act 1993; the dates such reports were received; the findings of any such report; the actions that were prompted in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8269/15]

The Taoiseach: No such report has been received by my Department.

Community Employment Drug Rehabilitation Projects

176. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of the nationwide 47 dedicated community employment drug schemes that are operating at full capacity; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8094/15]

177. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of the 35 dedicated community employment drug schemes in the Dublin region that are operating at full capacity; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8095/15]

178. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide an updated confirmation on the number of ring-fenced drug rehabilitation participants on community employment schemes, since reported by the Department of Social Protection, as 824 participants as at 31 December 2012; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8096/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 176 to 178, inclusive, together.

I am pleased to say that considerable progress has been made in increasing the number of participants on the community employment (CE) drug rehabilitation scheme, the majority of which (two-thirds of participants) are in the Dublin region. At December 2014, there are 936 referred clients on drug rehabilitation places, compared to 824 in 2012. In addition, there are 220 support workers giving a total of 1,156 places dedicated to drugs rehabilitation on CE. This number is very close to full capacity.

A key first step in securing this improvement was the establishment of a stakeholder group which now assists the Department to identify and implement enhancements to the scheme. In addition, workshops have been held with the scheme supervisors and departmental staff to ensure that the schemes meet the needs of participants. To complement these changes, an improved vacancy notification system and referral process was introduced by this Department.

During any given year, participants may exit for many reasons, including illness/relapse, gaining employment, maternity leave, retirement, emigration, transfer to another scheme, exit to a training programme or completion of CE. Therefore, there is a cycle of places becoming vacant and being filled on an ongoing basis on schemes. All referrals to the drug rehabilitation places come directly from treatment centres or other designated personnel engaged in the rehabilitation process.

The CE Drug Rehabilitation Scheme plays an important role in helping recovering drug users to develop their personal and employment skills. In this regard, I am pleased that the number of places filled increased substantially last year and that this will continue in 2015.

Community Employment Drug Rehabilitation Projects

179. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide an up to date age profile breakdown for the drug rehabilitation participants on community employment schemes; if she will further provide an up to date age profile breakdown for general participants on community employment schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8097/15]

180. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide a gender breakdown for the drug rehabilitation participants on community employment schemes; if she will further provide an up to date gender profile breakdown for general participants on community employment schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8098/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 179 and 180 together.

In terms of the age profile of participants on Community Employment (CE):

- Table 1 below provides the profile of participants on CE drug rehabilitation projects. At

December 2014, 27% (257) are under 25 years of age. While the minimum age for participation on a standard CE programme is 25 years of age, this requirement has been reduced for people referred to CE in recovery from substance misuse to 18 years. The majority of participants - 67% - are between the ages of 25-54 years.

- Table 2 below provides the age profile for all participants on CE. As of December 2014, less than 3% (655) are under 25 years of age. The majority of participants - 65% - are between the ages 25-54 years.

In terms of the gender breakdown of participants on CE:

- Table 3 below provides the breakdown for referred participants on drug rehabilitation projects. As of December 2014, there are 936 referred clients on drug rehabilitation projects - 69% are male (644) and 31% are (292) female.

- Table 4 below provides the breakdown for all participants on CE. As of December 2014, there are 23,249 participants on CE – 57% (13,276) are male and 43% (9,973) are female.

Table 1: Drug Rehabilitation Places on Community Employment by Age (Referred Clients)

Age Band	Total	%
Under 20	50	5.3
20-24	207	22.1
25-34	266	28.4
35-44	264	28.2
45-54	98	10.5
55 and over	51	5.5
Total	936	100.0

December 2014: CSM IT Extracts (Referred clients)

Table 2: Community Employment Participants by Age

Age Band	Total	%
Under 20	134	0.6
20-24	521	2.2
25-34	3,697	15.9
35-44	5,466	23.5
45-54	5,903	25.4
55 and over	7,528	32.4
Total	23,249	100.0

December 2014: CSM IT Extracts

Table 3: Ring-fenced Drug Rehabilitation Places and Gender (Referred Clients)

Gender	Ring-fenced Drug Places	%
Male	644	68.8
Female	292	31.2
Total	936	100.0

December 2014: CSM IT Extracts (Referred clients)

Table 4: Community Employment Participants and Gender

Gender	Community Employment Places	%
Male	13,276	57.1
Female	9,973	42.9
Total	23,249	100.0

December 2014: CSM IT Extracts

One-Parent Family Payments

181. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide a breakdown of the rates of lone parents' allowances for the years 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014. [7728/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The rates of payment for the One Parent Family Payment scheme are set out in the table below. Also provided are the increases for each child dependent who qualifies under the scheme rules.

Rates of One Parent Family Payment, 2008 to 2014 and increases for a qualified child

Year	Rate	Increase for Qualified Child
2014	€188.00	€29.80
2013	€188.00	€29.80
2012	€188.00	€29.80
2011	€188.00	€29.80
2010	€196.00	€29.80
2009	€204.30	€26.00
2008	€197.80	€24.00

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

182. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views that long-term family carers are not eligible for the contributory State pension (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7819/15]

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. This is particularly important given the challenge that increased longevity is posing for the future sustainability of the State pension. Therefore, when assessing whether an individual is entitled to a State pension, and to ensure that they can maximise such entitlement, all contributions (paid or credited) from when they first enter insurable employment until pension age are taken into account.

The State already assists those with caring roles to qualify for a State pension (contributory). The homemaker's scheme makes qualification for State pension (contributory) easier for those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties. The scheme, which was introduced in 1994, allows up to 20 years spent caring for children under 12 years of age or incapacitated people to be disregarded when a person's social insurance record is being averaged for pension

purposes. Given the valuable nature of the State pension (contributory), those who qualify under the homemaker's scheme still need to fulfil the eligibility requirements for that scheme, and have at least 520 paid contributions over the course of their working lives.

However, for those with insufficient contributions to meet the requirements for a State pension (contributory), the State pension system provides alternative methods of support. If someone has been a carer for nearly all of their adult life and has paid little or no PRSI, they may qualify for a means tested State pension (non-contributory), the maximum personal rate for which is €219, which amounts to just over 95% of the maximum rate of the State pension (contributory). Alternatively, if their spouse or civil partner is in receipt of a State pension (contributory) they may instead qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult of up to €206.30, which is just under 90% of the maximum personal rate of the State pension (contributory).

It is expected that a total contributions approach to pension qualification will replace the current average contributions test for State pension (contributory) from 2020, although that date is subject to change. Issues such as equality of outcomes for women and men, including those who spend some years outside the labour market on caring duties, will be considered carefully in the context of that reform.

Respite Care Grant Payments

183. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if consideration will be given to increasing the respite care grant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7821/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The respite care grant (RCG) is an annual non means-tested payment made to all carers who provide full time care and attention to others and the grant forms part of a range of income supports for carers provided by the Department. Over €822 million is being provided this year for these direct supports, up nearly €17 million from that provided for in 2014. In 2014, more than 80,000 carers benefited from the respite care grant at an estimated cost of €122 million.

Any change to the rate of RCG can only be considered in the context of Budget preparations and I was not in a position to provide for an increase in the respite care grant in the 2015 Budget. However, I did announce a number of welfare initiatives which will benefit carers, pensioners, and people with disabilities who are in receipt of a welfare payment. These initiatives included the re-introduction of a Christmas Bonus, an increase in Child Benefit and an increase in the Living Alone Allowance.

The Christmas Bonus was abolished by the previous Government in 2009. I was in a position to partially restore the bonus last year. A bonus of 25% was paid in early December to all long-term welfare recipients including all pensioners and carers. This is in recognition of the position of vulnerable households. I should also point out that recipients of half-rate carer's allowance also received a bonus.

Health and Safety

184. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on the concerns of staff in her Department of exposure to asbestos due to renovation works at the offices at High Road, Letterkenny, County Donegal. [7833/15]

216. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the measures taken to ensure that workers at a social welfare office in Letterkenny, County Donegal, were protected, amidst concerns about asbestos in their place of work, following recent renovations; the tests that were carried out before workers were allowed to return to the affected offices; the results of these tests; if she will provide assurances that workers were not exposed to asbestos material, upon returning to work; if the offices are now completely free from asbestos material; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8210/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 184 and 216 together.

The Office of Public Works (OPW) is currently undertaking works on behalf of DSP at Government Offices, High Road, Letterkenny. The works involve refurbishment to facilitate the introduction of an INTREO Office facility, a key element of the Government's Pathways to Work programme. The Office of Public Works and the Department of Social Protection staff are liaising with the main contractor and specialist sub-contractors to remove, contain and encapsulate low risk asbestos flooring material identified prior to and during the refurbishment works in the building, without posing any risk to our staff or our clients, in accordance with standard practice. The removal of asbestos will follow a strict 'Method Statement' that forms part of the Health and Safety procedures.

On 21/02/2015, some asbestos material was removed by a specialist company and a separate specialist company carried out 20 number reassurance air tests throughout the building. Tests were carried out on all floors in both the front and rear blocks and within the temporary prefabs. All of the air tests were negative for asbestos.

Based on clear air tests and the results of the material and dust samples, the offices can be re-occupied by staff. However in the light of staff concerns, staff are currently being accommodated in alternate accommodation in the Department's Offices at Oliver Plunkett Road, and this is being kept under constant review. Prior to re-occupancy all areas will be tested again for further assurance that there is no risk to staff or clients.

Community Employment Schemes Operation

185. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the opportunities available for persons who have completed their three year participation in a community employment scheme, especially those who are 60 years of age or over; if she is satisfied that there are plenty of opportunities for persons, especially those 60 years of age or over, when they finish these schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7842/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): For persons of 55 years of age and over, the maximum cumulative duration for participation on Community Employment (CE) is six years. Therefore, if they have only completed three years to date, they have the potential to participate for a further three years on the programme.

For persons who have exhausted their maximum duration on CE, and who are looking for other opportunities to progress, they should make contact their local Intreo Office for advice and assistance. There are opportunities for persons when they finish these schemes as the work experience and qualifications gained during their time on CE can greatly assist with securing employment or helping them to continue to further their education or training.

Further Education and Training Programmes Funding

186. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the funding available from the case officers in the Intreo offices for all courses, for example, fork-lift training, Further Education and Training Awards Council, FETAC, courses and so on; and if any of this training, being funded, is subject to having a job secured, prior to funding being approved. [7843/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): The Training Support Grant (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. It is important to note that the scheme is not designed to provide general training for jobseekers. Access to the scheme is via the Department’s case officers who are tasked with identifying support interventions for jobseekers, particularly where a job opportunity has been identified or where an intervention will enable an application for work to be made.

The scheme is activation focused and the jobseeker is required to provide reasonable evidence or grounds of need (for example in the form of a potential job offer) or a requirement to maintain or achieve accreditation, for example, safe pass, certain certification such as required for the catering sector (HACCP) or the security industry permit.

The maximum fund available to jobseekers under the scheme is €500 p.a. The training sought by the jobseeker, such as fork lift training and FETAC courses, must form part of the agreed personal progression or action plan for the individual to enter/re-enter the labour market.

Further Education and Training Programmes Provision

187. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if there is a training scheme or allowance available in respect of a person with a disability (details supplied) in Dublin 3; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7863/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned is in receipt of Disability Allowance since November 2011. To explore possibilities around appropriate training his family should contact the Intreo Centre in Parnell Street, Dublin 1 and arrange an appointment to meet with a Case Officer. At this meeting any options that are available to him with regard to training opportunities can be explored.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

188. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite an appeal for a domiciliary care allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7900/15]

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 4th 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. 189 withdrawn.

One-Parent Family Payments

190. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 11 of 5 February 2015, when she will conclude her deliberations on lone parents who are affected by a potential cut of €86, as this requires clarity as a matter of urgency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7919/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am aware of the financial impact that the age reforms to the one-parent family payment (OFP) due to take effect on 2, July 2015, will have on customers who are also in receipt of a half-rate carer's allowance payment in respect of another adult. That is why my officials and I are presently examining possible options in relation to this issue. I hope to conclude our deliberations on this aspect of the July reforms in the near future.

Social Welfare Code

191. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if there are persons still in receipt of dual social welfare payments; if so, if she will provide a breakdown of which payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7921/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): I can confirm that there are persons still in receipt of dual social welfare payments (i.e. concurrent community employment (CE) allowances and certain social welfare payments).

Budget 2012 announced the disqualification from certain payments while participating on CE. Up until 16th January 2012, certain social welfare payments could be retained in part or in full while participating on CE. These retained social welfare payments were:

- One Parent Family Payment
- Deserted Wife's Benefit
- Widow(er)s Pension
- Illness Benefit
- Disability Allowance
- Invalidity Pension
- Blind Pension

This cessation of dual payments did not apply to the above categories in receipt of welfare payments that were *already* on CE on commencement of the legislation.

The breakdown of payments includes those concurrently in receipt of disability allowance, invalidity pension and one parent family payment (all of whom commenced CE prior to 16th

January 2012). The figure at the 1st of January 2015 was 778 concurrent payment recipients broken down as follows:

Concurrent payment recipients

Breakdown of payments	Nos.
Carers Allowance	1
Disability Allowance	292
Illness Benefit	6
Invalidity Pension	334
One Parent Family Payment	4
Widow(er)'s Contributory Pension	141
Grand Total	778

Social Welfare Appeals

192. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a decision will be expedited on an appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny, in view of the fact that the oral hearing took place in County Kilkenny on 4 January 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7925/15]

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, including that adduced at oral hearing, decided to allow the appeal of the person concerned. The person concerned was notified of the Appeals Officer's decision on 16th February 2015.

The oral hearing of this case was held on the 04th February 2015 and not on 4th January 2015 as suggested by the Deputy.

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.

Child Benefit Eligibility

193. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding payment of child benefit and a one-parent family allowance, and any arrears accruing therefrom, in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7934/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Child benefit is payable in respect of children who are ordinarily resident in the state. In the case of the person concerned child benefit is in payment since November 2014.

Payment was suspended in June 2014 as she failed to provide relevant information that was requested in March 2014 in relation to her residency. She was written to on 21 November 2014 and has since received two further letters in relation to her residency in Ireland for the period from April 2014 to October 2014. To date she has not responded. If she is unable to provide the documents requested she must provide some form of evidence to confirm her residence for the period in question. On receipt of her response her claim will be reviewed.

The person concerned had a jobseekers transitional payment claim (JST) appointment on 12th January 2015 at Dun Laoghaire Intreo Centre. She attended, but did not bring any documentation or information required to support her JST claim. She was given a new JST appointment for 29th January 2015, but did not attend. She has not made any further appointments with the office. If she is still residing at the stated address, she should contact the Dun Laoghaire Intreo Centre as soon as possible to make a new appointment.

One-Parent Family Payments

194. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of persons in receipt of one-parent family payments in 2012, 2013, 2014 and to date in 2015; the number of male recipients and female recipients. [7945/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The numbers of persons in receipt of the One Parent Family Payment at December 31st of the years 2012, 2013 and 2014 and at 31st January 2015 are provided in the following table. The gender breakdown is also supplied.

Number of Recipients of One Parent Family Payment by Gender, 2012 to January 2015

Year	Male	Female	Total
31st January 2015	1,001	68,772	69,773
2014	1,018	68,866	69,884
2013	1,463	76,783	78,246
2012	1,984	85,934	87,918

Local Employment Service

195. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if and when adequate funding services will be made available to County Kildare Local Employment Service Network Limited, for the purpose of progressing its clients into agreed training options, to enable them to update their skills and acquire accreditation, to allow them to return to employment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7954/15]

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

Departmental Customer Charters

196. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide details of each step of the internal processes in her Department that take place, when a person wishes to make, and escalate, a complaint through the various levels, before going to the Ombudsman. [7960/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department's Customer Charter and Action Plan 2013-2015 sets out the level of service customers can expect when dealing with the Department and its commitment to provide a professional, efficient, courteous and timely service to all customers. The Customer Charter is displayed in all public offices and is also available on the department's website www.welfare.ie.

If a customer is dissatisfied with the standard of service they have received from the Department, they can contact the staff member or section involved to have the matter dealt with. All business areas within the Department have resources dedicated to the management of comments and complaints received.

If this does not resolve the issue to their satisfaction, they can make a formal complaint in person, on line, by telephone, by e-mail or in writing. The complaint will be dealt with promptly, fairly and impartially. Receipt of the complaint will be acknowledged and the complaint will be referred to a complaints officer for investigation. A response to the customer normally issues within 15 working days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the complaint will take more than fifteen working days to resolve, the customer is contacted to explain the delay and given a timeframe for resolution of the complaint.

If the customer is not satisfied with the response they receive, they can seek to have the complaint reviewed. Following this further review by a manager, if the complaint remains unresolved to the customer's satisfaction they are advised by the Department that they can refer the matter to the Office of the Ombudsman.

Pension Provisions

197. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding compensation payment to former staff of a company (details supplied) in respect of their pension scheme; when payments will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7962/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I wish to advise that my officials are working with the Mediator, Unite, the trustees of the scheme and the scheme administrator to ensure that the terms of the agreement are implemented as soon as possible.

The scheme administrator wrote to the members of the scheme on 29th January seeking the consent of each member to the transfer of personal data to the Department of Social Protection to enable the terms of the agreement to be implemented. I am glad to say that in excess of 90% of the members have responded to this letter.

A further letter will be issued to members who have consented to the transfer of data to the Department to inform them of their entitlement under the terms of the agreement. At that stage, the member will be required to sign a "Deed of Release" to the effect that any payment issued under the agreement will be in full and final settlement of any claim a member may have under the scheme. A payment cannot be made until the member signs the "Deed of Release".

I can assure you that every effort is being made to implement the terms of the agreement as soon as possible.

Pension Provisions

198. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to any other double insolvency pension schemes whereby compensation will be payable to former members; if she has estimated the potential liability to the State in such circumstances; her plans in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7963/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Rulings of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) on the Insolvency Directive (2008/94) have implications for any defined benefit pension scheme where on the date of the wind up both the scheme and the employer are insolvent (double insolvency) and where the date of wind-up was after the date of the ECJ ruling in the UK Robins case of 25th January 2007.

The Social Welfare and Pensions (No.2) Act 2013 amended the Pensions Act 1990 to address double insolvencies occurring after the 25th December 2013. No claim has been made in respect of any double insolvencies occurring since the enactment of the 2013 legislation.

The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2009 provided for the establishment by the Minister for Finance of a Pensions Insolvency Payments Scheme (PIPS) to provide for the payment of pensions, in the event of the wind up of a pension scheme where both the employer and the scheme are insolvent, at less cost than through traditional annuities, thereby making more scheme assets available for the pensions of those yet to retire.

Application for pension payments under this scheme would give an indication of the number of double insolvencies arising in the period since the ECJ ruling in the Robins case and prior to the 2013 legislation. Eleven schemes have been certified by the Pensions Authority as eligible schemes to apply to the Minister for Finance to pay pensions under PIPS. I understand that nine of the schemes have been accepted and one further scheme is being processed. An application to join PIPS has not been made to the Minister for Finance in respect of the remaining scheme. Any of these schemes which considers that the State has a liability for a shortfall in the funding in the scheme will need to establish the extent of any liability arising. No formal claim has been made in respect of any of these schemes.

Question No. 199 withdrawn.

Rent Supplement Scheme Eligibility

200. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if the income a parent receives for the domiciliary care allowance in respect of the extra costs incurred for a child because of their special circumstances is taken into account as household income when considering an application for rent supplement under the supplementary welfare scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7996/15]

214. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the plans in place and the progress that has been made to provide young persons on a reduced rate of payment, trapped in homelessness, with the support and financial means to exit homelessness; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8181/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 200 and 214 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 currently approximately 70,700 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €298 million for 2015.

Rent supplement is subject to a means test which is normally calculated to ensure that a person, after the payment of rent, has an income equal to the rate of basic supplementary welfare allowance appropriate to their family circumstances, less a minimum contribution which recipients are required to pay from their own resources.

Under social welfare legislation payment received under the domiciliary care allowance scheme is classed as non-assessable means for the purposes of calculating rent supplement and is excluded from the assessment of means.

The reduced rates of jobseeker's allowance for younger persons 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. 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.

The aim of the Youth Guarantee is to provide young people under the age of 25 with a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a short time of becoming unemployed. The main plank of the guarantee is assistance to young people in finding and securing sustainable jobs, through earlier and enhanced engagement processes. In addition, additional places on a number of programmes and youth-oriented variants of existing schemes have been rolled out. Young people 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 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.

Free Travel Scheme Eligibility

201. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the reason the free travel companion pass for visually impaired children is not widened to include children with other physical or intellectual disabilities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8010/15]

202. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on the current situation where parents of certain children with disabilities may qualify for free travel if they are in receipt of the domiciliary care allowance and qualify for carer's allowance, but the child for whom the allowance is granted is not eligible for free travel; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8011/15]

203. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection outside of school transport schemes for children with special education needs and the free travel companion pass for visually impaired children, the free travel schemes that are available for intellectually or disabled children under 16 years of age; her views that this cohort is adequately catered for, in terms of free travel entitlements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8012/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 201 to 203, inclusive, together.

There are currently approximately 800,000 people in Ireland in receipt of free travel at an annual cost of €77 million per annum.

The free travel scheme is available to all people aged over 66 living permanently in the State. Applicants who are under age 66, including those with learning disabilities, must be in receipt of a qualifying payment in order to qualify for the scheme. The qualifying payments for those aged under 66 are invalidity pension, blind pension, disability allowance, carer's allowance or an equivalent social security payment from a country covered by EC Regulations or one with which Ireland has a Bilateral Social Security Agreement. Free travel is provided for people in receipt of carer's allowance to facilitate their caring role and support their social inclusion.

There is a provision for free travel passes for visually impaired children who satisfy the medical conditions for the blind pension. The provision is a long-standing one based on supports for the blind, including the blind pension, that predated other supports for the disabled.

Children with other disabilities may qualify for the domiciliary care allowance. This is a monthly payment of €309.50 to the carer of a child with a disability. The allowance may be used for the additional costs involved in caring for the child and this may include additional transport costs. On most transport services children under 16 years of age are charged fares at special concessionary child rates.

Any decision to extend the free travel scheme to persons who are not in receipt of a primary qualifying payment would have budgetary consequences and would have to be considered in the context of budget negotiations.

Disability Activation Projects

204. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection in view of the outstanding performance of the disability activation project also known as Project DAWN in the Roscommon Disability Support Group DALE Centre, Derrane, County Roscommon, in exceeding its targets in the first seven months of operation, if she will make provision for the extension of European Social Fund co-funding beyond April 2015, thereby preventing the negative impact the project's termination would have on its 170 participants, their families, and the six employees who will lose their jobs and their families; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8071/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The project to which the Deputy refers is one of 14 Disability Activation Projects (DACT), which are being jointly funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Department. The DACT projects commenced at the end of 2012 and will end on 30 April 2015, as the ESF portion of the funding was provided under the Human Capital Investment Operational Programme 2007-2013 and this programme has recently come to an end.

There is therefore no provision for ESF co-funding arrangements to continue beyond the end of April next. This position was recently communicated to the individual projects and it was pointed out that the terms of the grant agreement with each DACT project stipulated that the project must be delivered and completed by the end of April this year.

I very much welcomed and supported the setting up of these projects as they set out to explore a variety of routes towards ensuring that people with disabilities are enabled to avail of progression, education and development opportunities within the world of work. However, the projects were not intended to become ongoing service delivery organisations.

The Department has now commissioned an independent evaluation of the projects and a key part of this evaluation will be to identify from the projects what works with regard to increasing the capacity and potential of people on disability/illness welfare payments to participate in the labour market, and which of those are capable, where appropriate, of being mainstreamed in the delivery of supports to people with disabilities in the future. In the meantime, the Department is considering the position of those people who will still be participating in the projects at the end of April.

Exceptional Needs Payment Applications

205. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if particular family circumstances will be taken into consideration when considering the application for an exceptional needs payment to discharge funeral debt in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare. [8102/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): According to the Department's records the person concerned has received the maximum amount payable in line with ENP guidelines.

Exceptional Needs Payment Applications

206. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if family circumstances will be taken into consideration when considering an application for an exceptional needs payment to discharge funeral debt in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8103/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): According to departmental records, the person concerned has received a payment in line with ENP guidelines.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

207. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she deems it acceptable that a 23-year-old living with their parents may be limited to a payment of €100 per week, under the age-related jobseeker's allowance scheme, and on top of this, have their payment more than halved, arising from an assessment of the income of their parents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8118/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The jobseeker's benefit and jobseeker's allowance schemes provide income support for people who have lost work and are unable to find alternative full-time employment. The 2015 Estimates for the De-

partment provide for expenditure this year on the jobseekers' schemes of €3.01 billion.

In the case of persons aged under 25 years of age, the means test for jobseeker's allowance takes account of the value of any benefit and privilege enjoyed by a claimant as a result of residing with a parent or step-parent. The calculation of such value is based on the level of parental net income. Parental income is calculated as gross income less tax, PRSI, Universal Social Charge, superannuation and union dues. Rent or mortgage repayments are disregarded, where appropriate and a parental allowance of €600 per week per couple plus €50 per week in respect of other dependent children applies. The balance is assessed at 34% and this constitutes the weekly value of benefit and privilege. Once the person concerned reaches 25 years of age, the value of any benefit and privilege will no longer be regarded as means.

Reduced rates for younger jobseeker's allowance recipients were first introduced in 2009. Budget 2014 further extended the reduced rates of jobseeker's allowance to recipients under 26 years of age. This is a targeted measure aimed at protecting young people from welfare dependency. It aims to incentivise young jobseeker's allowance recipients to avail of education and training opportunities. If a jobseeker in receipt of the reduced jobseeker's allowance rate participates on an education or training programme he or she will receive a higher weekly payment of €160.

To guard against the development of welfare dependency I believe that it is necessary to provide young jobseekers with a strong financial incentive to engage in education or training or to take up employment. If they do not improve their skills, it will be much more difficult for them to avail of job opportunities as the economy recovers and they are at risk of becoming long-term unemployed from a young age.

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

Reflecting the improvement in the labour market, youth unemployment continues to fall. For example the youth unemployment rate in Ireland as estimated by Eurostat was 21.6% in December 2014 as compared to 30.8% in December 2011. However, the Government recognises that as the recovery takes hold, there is a need for additional measures to ensure that as many as possible of the jobs created are taken up by jobseekers and young jobseekers in particular. This is the rationale behind the Government's Pathways to Work strategy and the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan.

Social Welfare Benefits Applications

208. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the full extent of entitlement to a disability allowance-invalidity pension in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8122/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for disability allowance (DA) from the person concerned was disallowed by a deciding officer (DO) on 4 February 2012 on the grounds that his weekly means exceeded the statutory limit allowable in his case. The person concerned was notified of that decision and the reasons for it on the same date.

There is currently no DA application registered for the person concerned. If he considers

that he may qualify, it is open to him to submit a new application for assessment and decision.

Invalidity Pension is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the contribution conditions.

An application for Invalidity Pension (IP) was received from the person concerned on 19 January 2012. This application was disallowed by a DO on the grounds that he did not satisfy the contribution conditions for IP. The person concerned did not have the necessary 48 paid or credited contributions in the governing contribution year i.e. 2011, which was the last contribution year prior to his application date.

The person concerned appealed the decision to the social welfare appeals office (SWAO). His appeal was disallowed and he was notified of the Appeals Officer's decision on 04 March 2014.

If the person in question is incapable of work, he may qualify for the award of credited PRSI contributions for the period of his incapacity. For more information he should consult the department's illness benefit section, the department's website at *www.welfare.ie* or his local citizen's information service.

Registration of Births

209. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the information that is recorded on a person's birth certificate; and if it includes the mother's date of birth. [8129/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Part 1 of the First Schedule to the Civil Registration Act 2004 sets out the required particulars to be entered in the Register of Births. These are as follows:

Date and place of birth.

Time of birth.

Sex of child.

Forename(s) and surname of child.

Forename(s), surname, birth surname, address and occupation of mother.

Former surname(s) (if any) of mother.

Date of birth of mother.

Civil status of mother.

Personal public service number of mother.

Birth surname of mother's mother.

Forename(s), surname, birth surname, address and occupation of father.

Former surname(s) (if any) of father.

Date of birth of father.

Civil status of father.

Personal public service number of father.

Birth surname of father's mother.

Forename(s), surname, qualification, address and signature of informant.

Date of registration.

Signature of registrar.

However, while these details are required when a birth is being registered and are recorded on the Civil Registration Service system, the parents' PPS numbers, their civil status and their dates of birth do not appear on the birth certificate.

The requirement for parents to provide their date of birth for birth registrations was introduced in 2003.

Community Development Projects

210. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the reason her Department has ceased funding a community arts project (details supplied) in Dublin 11; and if she will review this decision in view of the invaluable contribution this project makes to the community. [8143/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The scheme in question has been sponsored and managed by the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb). This Department was advised in December 2014 that, following a strategic review of all their services in the community, the CDETb had decided to wind up the community employment (CE) project that encompassed the Finglas Arts Project.

To facilitate an orderly closure the Department agreed to extend the current project beyond its scheduled finish date which was 31 January 2015. An 'Amendment to Agreement Contract' was issued to the CDETb with a revised finish date of 30 June 2015 (or sooner if appropriate). This extension was agreed to enable Supervisors on the scheme to engage with all participants and commence work on an exit strategy with immediate effect; to include the transfer of participants to other local projects, employment, or further education. It is also envisaged that, if possible, the two existing CE supervisors will be re-deployed to other projects.

Jobseeker's Benefit

211. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 559 of 10 February 2015, if she will investigate the situation whereby school secretaries have to sign-on every time they take holidays and are not paid for the first days of their claim; and if a more user-friendly, efficient service will be put in place whereby persons can sign on once a year at the start of the school term if they have a letter from their school. [8155/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): A jobseeker's payment is paid for days of unemployment where the person is not in receipt of holiday pay and satisfies the conditions of the scheme. School secretaries who are employed on a temporary basis

and who have already been in contact with the Department are issued with a repeat jobseeker's application form and holiday form in advance of the school holiday periods. This facilitates an efficient service to these customers. However, it is important to note that they are still required to sign on for each period of unemployment.

Initially when a person makes an application for jobseeker's benefit, three waiting days apply and payment is from the fourth day of the claim where there is no accrued holiday entitlement. If a person makes a repeat claim for jobseeker's benefit with 26 weeks of their previous claim, the repeat claim links to the earlier claim and no waiting days apply.

Question No. 212 withdrawn.

Departmental Staff Relocation

213. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will intervene in the case of a person (details supplied) who has mobility difficulties and who has requested, on a medical consultant's advice, to be assigned to an office which that person can reasonably access, rather than the currently assigned office, due to the fact that the currently assigned office is having an adverse effect on that person's overall health; the reason this person's repeated requests for a transfer to an accessible office have been ignored for over a year; if she will ensure that this request is now accommodated in order to avoid a staff member having to give up employment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8170/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): As the Deputy will appreciate, as Minister I have no role or function in relation to the assignment of staff of the Department to particular offices or functions.

For operational reasons in the context of the development of the Intreo services for clients from a number of areas the south of Dublin, the Department, decided to close its offices in Tara Street and Thomas Street and relocate the work and associated staff to new premises based in Cork Street.

The officer in question notified their manager and HR Division that they felt they would not be in a position to relocate to the new premises due to mobility issues. The officer identified a number of alternative offices to which they wished to be assigned and their name was added to the transfer lists of all the locations specified.

HR Division also referred the officer's case to the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) asking for opinion on the person's fitness for duty and the appropriate action concerning the officer's request to be accommodated in a central location.

The CMO's advice was that the officer was fit for duty but that the question of relocation to a central location was something that should be considered separately and as such was a matter for management.

In the circumstances and taking the advice into consideration the officer was advised that they could only be considered for an alternative assignment when their place on a transfer list has been reached.

It is open to the officer to submit any new medical evidence regarding their circumstances that can be referred to the CMO for further consideration.

Question No. 214 answered with Question No. 200.

Community Employment Schemes Review

215. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will confirm that her Department is currently reviewing the contractual arrangements between community employment supervisors and their direct employers; the reason for this review; the time frame for this review; and if she will provide a report on the findings of the review to date. [8204/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): I can confirm to the Deputy that the Department of Social Protection is not currently undertaking a review of the contractual arrangements between community employment (CE) supervisors and their employers CE Sponsoring Organisations.

Question No. 216 answered with Question No. 184.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

217. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a domiciliary care allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8228/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned applied for domiciliary care allowance in respect of three children on the 17th November 2014. The applications were not allowed as the children were not considered to satisfy the qualifying conditions for the allowance. A letter issued on the 18th February 2015 advising of these decisions.

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

One-Parent Family Payment Applications

218. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of maintenance recovery cases which are outstanding; the number of children involved; the corresponding figures for those making such repayments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8265/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): All liable relatives associated with every new One Parent Family (OFP) claim must be examined in accordance with the relevant legislation. The Department's Maintenance Recovery Unit cannot pursue liable relatives who are living outside the Republic of Ireland, or those who cannot be traced based on the information provided by the parent claiming OFP. In certain cases, the Unit are advised that some birth parents do not know the other birth parent.

In 2014, the Unit examined 8,063 liable relatives. Of the liable relatives examined, 967 were either living outside the Republic of Ireland or could not be traced and 558 liable relatives were classified as unknown in 2014.

Overall, 2,586 Determination Orders issued to liable relatives who were assessed with a liability and had an apparent ability to pay maintenance. Liable relatives are advised that they

can meet their maintenance liability by paying either the department directly or the OFP recipient directly.

Following the issue of the Determination Orders, 1,063 liable relatives commenced making payments/additional payments to the lone parents averaging €48.84 per week. A further 69 liable relatives started paying the Department directly and the average weekly payment was €60.64 per week. A total of 260 liable relatives made repayments directly to the Department in 2014.

There were 1,948 liable relatives with outstanding assessments at the end of 2014 and these have now been assessed.

Social Welfare Benefits Applications

219. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite an application for a domiciliary care allowance and a carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8270/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received from the person concerned on the 20th January 2015. This application has been forwarded to one of the Department's Medical Assessors for their medical opinion. Following receipt of this opinion, a decision will be made by a Deciding Officer and notified to the person concerned. It can currently take 10 weeks to process an application for DCA.

The Department received an application for carer's allowance from the person concerned on the 24th September 2014. She was refused carer's allowance on the grounds that the person being cared for is under 16 and not in receipt of domiciliary care allowance. She was notified of this decision on the 4th of January 2015, the reason for it and of her right of review or appeal.

State Pensions Payments

220. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of persons currently in receipt of the over-80s allowance; the cost of this in 2014; the number of State pension recipients who currently receive an increase for a qualified adult, for a person who is 80 years of age or over; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8273/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The over 80 allowance is an increase of €10 per week on the basic pension rate, which is automatically awarded to qualified pensioners on attaining 80 years of age. In the year ending 2014, the following were in receipt of the allowance at a total cost of approximately €75 million in a full year:

- 71,070 State pension (contributory) pensioners,
- 34,156 State pension (non-contributory) pensioners,
- 38,050 widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's (contributory) pensioners.

An Increase for a Qualified Adult (IQA) is paid, generally, where the pensioner has a spouse or civil partner who is financially dependent on them, and who does not have enough contributions to claim a maximum rate State pension (contributory) in his/her own right. The maximum

rate of an IQA for someone over 66 is €206.30, and so in most cases where it is claimed, such couples have additional income or means above their State pension, as otherwise they would obtain a higher payment by the dependent spouse making a claim to the State pension (non-contributory), which is means-tested and has a maximum personal rate of €219 weekly (plus additional allowances, such as the over-80 allowance, where applicable). In the year ending 2014, there were some 7,750 qualified adults on State pension (contributory) claims who are at least 80 years of age, and this is expected to increase in the coming years.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

221. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an appeal for a carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8296/15]

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 15 January 2015. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 16 February 2015 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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

Departmental Staff

222. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on the proposal to require all public sector workers under the aegis of her Department who interface with service users to wear a name badge; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8565/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department of Social Protection administers over 70 separate schemes and services serving a wide and diverse group of customers daily including families, people in employment, unemployed people, people with disabilities, carers, and older people. The overall aim of the Department is to provide people with the information, financial support and other services that they require in a timely and customer friendly way. The Department is committed to delivering a high quality customer service to all its customers.

The Department's Customer Charter and Action Plan 2013-2015 sets out the level of service customers can expect when dealing with the Department and its commitment to provide a professional, efficient, courteous and timely service to all customers. The Customer Charter is prominently displayed in all public offices and is also available on the Department's website at www.welfare.ie.

Under the Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour, civil servants are required to deal sympathetically, efficiently and promptly with members of the public. They are also required to give their names to any member of the public with whom they are dealing, except where given

a special exemption, for example, on security grounds.

The Department operates a code of practice for Inspectors which requires Inspectors to identify themselves when interviewing a customer. Inspectors are also provided with a Certificate of Appointment which includes a photograph and this is shown to customers for identification purposes.

I wish to assure the Deputy that the Department is committed to ensuring that a customer service ethos is embedded in everything it does and is embraced by everyone in the organisation. While there is no current plan to introduce staff name badges, the Department will continue to consider and implement varied initiatives in order to further enhance the quality of our customer service provision.

Company Registration

223. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a comprehensive list of all multinational companies that have their headquarters here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8124/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Responsibility for the registration of Irish companies rests with the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. I am advised by that Department that they do not have a list of all the multi-nationals that have headquarters here and cannot provide this information as the Companies Registration Office ('CRO') have no means to identify a multi-national company. The CRO can identify foreign branches that are registered in Ireland, but not the parent company of foreign branches registered in other jurisdictions.

Further, I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that it is not a requirement of Irish tax law for companies resident in Ireland for tax purposes to report to the Revenue Commissioners whether or not the registered office of the company in Ireland is the corporate headquarters of the entire group as such information is not needed for any purpose of taxation. Accordingly, it is also not possible for the Revenue Commissioners to provide the list requested by the Deputy.

Budget Consultation Process

224. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to further reform the budgetary process; and if he is considering establishing an Oireachtas budgetary oversight office or budgetary scrutiny committee. [8215/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): There have been significant changes in the budget process over recent years as a result of the "Two Pack" and other reforms to the Stability and Growth Pact. These changes included moving the Budget date to October in coordination with other EU Member States. The Government is always considering initiatives that would improve the budgetary process, particularly in relation to multi-annual planning. In this context, the Government is also considering the introduction of a Spring Economic Statement, which would incorporate the Stability Programme Update that must be submitted to the European Commission by the end of April each year.

The Deputy may be aware from my reply to a recent parliamentary question that I am considering a proposal for an independent office that would provide costings of alternative budgets on request from members of the Oireachtas. At the moment, my Department provides costings

in regard to taxation proposals on a confidential basis to assist parties in advance of general elections or budgets. However, these costings are limited by being provided on a static, individual basis without analysis of the general government implications or potential second round economic effects.

Various models of this type of service and body already exist internationally, including independent bodies or offices under the aegis of parliaments. My current thinking is that this should be done by a unit within the ambit of the Oireachtas Commission and that it should then be independent of the Government and the Department of Finance.

Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

225. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide details of regulations relating to engine cc numbers for cars which are allowed for drivers who have undergone amputation; if there is an appeals process to allow for cars of 3000cc; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8230/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme provides relief from VAT and VRT (up to a certain limit) on the purchase of an adapted car for transport of a person with specific severe and permanent physical disabilities, assistance with fuel costs, and an exemption from Motor Tax.

In respect of drivers with disabilities, Regulation 8(1)(d) of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994 (S.I. 353 of 1994) provides that repayment or remission of VRT and VAT may only be provided in respect of a motor vehicle with an engine whose capacity is not greater than 2,000 cubic centimetres. There is no provision in S.I. 353 of 1994 for an appeals process relating to engine size.

In respect of passengers with disabilities, Regulation 10(1)(c) of S.I. 353 of 1994 provides that repayment or remission of VRT and VAT may only be provided in respect of a motor vehicle with an engine whose capacity is not greater than 4,000 cubic centimetres.

Tax Collection

226. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Finance the criteria used by the Revenue Commissioners, before calling in the sheriff, to pursue taxes owing. [7704/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that debt collection/enforcement action, including referral to the Sheriff, is normally only deployed in circumstances where there is no meaningful engagement by the taxpayer or business to agree mutually acceptable payment arrangements.

The Commissioners have also assured me that they continue to be very conscious of the current economic climate and how it can impact on taxpayers or businesses in being timely tax compliant. For this reason, Revenue debt management caseworkers actively encourage taxpayers or businesses experiencing payment difficulties to engage with them as soon as difficulties start to arise so that solutions can be put in place that restore voluntary timely compliance as quickly as possible without the need to refer the debt for enforcement action.

However, where a taxpayer or business fails to meaningfully engage with Revenue, then it has no alternative but to refer the outstanding debt for enforcement to protect the Exchequer and to maintain a level playing field for the vast majority who pay their taxes in full and on time.

Specifically in regard to referring outstanding tax debts to the Sheriffs, Revenue has confirmed that they (the Sheriffs) are officers of the Court, as provided for by Section 12 of the Court Officers Act, 1945. Their debt collection activities are generally covered by the Enforcement of Court Orders Act, 1926, as amended and the execution of Revenue certificates is specifically provided for in Section 960L of the Taxes Consolidated Act 1997, as amended.

The Sheriffs are not directly accountable to Revenue in regard to their enforcement methodologies, but they are answerable before the Courts for any breach of the civil debt collection law. Once a tax debt is referred to the Sheriff, Revenue ceases to engage with the taxpayer or business in respect of the outstanding amount and all negotiations from that point onwards must be with the Sheriff.

Credit Unions

227. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to create a third force in Irish banking using the credit union network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7734/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): While the Government is absolutely determined to support a strengthened and growing credit union movement, my role as Minister for Finance is to ensure the legal framework for credit unions is appropriate for the effective operation and supervision of credit unions.

Credit unions exist to attain the economic and social goals of their members and it is a matter for an individual credit union to determine how it might develop its business model going forward. However, in doing so a credit union must retain the responsibility of ensuring members' funds are not put at undue risk.

I am always open to considering proposals in relation to credit unions, particularly those that would see the development of the credit union business model and an increase in income for the sector.

The Registrar of Credit Unions at the Central Bank is responsible for the regulation of credit unions and as such, any proposal in relation to credit unions would be subject to regulatory approval by the Regulator.

The Report of the Commission on Credit Unions recommended that the credit union sector be restructured on a voluntary, time-bound and incentivised basis, in order to improve efficiency and maintain the strength and stability of the movement into the future. The Credit Union Restructuring Board (ReBo), was set up under the Credit Union and Co-operation with Overseas Regulators Act 2012, with the objective of supporting the restructuring process to underpin the stability and long-term viability of credit unions and the sector at large and to provide an opportunity for stronger credit unions to develop a more sustainable business model.

I would like to emphasise that while recognising the important role of credit unions as a volunteer co-operative movement and the distinction between credit unions and other types of financial institutions, the Government's priorities remain the protection of members' savings, the financial stability of credit unions and the sector overall.

Property Tax Exemptions

228. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance if consideration has been

given to providing a property tax exemption to households where a high level of care is required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7817/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that while there is no specific exemption from Local Property Tax (LPT) for a household where high level care is provided, a residential property occupied by an individual who is disabled may qualify for a reduction in the market value of the property for LPT purposes. Additionally, where a residential property is occupied by an individual who is permanently and totally incapacitated, the property may be exempt from LPT. These two LPT reliefs are outlined below.

Section 15A of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) provides for a reduction in the market value for LPT purposes of a residential property that has been adapted for occupation by a disabled person where the adaptation has been grant-aided, or approved for grant aid, by a local authority and where the adaptation increases the market value of the property. The person with the disability must occupy the property as his or her sole or main residence after the adaptation is completed. Under the Disability Act 2005 disability means “a substantial restriction in the capacity of an individual to carry on a profession, business or occupation in the State or to participate in social or cultural life in the State by reason of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual impairment.”

Section 10B of the LPT Act provides that an exemption from the charge to LPT may apply to a residential property purchased, built or adapted to make it suitable for occupation by a permanently and totally incapacitated individual as their sole or main residence, where an award has been made by the Injuries Board (formerly known as the Personal Injuries Assessment Board) or a court, or where a trust has been established, specifically for the benefit of such individuals. In the case of adaptations to a property, the exemption only applies where the cost of the adaptation work exceeds 25% of the market value of the property before it was adapted.

Entitlement to the exemption provided for in section 10B will depend on whether the extent of a person’s disability is such that they are permanently and totally incapacitated from being able to maintain themselves. “Maintain” in this context means a person’s ability to support themselves by earning an income from working. Total incapacity in this context means that the individual is not capable of earning a living from any kind of work. The incapacity must also be permanent, that is, there must be no prospect of the individual recovering, or of the condition improving, to the extent that they become capable of maintaining themselves. I am also advised that whether households, where high level care is provided, qualify for relief under section 15A, or for exemption under section 10B, will depend on the facts and circumstances of each case.

The Deputy may be aware that following representations and a review of the reliefs, I announced on 2 May 2014 that I intend bringing forward legislation amending section 15A to remove the requirement that any adaptation work on the residential property must be grant-aided, or has been approved for grant-aid, by a local authority as one of the qualifying conditions for the tax relief. I also intend to remove the requirement, by way of legislation amending section 10B, that a permanent and totally incapacitated person must have benefitted from a Court or Injuries Board award or a public trust fund, to qualify for the exemption.

My officials wrote to the Chairman of the Revenue Commissioners advising her of my intention to retrospectively amend the legislation. In view of this, the Chairman has advised me that Revenue will apply the exemption and the tax relief in line with the proposed revised legislation. The Commissioners have published detailed guidelines which describe how a residential property qualifies for the reduction in market value or the exemption under the new arrangements, and how liable persons should make their application to Revenue. The Guide-

lines are available on their website at: Guidelines on Local Property Tax Relief For Disabled/Incapacitated Individuals.

Under the new arrangements, applications for the reduction in market value should be made on Form LPT6. Applications for the exemption should be made on Form LPT7 or, where the application concerns a permanently and totally incapacitated child for whom the Department of Social Protection pay a Domiciliary Care Allowance Form LPT8 should be completed. Applications should be sent to the Revenue Commissioners, LPT Branch, PO Box 1, Limerick. I am informed that Revenue will examine each application and may seek additional information if considered necessary before determining whether the person is entitled to a reduction in the market value of the property or to the exemption, whichever one is being claimed.

The Commissioners have also advised that no further action is required where a property previously qualified for the reduction in the market value under the LPT legislation and the liable person declared the reduced valuation when filing the 2013 LPT1 Return. Similarly, no further action is required where a property previously qualified for the exemption and the exemption was claimed when filing the 2013 LPT1 Return. The reliefs will continue to apply for all years up to 2016, inclusive.

I have no plans at this time for the further extension of exemptions in relation to the above issues.

Tax Code

229. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Finance the tax implications for a parent, who wishes to financially assist their child with mortgage repayments, where the mortgage is half-paid but the child is currently unemployed; and if the parent will be penalised in the same way as a parent helping a child with a deposit, under the new guidelines. [7826/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that where a parent gives money to a child to assist with mortgage repayments, it is a gift for capital acquisitions tax purposes. In this regard, it is no different to money gifted to a child towards a deposit on a house. Accordingly, the Revenue guidelines to which the Deputy refers (Guide to the CAT treatment of receipts by children from their parents for their support, maintenance or education) apply to a gift of money to assist with mortgage repayments in the same way as to a gift towards a deposit on a house. The guidelines are available on the Revenue website. Therefore, the first €3,000 of such a gift to a child in any year is exempt from CAT under the annual small gifts exemption. This means that a parent can give a gift to a value of €3,000 to a child (or to anyone else) in each calendar year without any CAT charge arising. Where relevant, two parents can make gifts to a child to the value of €6,000 in any year free of CAT or could, if they wished, gift €12,000 in total each year to each son or daughter and to their respective partner (e.g. fiancée, fiancé, daughter-in-law, son-in-law) free of CAT.

If gifts in excess of the annual small gifts exemption of €3,000 are taken in any year, there would be no liability to CAT unless the aggregate amount of gifts and inheritances (if any) taken by the child from his or her parents (not counting small annual gifts of up to €3,000 from each parent, which are exempt) exceed the child's life time tax-free threshold of €225,000. Where the aggregate of the gifts and inheritances received by a child from parents exceeds €225,000, only the excess is charged to tax as demonstrated in Example 1 of the Revenue guidelines.

Fuel Laundering

230. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Finance the number of cases of reported petrol stretching the Revenue Commissioners have detected, or received, since January 2014; the number of these cases that are in counties Longford and Westmeath; if anyone has been prosecuted in relation to petrol stretching; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7839/15]

231. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners have established the possible motives behind petrol stretching; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7840/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 230 and 231 together.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners, who are responsible for tackling fuel fraud, that they are very aware of the risks posed to consumer's vehicles, legitimate businesses and the Exchequer by all forms of fuel fraud.

Revenue has, since last summer, received reports from a variety of locations around the country of problems relating to petrol quality, and suggestions that these problems are attributable to petrol stretching. Petrol stretching involves the illegal addition of a low tax commodity to petrol, and the motive of the criminals who engage in this activity is to profit from the sale of the adulterated petrol, thereby defrauding motorists and the State. Revenue has received 135 complaints to date, the majority of which originated in Revenue's Border Midland West Region. The numbers of complaints relating to counties Longford and Westmeath are 3 and 7 respectively.

Every filling station about which a complaint was made has been visited by Revenue enforcement officers and fuel samples taken from them have been sent for analysis by the State Laboratory. Over 300 samples of petrol from filling stations and other sources have been referred to the State Laboratory.

The scientific analysis required is complex and time-consuming and the State Laboratory has conducted an extensive series of tests and re-tests on the samples. Despite this extensive testing, evidence of the presence of prohibited stretching agents has been found in only two samples, both from one location. The conclusive results received from those tests have resulted in the seizure of the product, and files are being prepared with a view to prosecution.

Following a series of further tests conducted by the State Laboratory, results were received which indicate the presence of traces of road diesel in several samples taken from a variety of locations. This could indicate that petrol was contaminated with road diesel at some point in time. There is no rational economic reason or fraudulent incentive for anyone to mix normal road diesel with petrol. If the problems that have come to light were caused by unintended contamination as a result of diesel being inadvertently mixed with petrol at some point along the supply chain, there would be no Revenue offence involved. However, the Revenue Commissioners are investigating vigorously the possibility of tax fraud being associated with the identified problems. In any instances where the analysis of samples by the State Laboratory indicates the presence of illegal stretching agents in petrol, Revenue will take swift and robust action and pursue prosecutions against alleged offenders where possible.

Revenue will also continue to work closely with An Garda Síochána and share information and intelligence with them on this issue.

I am also advised by Revenue that they undertake, on an ongoing basis, an extensive programme of compliance and enforcement actions to ensure adherence to the legal requirements

governing the supply and sale of mineral oil and to allow action to be taken against fraud. This involves, among other things, carrying out analysis of the monthly oil movement returns that oil traders are required to make, and of other supply chain data. In addition, Revenue officers conduct control or compliance visits to mineral oil traders, during which they examine transport and movement documents and take samples of fuel for analysis.

I am satisfied that the Revenue Commissioners are taking all possible action to identify the problem and challenge any instances of identified fuel fraud, including, where possible, pursuing prosecutions against offenders.

Financial Services Regulation

232. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to assist those who invested their pension fund with a company (details supplied) and whose fund was misappropriated, leaving them without any retirement income, in view of the fact, that as a result of legislative change, neither the regulator nor any of the directors have been held accountable to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7887/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I understand that the Deputy is referring to the case of Custom House Capital (CHC) which is now in liquidation.

The Central Bank's investigation into CHC and persons concerned in its management has been on-going since the publication of the Final Report to the High Court by Court Appointed Inspectors dated 19 October 2011. Upon presentation of the Final Inspectors' Report to the High Court in October 2011, Mr. Justice Hogan ordered that CHC be wound up immediately. It should be noted that copies of the Final Report have been provided to other relevant state authorities for their consideration i.e. the Minister for Justice and Equality, to the Director of Public Prosecutions, to the Director of Corporate Enforcement, to the Revenue Commissioners and to the Garda Commissioner.

Following consultation with An Garda Síochána, the Central Bank's investigation has been deferred pending completion of investigations by An Garda Síochána.

In order to enhance the investor protection legislative framework, the Central Bank has been provided with extensive new powers since the onset of the financial crises to prevent the loss of client assets as occurred in the case of CHC. The principal developments are set out below:

New rules in respect of key management positions

Under the Central Bank Reform Act 2010 a new Fitness and Probity Regime came into effect on 1 December 2011 for all regulated financial service providers other than credit unions (whose fitness and probity regime came in on 1 August 2013). This new regime was fully implemented by 1 December 2012.

47 senior positions are prescribed as Pre-Approval Controlled Functions for regulated financial service providers other than credit unions. The prior approval of the Central Bank of Ireland is required before an individual can be appointed to a Pre-Approval Controlled Function.

Enhanced monitoring and enforcement powers for the Central Bank

The Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act, 2013 (the "Act") was enacted on 11 July 2013 and came into operation on 1 August 2013, with the exception of Section 72. This Act significantly enhances the capacity of the Central Bank to supervise regulated financial

services providers and enforce financial services legislation. The fitness and probity provisions are reinforced by the whistleblower protections. The Act also provides for the Central Bank to commission, as part of the proper and effective regulation of financial service providers, an independent expert report at the cost of the financial service provider. It strengthens the authorised officer regime, enables the Central Bank to secure assurances from auditors of regulated financial service providers. It also strengthens the enforcement powers of the Central Bank and provides for a substantial increase in monetary penalties. The Central Bank also has the power to suspend or revoke a regulated entity's authorisation following an Inquiry.

Client Assets Regulations for investment firms

An independent review of the Regulatory Regime for the Safekeeping of Client Assets was published by the Central Bank in 2012 and is available on the Central Bank website. The Central Bank accepted the specific recommendations contained in this independent review and established a process of implementing all of the necessary changes required. In 2013 the Central Bank published on its website a Consultation Paper on Client Assets Regulations and Guidance, which will replace the existing client assets requirements (issued in 2007). It is envisaged that the new rules for the Safekeeping of Client Assets will be in place in the first half of this year.

Return of Investor Funds Client or Other Client Property Regulations under the Investor Compensation Act 1998

This Investor Compensation Act was amended in 2013 (section 33b) to give the Minister for Finance regulation making powers providing for the return of investors' funds or investment instruments following the appointment of an administrator, where the Minister considers it necessary to do so in order to provide for their efficient, equitable and prompt return. A Working Group, chaired by my Department and also represented by the Central Bank and the Investor Compensation Company Limited, was established in April 2014 to draft such regulations. A public consultation on these draft regulations was held (closed on 23 January 2015). I would anticipate being able to bring forward these regulations in the first half of this year. They will very much complement the Client Assets Regulations for investment firms.

The Central Bank provides updates on the CHC case which can be accessed at: <http://www.centralbank.ie/press-area/press-releases/pages/updateoncustomhousecapital.aspx>.

Tax Credits

233. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding a tax allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7937/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that following contact with them by the person concerned in January 2012, his tax credits were increased in the light of the information he provided and which information he was to have confirmed in writing by the Department of Social Protection (DSP). He failed to subsequently provide this written confirmation.

In February 2015, following receipt of a health expenses claim for the year 2014, a review of the tax liability of the person concerned was carried out. It transpires that rather than two separate DSP pensions for the person concerned and his spouse, he is in fact in receipt of a DSP Old Age Pension with an increase in respect of a Qualified Adult. In the circumstances he is entitled to one PAYE Tax Credit only. He is not entitled to an additional PAYE Tax Credit or an additional Standard Rate Band in respect of the Qualified Adult portion of his pension.

24 February 2015

The underpayment of tax for 2014 arises due to the removal of the additional PAYE Credit of €1,650 and the additional Standard Rate Band. The arrears will be collected through a reduction in the person's tax credits over a 4 year period commencing 1 January 2016.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that an amended tax credit certificate will issue shortly which will show the correct tax credits due for 2015.

Should the person concerned require further clarification or assistance he may contact Ms Aisling Malone, City Centre/North City Revenue District, 14/15 Upper O Connell St., Dublin 1, telephone number 01 8655511.

Income Inequality

234. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to address the income inequalities here, as outlined in the report of the Think-tank for Action on Social Change, launched on 16 February 2015. [7949/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I note the report by the Think-Tank for Social Change (TASC) and their views on inequality in Ireland.

While inequality is an important issue, not just for Ireland but globally, the Deputy should be aware that the TASC report identifies high levels of inequality in respect of market incomes. When inequality in Ireland is looked at in terms of disposable income, in other words what people have in their pockets, Ireland is in very much line with the EU 28 average. This is recognised by TASC in their report. This reflects, inter alia, the effectiveness of the Irish tax and social welfare system in reducing inequality of market incomes. This is evidenced by the fact that the tax and social welfare system in Ireland reduces the Gini-coefficient (which is a measure of income inequality) by more than any other country in the OECD.

While our tax and social welfare system already does much to reduce market income inequality a number of Government policies should help to reduce income inequality over the coming years. In the most recent Budget, the Government removed 80,000 people from liability to the Universal Social Charge (USC).

Lowering the tax burden on those lower down the income distribution not only has the effect of helping to further reduce disposable income inequality it also serves to make work pay, rewarding the unemployed who take up employment. It is well recognised that participation in the labour market is one of the most effective ways to reduce income inequality, especially market income inequality. In keeping with this, the Government has made a commitment to the unemployed through further education and training programmes such as Momentum and Springboard. These provide the skills necessary for those currently unemployed to benefit from job creation.

Beyond these policies the Government has established the Low Pay Commission which will advise the Government annually on the National Minimum Wage earned by those at the bottom of the wage distribution.

I am confident that the continued pursuit of these Government policies over the coming years will help to promote fairness and combat income inequality.

Banking Operations

235. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the frustration among the public and business community that automated teller machines (ATMs) in the State are often not working, or have insufficient cash, particularly at weekends; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7957/15]

236. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he or the Central Bank of Ireland have any means of ascertaining the number of automated teller machines, ATMs, working, and able to dispense all the requested cash, at a given time, at State owned banks; if so, if he will provide those figures for the week to 7 February 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7958/15]

237. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the progress made on commitments provided by banks that more automated teller machines (ATMs) will provide €10 notes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7959/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 235 to 237, inclusive, together.

It is the responsibility of the banks to ensure the efficient running of the ATM network and for ensuring that ATMs are sufficiently maintained and have adequate levels of cash in them.

In regard to Question No. 237, ref. 7959, the National Payments Plan, which was published in April 2013, recommended that a minimum of 5% of all notes (by volume) distributed from non-retailer ATMs by each financial institution should be €10 notes by Q3 2014. The Central Bank of Ireland have advised me that this target was met.

Revenue Commissioners Expenditure

238. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to provide funding to the Revenue Commissioners for the purchase of additional mobile X-ray vans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7982/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that Revenue currently has three mobile scanner systems. Two of these are mobile x-ray container scanning systems that are based at Dublin Port and Rosslare Ferry Port respectively. Both of these scanners are available for deployment at other ports, and at other locations such as warehouses, as required, and Revenue uses them, on the basis of risk assessment, at a range of locations. The other mobile scanning system is a scanner van, a specialist vehicle incorporating x-ray and radiation detection facilities. It is used for monitoring baggage and cargo at airports and ports for narcotics, cigarettes, radioactive material and other contraband. It also allows Revenue officers to carry out control actions at other locations such as warehouses and courier depots.

The Revenue Commissioners continuously review their detection technology requirements, taking account of developments in those technologies and emerging circumstances and requirements. I understand that the performance of the scanner van has been under evaluation on an ongoing basis since its acquisition, and that the possibility of augmenting this resource with additional similar units is being considered. The question of funding will be addressed when a final determination has been made on scanner van requirements.

Tax Rebates

239. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if a refund of income tax will be granted to a person outside of the normal four-year rule, if the overpayment of tax arises due to an error on the part of the Revenue Commissioner's by including income in the wrong spousal column, on the P21 balancing statement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7989/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been advised by the Revenue Commissioners that they are statutorily debarred from making repayments of tax outside of the four year period from the end of the tax year in respect of which the tax was paid, other than in very specific circumstances (for example, where there is a factual error in a tax computation). Equally, Revenue can not seek payment of tax from a taxpayer outside of a four year time frame, other than in very specific circumstances (for example where an incomplete tax return is filed).

The question of whether or not a repayment claim made outside the four year period falls within the specific circumstances referred to above is considered by Revenue on the basis of the particular facts of each case and, as such, it is not possible to confirm for the Deputy that a refund will be made in the particular circumstances of the case described, based solely on the information provided in the question.

However, if the individual the Deputy is referring to submits all relevant information to his or her local Revenue Office in relation to the claim, the matter can be fully considered by that office on the basis of the full facts, having regard to the statutory provisions.

Revenue Commissioners Investigations

240. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners will investigate the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare in respect of that person's employment. [7999/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been advised by the Revenue Commissioners that in the light of the information available to them and the information now provided they will make contact with the person concerned to clarify the position.

National Pensions Reserve Fund Investments

241. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide, in detail, all the spending and investments from the National Pensions Reserve Fund's discretionary portfolio; including the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund since March 2011, showing the balance at the end of each year, and as of 1 February 2015. [8079/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy will already be aware that the assets of the National Pensions Reserve Fund (NPRF) became assets of the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) on 22 December 2014, except for assets governed by foreign law which remain NPRF assets until their transfer. The ISIF will be used to make commercial investments that support economic activity and employment in Ireland. For the purposes of this material, the asset analysis is based on a combination of both funds.

The National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) has advised that the preliminary value of the discretionary portfolio held by the ISIF/NPRF as at the 31 December 2014 is €7.2bn (this is a preliminary unaudited figure). The detailed schedule of investments as at 31 December 2014 will be included in the Fund's Annual Report, which will be published before the end

of June 2015, in accordance with statutory requirements.

The Discretionary Portfolio Asset Allocation as at 31 December 2014 is set out as follows:

Asset Class	Value (€m)	% of Discretionary Portfolio
Large Cap Equities	1,281	17.9
Small Cap Equities	239	3.3
Emerging Market Equities	255	3.6
Total Quoted Equities	1,775	24.8
Value of Equity Put Options	31	0.4
Inflation Linked Bonds	148	2.1
Corporate Bonds	1,378	19.2
Cash & Cash Equivalents	2,403	33.6
Total Financial Assets	3,929	54.9
Private Equity	234	3.3
Property	244	3.4
Commodities	307	4.3
Infrastructure	369	5.2
Absolute Return Funds	274	3.8
Total Alternative Assets	1,428	19.9
TOTAL DISCRETIONARY PORTFOLIO	7,162	100.0

The NTMA will report on ISIF investments on a quarterly basis in summary form and in detail at year end, therefore the next data published will be as at 31 March 2015.

A detailed schedule of investments is included in the annual report and financial statements for the NPRF for the year-ended 2011, 2012 and 2013 in the section “Portfolio of Investments”. The expenditure incurred in 2011 and 2012 can be found within note 6 to the respective financial statements. The expenditure incurred in 2013 can be found within note 5 to the 2013 financial statements. The expenditure incurred in 2014 is being finalised as part of the ongoing year end accounting process.

The link to each report on the NPRF website is as follows:

<http://www.nprf.ie/Publications/2014/AnnualReport2013.pdf>

<http://www.nprf.ie/Publications/2013/AnnualReport2012.pdf>

<http://www.nprf.ie/Publications/2012/NPRFReport2011.pdf>

Fuel Laundering

242. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of lost revenue to the State by diesel laundering over each of the past five years; the number of cases successfully prosecuted of those involved in the practice; the revenue collected by the State, arising from successful prosecutions; the level of resources allocated to investigate such matters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8091/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy will appreciate that it is

inherently difficult to estimate the scale of any illegal activity or the impact of that activity on the Exchequer. The Revenue Commissioners advise me that, while there is no reliable estimate of the extent of illegal activity in the fuel sector, they recognise that fuel fraud, including the laundering of markers from rebated fuel, is a significant threat to Exchequer revenues. Action against this illegal activity is, therefore, a priority for Revenue, which is implementing a comprehensive strategy to tackle the problem. Key elements of this strategy include the following:

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

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

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

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

- Close co-operation, in the framework of the Cross Border Fuel Fraud Enforcement Group, with other enforcement authorities in this jurisdiction and in Northern Ireland in combating the all-island problem of fuel fraud. This has proven effective in supporting the identification and targeting of the organised crime groups, many with links to paramilitaries and former paramilitaries, which are responsible for the bulk of fuel fraud.

- Following a joint process, Revenue and HM Revenue and Customs have identified a new and more effective product to mark rebated fuels. The new marker will be produced by Dow Chemical Company and will be introduced in the State and in the UK from the end of March 2015, providing a significant boost in the fight against illegal fuel laundering in both jurisdictions. In addition, I have introduced a range of legislative measures in recent years to support Revenue's work in fighting fuel fraud, including reckless trading provisions that ensure a mineral oil trader is liable for the mineral oil tax evaded where that trader knew, or was reckless as to whether or not, in making a supply or delivery, he or she was participating in a transaction or series of transactions connected to the evasion of mineral oil tax. In the Finance Act 2014, I introduced measures to further strengthen Revenue's ability to refuse or revoke a mineral oil trader's licence where the trader does not comply with excise law, does not maintain adequate stock management systems and records, or provides false or misleading information. Revenue's strategy has yielded significant results. Since mid-2011, 134 filling stations were closed for breaches of licensing conditions, over 3 million litres of oil have been seized and 31 oil laundries were detected and closed down. Industry sources indicate a much-reduced incidence of laundered fuel on the market, and road diesel consumption and tax revenues have risen significantly compared with a couple of years ago. Obviously, other economic factors have contributed to this growth but reduced fraud is also an important factor. There were four convictions between 2010 and 2014 for offences related to the illegal laundering of markers from fuel. In addition, there were twelve convictions in that period for offences related to the sale or distribution of laundered fuel, in respect of which the penalties imposed by the Courts included fines amounting to €37,000. The Revenue Commissioners are not responsible for the collection of fines imposed by the Courts and would not have details about their payment. The Revenue Commissioners work to ensure also that the tax affairs on any persons found to be involved in the illegal laundering of fuel are subjected to full and rigorous examination, and

that monies owed, including interest and penalties where applicable, are recovered. In relation to the resources allocated to investigate this form of fuel fraud, I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that they are a fully integrated tax and customs administration and that it is not possible to disaggregate resources deployed exclusively at any given time on action against fuel laundering. Revenue currently has approximately 2,000 staff engaged on activities that are dedicated to targeting and confronting non-compliance. These front-line activities include anti-smuggling and anti-evasion, investigation and prosecution, audit, assurance checks, anti-avoidance, returns compliance and debt collection. The Revenue Commissioners were subject to the Employment Control Framework staffing reductions imposed since 2009. Revenue's overall staffing levels have reduced from a total of 6,581 full-time equivalents at the end of 2008 to the current level of 5,661. Notwithstanding this reduction, Revenue staff resources assigned to compliance activities have been maintained at around 2,000. I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that they are committed to ensuring that, despite the staffing reductions, enforcement work generally, and action against fuel fraud specifically, will continue to be resourced to the maximum extent possible.

Fuel Rebate Scheme

243. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding a fuel rebate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8100/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I introduced this scheme in the Finance Act 2013 in order to provide for a repayment to qualifying road haulage and bus operators of a part of the mineral oil tax paid on their purchases of auto-diesel for use in the course of business. In order to address the risk of widespread abuse of the scheme, provision was made for certain restrictions on the means by which the auto-diesel concerned may be purchased. Purchases in bulk must be made from a licensed mineral oil trader, and delivered, in a quantity exceeding 2,000 litres, to a premises or place that is under the control of that qualifying road transport operator.

Bulk purchases from licensed mineral oil traders can be verified by reference to the monthly electronic returns that the oil traders are required to make to Revenue. These returns form part of the supply chain controls introduced by Revenue to tackle the problem of illicit fuel, prior to the introduction of the diesel rebate scheme. The return provides an electronic record of the purchases, stock movements and sales of mineral oil each month by licensed mineral oil traders, by oil product type, including bulk sales to customers exceeding 2000 litres. This information can be used to verify electronically claims for bulk purchases under the diesel rebate scheme.

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

As outlined, the scheme is not solely confined to the minimum purchase requirement of 2,000 litres. Purchases by a qualifying coach operator by means of a fuel card approved by Revenue are not subject to a minimum purchase requirement and allow the coach operator concerned to avoid fuel storage while claiming under the scheme, thereby alleviating the security risks identified.

The current purchasing arrangements under the scheme are necessary to enable Revenue

to manage repayments to qualifying transport operators while controlling the risk of fraud. I am satisfied that the purchasing arrangements achieve the right balance between making the scheme available to compliant transport operators and allowing Revenue to manage effectively the risk of fraud and I do not plan to change these arrangements.

Fiscal Policy

244. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he has had discussions with the European Commission regarding the expenditure benchmark, and its application to Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8137/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): My officials are in regular engagement with the Commission on the interpretation and implementation of fiscal rules, including through the Output Gap Working Group and the Alternates sub-committee of the Economic & Financial Committee.

The Expenditure Benchmark will formally apply to Ireland once we enter the preventive arm of the Stability & Growth Pact. In terms of the application of the Expenditure Benchmark to Ireland, most of the components determining the calculation for 2016 are fixed at this point. The outstanding variable for 2016 is the relevant GDP deflator, which will be taken as the average of the Commission's 2015 Spring and Autumn forecasts. Given the composition of the Irish economy, there is significant volatility around GDP deflator estimates for Ireland in particular. The Commission's Spring forecast is expected to be published in the coming months. The European Commission are expected to inform Member States of the country-specific reference rate and the convergence margin components of the benchmark to apply to each Member State for the years 2017-2019 in late 2015. Discussions around these matters remain ongoing at technical level.

Stability and Growth Pact

245. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the Budget Statement 2016 will be drafted with full regard to the expenditure benchmark; and further to Parliamentary Question No. 43 of 3 December 2014, if he will provide an update on these figures. [8138/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): After Ireland corrects its EDP in 2015, it will enter the preventive arm of the Stability & Growth Pact from 2016 onwards. This will mean that Ireland will be subject to a series of fiscal rules, including the achievement of our Medium Term Objective (MTO) through the annual improvement in the structural balance and the Expenditure Benchmark. In developing Budget 2016, Ireland will comply with the requirements of the Stability & Growth Pact.

With regard to an update of the figures in Parliamentary Question No. 43 of 3 December 2014, the general government expenditure forecasts are unchanged to those published in Budget 2015. The Spring Economic Statement due to be announced in April will contain revised forecasts for general government expenditure.

Tax Credits

246. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Finance if an application for single person child care credit will be approved in respect of a person (details supplied) in Coun-

ty Kilkenny in view of the fact that the person's circumstances remain the same as in 2014 [8145/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the application for SPCC has been approved in respect of person concerned. The increased tax credit will be reflected in a revised tax credit certificate that will be sent to the person concerned shortly.

Mortgage Interest Rates

247. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on concerns at the current levels of home mortgage variable interest rates being charged by the pillar and other banks, especially in view of the much lower average level of similar interest rates charges across the eurozone. [8176/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy may be aware that this is a topic that has been raised through previous parliamentary questions and was subject to lengthy discussions at the most recent meetings of the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform with the banks' CEOs.

At the Committee the banks pointed out that in comparing the SVR mortgage margin of Irish banks to other jurisdictions, it is important to understand that the difference reflects many factors and in particular loss experience which determines the capital that must be held against these loans. In recent years this has obviously been very different for Irish banks compared to their counterparts in other European countries. Funding models also differ between Ireland and other countries. Finally, they pointed out the shortcomings of comparing mortgage rates against short term ECB funding rates given the significant liquidity risk which is a feature of mortgages that typically have a term of 20+ years.

The Deputy will be aware however that I, in my role as Minister for Finance, have no direct function in the relationship between the banks and their customers. I have no statutory function in relation to the banking decisions made by individual lending institutions at any particular time and these are taken by the board and management of the relevant institution. This includes decisions in relation to product interest rates as determined by the banks from time to time.

Notwithstanding the State's shareholdings in the banks, I must ensure that the banks are run on a commercial, cost effective and independent basis to ensure their value as an asset to the State. A Relationship Framework has been specified that defines the nature of the relationship between the Minister for Finance and each bank. These Frameworks were published on 30 March 2012 and can be found at <http://banking.finance.gov.ie/presentations-and-latest-documents>.

Tax Code

248. **Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners treat payments to Reserve Defence Force Army Reserve/Naval Service Reserve volunteers the same as payments to employees, meaning that income tax and PRSI and USC contributions must be withheld; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8189/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the Department of Defence make the appropriate deductions of tax, USC and

PRSI under the PAYE system on the making of payments to members of the Army and Naval Service Reserve.

Tax Code

249. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons who applied to the Revenue Commissioners for the artists' exemption scheme since 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8260/15]

250. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons who were granted an exemption by the Revenue Commissioners under the artists' exemption scheme since 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8261/15]

251. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons who appealed a refusal under the artists' exemption scheme to the appeals commissioner, since 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8262/15]

252. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Finance the number of appeals under the artists' exemption scheme that were successful since 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8263/15]

253. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Finance the number of successful appeals under the artists' exemption scheme which were challenged by the Revenue Commissioners since 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8264/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 249 to 253, inclusive, together.

Section 195 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (TCA 1997) empowers the Revenue Commissioners to make a determination that certain artistic works are original and creative works generally recognised as having cultural or artistic merit.

The scheme provides that the Revenue Commissioners can make determinations in respect of artistic works in the following categories only:-

1. a book or other writing;
2. a play;
3. a musical composition;
4. a painting or other like picture;
5. a sculpture.

The Revenue Commissioners have provided the following statistics regarding the Artists' Exemption Scheme for the period 2005 to 2014:

Year	Number of Applications made to the Revenue Commissioners	Number of cases where the exemption was granted by the Revenue Commissioners	Number of Appeals against refusals by the Revenue Commissioners to grant the exemption	Number of successful Appeals	Number of Challenges to successful Appeals made by the Revenue Commissioners
2005	662	488	3	1	0
2006	654	486	6	4	0
2007	613	418	4	3	1(1)
2008	648	417	2	1	0
2009	534	386	2	1	0
2010	445	389	11	5	0
2011	417	308	11	7	1(2)
2012	385	308	12	3	0
2013	433	301	7	1(3)	0
2014	404	329	4(4)	0	0
Total	5,195	3,830	62	26	2

A determination in respect of a work covers both the original work submitted as well as any future work in the same category, provided that the future work comes within scope of the scheme. However, a fresh application must be made to Revenue in respect of work produced in a different category.

- (1) This case was not concluded until 2014;
- (2) This case is ongoing;
- (3) A decision in a further case has been deferred by the Appeal Commissioner;
- (4) These cases have yet to be heard by the Appeal Commissioner.

Departmental Staff

254. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the proposal to require all public sector workers under the aegis of his Department who interface with service users to wear a name badge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8657/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In response to the Deputy's question I am not aware of a proposal to require all public sector workers under the aegis of my Department who interface with service users to wear a name badge. In the interest of improving customer service standards I am open to consideration of such a proposal. As the Deputy will be aware some bodies under my aegis, have little or no direct contact with members of the public while others interface regularly. I expect all bodies under the Aegis of my Department to provide the highest standards of customer service in all dealings with customers. However, consultations with my colleagues, staff, trade unions and the bodies concerned would have to take place to progress such a proposal.

Flood Risk Assessments

255. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will address a serious flooding risk at a location (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7716/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The River Laune is not a designated channel under an OPW arterial drainage scheme and therefore the OPW is not responsible for its maintenance. The channel is in a Drainage District and its maintenance is the responsibility of Kerry County Council.

If the flooding problem in the location mentioned is due to factors other than a lack of maintenance by the Council, the Local Authority may apply to the Office of Public Works which operates a Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme. This administrative Scheme's eligibility criteria, including a requirement that any measures are cost beneficial are published on the OPW website, www.opw.ie. It is not available for repair of damaged infrastructure or for maintenance of existing flood defence or coastal protection assets. A Local Authority may apply to the OPW for support under the scheme having regards to those eligibility criteria. Application forms are available on OPW's website under Flood Risk Management and decisions are made having regard to the overall availability of funding for flood risk management.

However, if the problem is due to lack of maintenance, it is entirely a matter for the County Council.

Office of Public Works Projects

256. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding a permit and a competition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7883/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Office of Public Works (OPW) intend to advertise an additional Permit for the Skellig Michael passenger route and, with this in mind, are currently preparing a Competition process to allow interested parties to apply to be considered.

The award of the Permit will be made by the OPW after a publicly advertised competition process and it will be open to all parties with an interest to submit applications at the appropriate time.

Currently, the OPW are finalising the necessary documentation and legal consultation and expect to advertise the competition publicly as soon as it is feasible. It is not expected that the competition process will be concluded in time for the start of the new Season in mid May, though it is hoped that a new Operator will be in a position to commence during the course of this year.

Freedom of Information Remit

257. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when an An Garda Síochána will be in a position to accept requests under the Freedom of Information Acts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7980/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Freedom of Information Act 2014 came into effect on 14 October 2014. In line with the Programme for Government, the Act provides for the extension of FOI to An Garda Síochána for its administrative records relating to human resources, or finance or procurement matters, subject to security exemptions.

In accordance with Section 1(3)(b) of the FOI Act 2014, in the case of a public body - such as An Garda Síochána - that was not subject to FOI under the FOI Act 1997 but is subject to FOI under the 2014 Act, the Act will apply to that body 6 months from enactment or on such later day, not later than 12 months from enactment, as the Minister may by order appoint.

Following consideration of the case made by and on behalf of An Garda Síochána relating to the size, scale and the geographically dispersed nature of the organisation, I have agreed that the maximum lead-in time provided for under the Act for the application of FOI could be allowed in respect of An Garda Síochána.

My decision as set out above will require a Ministerial Order before it comes into effect. I intend, therefore, to make an Order shortly to provide that FOI will apply to An Garda Síochána with effect from 14 October 2015 in respect of the records detailed above. The Order will be laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas in accordance with normal procedure.

Garda Station Refurbishment

258. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide an update on the former Castletownshend Garda station, County Cork [8069/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Commissioners of Public Works are in the process of assigning the former Garda Station at Castletownshend, Co. Cork for use by Castletownshend Community Association for community and voluntary activities for a period of not less than 3 years.

The Chief State Solicitors Office (CSSO) are preparing the licence which sets out the terms and conditions that are applicable to the use of a State property. They have requested further legal information from the solicitors representing this Association. When this information is received and the legal process is complete, it is hoped that the CSSO will be in a position to finalise the licence.

Garda Station Refurbishment

259. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the projected timeframe for the completion of the planned renovation works on the old Garda station in Whitehall, Dublin 9; and when the new uses for the building will become fully operational. [8105/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): Tenders have been issued to secure a Main Contractor to carry out the renovation works at the former Whitehall Garda Station to accommodate the Dublin City Mortuary and the Office of the State Pathologist.

It is expected that a Contractor will be appointed in April 2015. Subject to placing the contract, scheduled completion is the end of Q4 2015. It is expected that the building will become fully operational immediately on completion.

Departmental Staff

260. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on the proposal to require all public sector workers under the aegis of his Department who interface with service users to wear a name badge. [7961/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In response to the Deputy's question I can confirm that my Department, and the Offices under my aegis, have little or no direct contact with members of the public. Despite this, it is a well-established policy of my Department that all officers supply their names in any dealings with the public. I would have no objection to this idea but consultations with my colleagues, staff and trade unions would have to take place before consideration could be given to implementing this step.

Departmental Staff Sick Leave

261. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the way persons with a critical illness can avail of sick leave, if they have used up all of their sick leave entitlement in one year, but still need to access sick leave, to continue with their treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7994/15]

262. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the way persons who return to work after a critical illness can avail of sick leave, if they have used up all of their sick leave entitlement in one year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7995/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 261 and 262 together.

The Public Service Sick Leave Scheme came into effect for the generality of the Public Service on 31st March 2014 and for the Education Sector on 1 September 2014.

Under the Sick Leave Scheme, public servants have access to the following paid sick leave a maximum of 92 days (3 months) on full pay in a rolling one year period; followed by a maximum of 91 days (3 months) on half pay; subject to a maximum of 183 days (6 months) paid sick leave in a rolling four year period.

In addition, public servants may be awarded Temporary Rehabilitation Remuneration (TRR) where they have exhausted their access to paid sick leave and there is a reasonable prospect of them returning to work and providing regular and effective service. TRR is paid at the same rate at which an ill health retirement pension would be.

In order to provide support to public servants who suffer from a critical illness or injury, the Scheme provides for up to 365 days' paid sick leave in a four year period (comprising 183 days on full pay in a rolling one year period, followed by 182 days on half pay).

A public servant who wishes to avail of extended sick pay for a critical illness or injury must apply to management in his or her organisation. In the Civil Service, for example, a civil servant must complete an application form and submit it to the Human Resources Manager in his or her Department/Office.

The Critical Illness Protocol (CIP) sets out the circumstances in which a HR Manager may grant access to extended paid sick leave under the critical illness provisions. In the first instance the employer's occupational health physician must certify that an illness or injury sat-

ifies the following medical criteria: 1. the employee is medically unfit to return to his or her current duties or (where practicable) modified duties in the same pay grade; and 2. The nature of this medical condition has at least one of the following characteristics: acute life threatening physical illness; chronic progressive illness, with well-established potential to reduce life expectancy (in circumstances where there is no medical intervention); major physical trauma ordinarily requiring corrective acute operative surgical treatment; in-patient hospital care of two consecutive weeks or greater. In the case of pregnancy-related or assisted pregnancy-related illness, the requirement for hospitalisation of two consecutive weeks will be reduced to two or more consecutive days of in-patient hospital/clinic care.

The HR Manager will then decide, following consideration of the advice of the occupational health physician, whether to grant extended paid sick leave under the critical illness provisions. It should also be noted that where there are - in objective terms - exceptional circumstances relating to an illness or injury that warrant the application of the critical illness provisions where the strict medical criteria do not apply, the HR Manager may grant access to extended paid sick leave.

International Agreements

263. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No.241 of 17 February 2015, if, and the way, Ireland's treaty obligation to ensure progressive realisation of economic, social and cultural rights to the maximum of available resources is taken into account in the comprehensive review of expenditure process; if the various Departments are instructed to undertake an analysis in meeting these obligations in preparation of their departmental submission papers; and if his Department takes account of these obligations in preparation of its own Department-by-Department analysis papers, drawn up in response to the departmental submissions. [8074/15]

265. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will itemise the specific measures by which the Government's treaty obligation to ensure progressive realisation of economic, social and cultural rights to the maximum of available resources is reflected in the expenditure measures in budget 2015. [8076/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 263 and 265 together.

The Government's priorities in returning stability to the public finances, have been to meet fiscal targets while also ensuring that economic recovery is supported and the most vulnerable in society are protected. This approach to economic and fiscal policy, through maintaining an acceptable social safety net and returning the unemployed to work, has been consistent with the ideals set out under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Expenditure in critical economic and social sectors has been protected to the greatest extent possible: in 2015 some four-fifths of gross voted current expenditure is allocated to the Social Protection, Health and Education sectors. Our continued prioritisation of these sectors has meant that primary social welfare rates have been maintained since this Government took office. Our commitment to protecting our society's most vulnerable is also found in recent data published by Eurostat showing that Ireland's system of social transfers, the redistribution of wealth and income to those most in need, is among the most effective in Europe at reducing the at risk of poverty rate.

Aside from social transfers, the fundamental reforms to labour market activation undertaken

by this Government represent a significant modernisation of Ireland's approach to tackling unemployment through a two-pronged approach: Pathways to Work ensures that the unemployed are given a chance to up-skill and re-join the workforce; while the Action Plan for Jobs has directed its efforts towards boosting labour demand through key reforms.

Similarly, our investment in the Health sector has ensured that key frontline services have been maintained and will be enhanced further through initiatives such as extending free GP care to children under 6 years of age. In the area of Education we have sought to protect DEIS expenditure which prioritises the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged areas. Furthermore, this prioritisation of expenditure has been pursued against the backdrop of increasing demands on public services due to cyclical economic conditions and demographic factors.

Last year's Comprehensive Review of Expenditure informed the expenditure measures in Budget 2015. The Review was informed by Government priorities and took into account economic and societal demands. The main objectives of the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure process were to provide Government with the necessary evidence and analysis to re-align spending with the priorities set out in the Programme for Government; meet overall fiscal objectives; and explore new and innovative ways of delivering Government policy in a reformed public sector.

In the context of the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure, Ministers and their Departments had primary responsibility for delivering a detailed expenditure report based on evaluation of each budgetary programme under their remit, including programmes delivered by Government Agencies. The analysis carried out by Departments drew on a wide-ranging base of evidence developed since the last Comprehensive Review of Expenditure, including previous expenditure evaluations and policy analysis. Naturally, as part of the overall approach to undertaking this analysis Departments considered any relevant obligations leading to expenditure commitments, as deemed appropriate by each Department.

Overall the Government's approach to implementing the difficult but necessary fiscal adjustment over recent years has ensured that vital public services were protected during challenging economic times. On the back of these efforts, the economic and fiscal position in which Ireland now finds itself is vastly improved, and Budget 2015 provided an opportunity to alleviate pressures and enhance certain key services. The Comprehensive Expenditure Report 2015-2017 and the Revised Estimates for Public Services 2015 protects and provides for expenditure allocations in fundamental policy areas: anticipated Live Register savings from falling unemployment in 2015 have been reinvested to ensure that Ireland's effective system of social transfers is adequately funded in the face of rising demographic pressures; the allocation provided to the Health sector will deliver 1.7 million Medical Cards and a further 0.4 million GP Visit Cards; capital investment of €2.2bn (public and private) on the multi-annual housing programme will lead to an additional 10,000 social housing units by 2018; increased investment in education will allow for an additional 920 mainstream teachers, an additional 480 resource teachers for children with special education needs and 365 Special Needs Assistants; funding is provided for the establishment of the Low Pay Commission. The overall 2015 expenditure allocations will support the ongoing work of Government in furthering the economic, social and cultural rights of all Irish citizens.

International Agreements

264. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 241 of 17 February 2015, if he will report on his

Department's contribution to the interdepartmental progress consultation on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights currently under way. [8075/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is currently in the process of compiling a Response to the List of Issues drawn up by the United Nations Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights in relation to the third periodic examination of Ireland under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) which is scheduled to take place in June 2015. They have written to relevant Departments requesting inputs to the Response. My Department is in the process of preparing its reply to that request. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade will compile the final report on the basis of inputs from Departments.

Question No. 265 answered with Question No. 263.

Ministerial Pensions

266. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide, in tabular form, a list of the annual pension payments to former Ministers and taoisigh, following the Haddington Road agreement reductions, sorted by payment, high to low, including the recipient's name. [8077/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The following table contains the pension amounts payable to former Officeholders in 2014.

I would like to advise that, in certain cases, the pension amounts shown do not reflect the actual amount of pension in payment where an individual is 'gifting' all or part of their pension to the State, or where a pension is subject to certain provisions of the Family Law Acts. It is the policy of my Department not to release personal information of that nature.

Name	Pension 2014 € p.a.
BERTIE AHERN	80,810.86
BRIAN COWEN	80,810.86
JOHN BRUTON	72,908.94
MICHAEL MCDOWELL	64,958.14
MARY HARNEY	63,478.22
PETER BARRY	57,576.82
DICK SPRING	56,386.20
DESMOND O' MALLEY	56,059.64
JOHN O'DONOGHUE	54,812.94
MARTIN CULLEN	54,812.94
SEAN TREACY	54,812.68
MICHAEL SMITH	54,812.68
CHARLES JOHN MCCREEVY	54,812.68
DERMOT AHERN	54,570.62
MICHAEL WOODS	53,733.42
MICHAEL L O' KENNEDY	53,268.54
RORY O'HANLON	53,018.94
MARY O'ROURKE	52,710.84
ALBERT REYNOLDS (RIP)	52,133.05

Name	Pension 2014 € p.a.
JIM MC DAID	50,411.14
ROBERT MOLLOY	50,327.94
MÁIRE GEOGHEGAN-QUINN	49,508.68
MARY HANAFIN	49,283.00
SÉAMUS PATTISON	49,241.40
NOEL DEMPSEY	49,026.64
JOE WALSH (RIP)	48,488.37
LIAM MAC COSGAIR	47,299.98
BRENDAN DALY	46,106.06
DAVID ANDREWS	46,049.12
ALAN DUKES	45,470.62
FRANK FAHEY	43,444.44
RAY BURKE	42,262.84
SÍLE DE VALERA	42,212.30
PATRICK COONEY	41,358.20
RAY MAC SHARRY	41,135.38
PATRICK LALOR	40,245.92
LIAM KAVANAGH	40,113.84
MERVYN TAYLOR	39,764.92
BATT O'KEEFFE	38,883.52
BARRY DESMOND	38,383.28
RICHIE RYAN	37,697.14
TOM O' DONNELL	37,697.14
AUSTIN DEASY	37,323.26
MICHAEL D. HIGGINS	36,906.48
GERARD COLLINS	35,781.20
JOHN GORMLEY	34,966.88
GEMMA HUSSEY	34,757.84
NOEL TREACY	33,704.58
NIAMH BHREATHNACH	33,413.90
PÁDRAIG FLYNN	33,292.74
TOM KITT	32,619.26
MARTIN O' DONOGHUE	31,231.46
JOE JACOB	30,390.88
RICHARD BURKE	28,523.30
NORA OWEN	28,254.20
IVAN YATES	28,243.28
PADDY O' TOOLE	27,563.90
MARY WALLACE	27,374.88
PROINSIAS DE ROSSA	27,278.36
TONY KILLEEN	26,071.50
PAT THE COPE GALLAGHER	25,751.06
GER CONNOLLY	25,582.96
SEAN CALLEARY	24,164.14

Questions - Written Answers

Name	Pension 2014 € p.a.
TRAS HONAN	23,674.30
PAT CAREY	23,639.20
NOEL AHERN	23,107.76
BRIAN MULLOOLY	22,472.06
DAN WALLACE	21,298.16
VINCENT BRADY	21,200.40
NOEL DAVERN (RIP)	20,745.52
JIM O'KEEFFE	19,918.34
FERGUS O' BRIEN	19,918.34
LIZ O'DONNELL	19,167.20
LIAM T. COSGRAVE	19,132.92
TOM MOFFATT	18,803.46
HUGH BYRNE	18,803.46
EDWARD COLLINS	18,668.00
TIM O'MALLEY	18,585.06
TOM PARLON	18,585.06
JACKIE FAHY	18,401.76
EAMON RYAN	18,350.28
PAUL CONNAUGHTON	18,037.50
GEORGE BIRMINGHAM	18,037.50
LIAM AYLWARD	17,706.02
CHRIS FLOOD	17,645.94
THOMAS HUSSEY	17,374.24
BRIAN O'SHEA	17,298.06
RORY KIELY	17,193.80
MICHAEL D'ARCY	17,124.12
DONAL CREED	17,124.12
EITHNE FITZGERALD	16,982.94
SEAN HAUGHEY	16,934.32
CONOR LENIHAN	15,415.92
NED O'KEEFFE	15,273.70
AVRIL DOYLE	14,916.20
IVOR CALLELY	14,879.02
TODDY O'SULLIVAN	14,835.60
JOHN CURRAN	14,757.34
PAT MOYLAN	13,986.18
MARTIN MANSERGH	13,113.88
MICHAEL FINNERAN	13,113.88
TREVOR SARGENT	12,687.74
AUSTIN CURRIE	12,291.24
LIZ MCMANUS	12,287.34
BERNARD ALLEN	12,287.34
DONAL CAREY	12,008.62
SEAN MC CARTHY	11,803.22

Name	Pension 2014 € p.a.
LIAM HYLAND	11,796.72
CHARLES MC DONALD	11,770.46
LORCAN ALLEN	11,644.36
DONIE CASSIDY	11,466.52
THOMAS FITZPATRICK	10,953.80
JOHN DONNELLON	9,018.62
JIM HIGGINS	8,730.38
SEÁN POWER	8,535.54
DONNACHA Ó LIATHÁIN	8,424.68
GAY MITCHELL	8,187.18
EOIN RYAN	5,909.28
JOHN RYAN (RIP)	4,761.12

Equality Tribunal Cases

267. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he is satisfied with the manner in which the Equality Tribunal conducts itself and deals with cases that are brought to its attention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7680/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Equality Tribunal is a quasi-judicial and independent statutory body set up under the Employment Equality Act 1998 to investigate and decide on complaints of discrimination. The Equality Tribunal as one of the quasi-judicial bodies of this Department and is operated independently of the Minister and as such the Minister does not interfere in the exercise by that body of its quasi-judicial functions including how it deals with cases. All decisions of the Equality Tribunal may be appealed to the Labour Court or the Circuit Court depending on the legislation. As with all quasi-judicial bodies it is subject to the oversight of the High Court through the system of Judicial Review. Such review is the appropriate channel to seek a remedy for any dissatisfaction a party to a complaint may have with either a decision issued or the processes involved.

The Workplace Relations Bill currently before the Oireachtas is expected to be enacted early this year. On commencement, the Equality Tribunal will cease to exist and all cases on hands and all new cases will be a matter for the Workplace Relations Commission.

The establishment of the Workplace Relations Commission, replacing the Equality Tribunal as well as the Labour Relations Commission, the Employment Appeals Tribunal and the National Employment Rights Authority will allow greater resources to be applied to processing complaints of discrimination and a quicker and more efficient service is expected.

Equality Tribunal Cases

268. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the annual budget of the Equality Tribunal; the number of staff employed; and the number of cases dealt with in 2014. [7731/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The 2014 budget allocation for the Equality Tribunal was €1.955 million. The number of staff employed in the Tribunal at the end of 2014 was 21.6 full time equivalents (FTEs), a number of which are

assisting with Workplace Relations Reform projects. The Tribunal had 730 new cases referred to it in 2014 and closed 506 cases.

Carer's Benefit Eligibility

269. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the steps he will take to make employees aware of their entitlement to carer's benefit and carer's leave; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7813/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Carer's Strategy published in 2012 by the Department of Health, sets out the strategic direction for policies, services and supports provided for carers. This strategy, prepared in consultation with carers, established the key priorities to support carers given scarce resources and a Carers' Forum is held annually to continue to give carers a voice at policy level.

The Department of Social Protection actively promotes its services, including the Carer's Benefit Scheme, through its network of Local Offices and Citizens Information Offices. That Department is committed under the National Carer's Strategy to publicise the supports available to carers, and will attend events during 2015 to promote the schemes available. The Department of Social Protection facilitates the annual Carer's Forum and frequently liaises with carers support groups throughout the country. Detailed information on Carer's Benefit and Carer's Leave is available on that Department's website at www.welfare.ie.

My Department, through the information and support services for employees and employers available at www.workplacerelations.ie will continue to provide information on employment rights, including the Carer's Leave Act 2001, and I will continue to encourage employers and employees to provide flexible workplaces that meet the needs of both the employer and employees.

Workplace Relations Services

270. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if consideration will be provided to implementing an initiative, similar to the Carer Positive initiative in Scotland, which recognises employers who offer support to working carers and encourages them to allow working carers the flexibility they need to balance employment with their caring responsibilities at home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7814/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I understand that Carers Scotland, a charitable organisation, has received funding to develop Carer Positive, a 'caring for carers' kitemark to recognise employers who offer the best support to carers, allowing them the flexibility they often need to deliver care at home. I understand it is overseen by an Advisory Group of key stakeholders that have supported the development of the kitemark. This has included the NHS; Scottish Chambers of Commerce; Scottish Council for Development and Industry; Federation of Small Businesses; Institute of Directors; the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development; Carers organisations; British Telecom; British Gas; HMRC, the Scottish Court Service, STUC; Unison; Healthy Working Lives and 'see me' Scotland.

In Ireland, the National Carer's Strategy published in 2012 by the Department of Health, sets out the strategic direction for policies, services and supports provided for carers. This strategy, prepared in consultation with carers, established the key priorities to support carers given scarce resources and a Carers' Forum is held annually to continue to give carers a voice

at policy level. I am not aware of any proposals to divert funds to replicate the Scottish position at this time.

My Department, through the information and support services for employees and employers available at www.workplacerelations.ie will continue to provide information on employment rights, including for example the Carer's Leave Act, 2001, and I continue to encourage employers to provide flexible workplaces that meet the needs of both the employer and employees.

Tax Code

271. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if his Department will investigate the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare in respect of that person's employment. [7998/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Following clarification, I understand that the question relates to the payment of tax and pay related social insurance (PRSI) while an employee is out sick. In general, an employee has no right under employment law to be paid by their employer while on sick leave. Consequently, it is at the discretion of the employer to decide his/her own policy on sick pay and sick leave, subject to the employee's contract or terms of employment. Under Section 3 of the Terms of Employment (Information) Act 1994, an employer must provide an employee with a written statement of terms of employment within two months of the commencement of the employment. One of the terms referred to in this Act on which the employer must provide information is any terms or conditions relating to incapacity for work due to sickness or injury and paid sick leave. The terms of employment should also include a reference to any Collective Agreements that may be in place which may contain a provision regarding sick pay.

A person may get Illness Benefit from the Department of Social Protection if they cannot work because they are sick or ill and meet the qualifying conditions. I am informed that Illness Benefit is considered to be income for tax purposes.

The questions as to liability for payment of PRSI is a matter for my colleague, An Tánaiste, Joan Burton T.D., Minister for Social Protection.

Action Plan for Jobs

272. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the position regarding Drogheda in County Louth with respect to the recently announced jobs strategy; the reason Drogheda, which is the biggest town in the county, has not been included by name in this strategy; if it will be included; if he will meet Drogheda Chamber of Commerce as a matter of urgency to resolve this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8115/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): On 11 February, the Government announced details of the Action Plan for Jobs: Regional initiative which will seek to maximise the strengths and assets of each region to support enterprise growth and job creation. The Regional Action Plans will identify specific measures that can be taken to help each region to realise its economic potential, with a view to increasing the number of people at work in the region. My objective is that six Regional Action Plans, including one for the Border region, will be launched by July, with two remaining Plans in development at that stage.

In launching the Action Plan for Jobs: Regional initiative, I announced that new funding

of up to €250 million will be made available over the next five years to support job creation through enterprise growth in the regions. This sum includes €150 million for an IDA property investment programme to attract foreign direct investment into the regions, and €100 million to Enterprise Ireland to support indigenous enterprises to start up, grow and export.

As part of IDA's capital investment programme, a total of nine locations were identified in the recent announcement as headline investments to occur in the period 2015-2017; these investments include facilities at Sligo and Dundalk within the Border Region.

IDA regularly assesses property requirements in Regions and has identified locations where quality building and site solutions would enhance the winning of FDI for a region, commencing with identified locations over the next 3-5 year period. The locations identified provide a good offering to companies seeking to invest, for example- a good population base, the presence of a third level college, an existing base of FDI and indigenous companies and good transportation links.

In addition, it should be noted that the Advance Facilities announced recently represent less than half of the total investment in property solutions as part of the new IDA Strategy. Significant resources will be invested in utility intensive strategic sites which have a track record of attracting FDI as well as a substantial upgrade of large sections of the existing Business Park network to ensure an attractive suite of investment location options are available to potential investors.

Consultation with local stakeholders will be an essential part of the process of developing the Regional Action Plans for Jobs. In this context, officials from my Department and the Enterprise Development Agencies will consult with all relevant bodies who can assist in the development of these Regional Action Plans, including the local Chambers of Commerce. The local Chambers can also play an important role in promoting and delivering actions to support enterprise development and job creation in each region. I look forward to the contribution they can make, throughout the country, to the Regional Action Plans for Jobs.

International Bodies Membership

273. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if there has been any movement towards Ireland joining the CERN project; and the amount this would cost the Exchequer. [8212/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): International linkages are a crucial component of a national innovation system. In this context membership of international research organisations can play an important role in enhancing and supporting the effectiveness and output of Ireland's innovation system. However, Ireland's membership of international research organisations must be predicated on whether the benefit of membership, in terms of supports to Irish researchers, companies and jobs, justifies the costs involved. My Department is currently undertaking a review of Ireland's membership of international research organisations. The review encompasses those international research organisations of which Ireland is currently a member as well as those - including CERN - to which we do not subscribe at present. The extent to which membership might support national strategic objectives will be considered, particularly in the light of the development of a successor strategy to the Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation 2006-2013.

Concerning the cost to the Exchequer if Ireland were to join CERN, our current understanding is that the annual cost of full membership of CERN would be in the region of €10m. CERN

also provide an associate membership option. Normally, the cost of this would start at 25% of the full cost of membership in Year 1, increasing incrementally until reaching the 100% level in Year 4.

Coillte Teoranta Lands

274. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine in view of Coillte Teoranta being issued last week with an urgent enforcement notice by Roscommon County Council requiring it to vacate within 24 hours a wind farm construction site on Sliabh Bán, County Roscommon, if he will direct the company to urgently review its compliance with planning regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7834/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Coillte Teoranta was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act, 1988 and day-to-day operational matters, such as construction works on wind farm sites, are the responsibility of the company. The matter outlined in the question was, however, raised with Coillte and the company advised that on the 26th January Coillte commenced minor enabling works on Sliabh Bawn, as a precursor to the construction of the Sliabh Bawn wind farm project, which is scheduled to commence in late Spring. These works were commenced on the basis of Coillte's understanding that a Commencement Notice under the Planning Regulations was not required, given that the works were minor in nature and did not constitute the commencement of the main development.

When contacted by Roscommon County Council on the 10th February, on foot of concerns expressed to them that the minor enabling works did in fact constitute commencement of the main project, Coillte offered to cease works as soon as it was verbally informed of the Council's concerns and the site had been vacated by Coillte by the time the Enforcement Notice was formally received on the 11th February.

I am further advised by the company that prior to the commencement of projects of the scale of Sliabh Bawn wind farm, it is not uncommon to carry out some minor preparatory enabling works in advance, which are not normally considered commencement of the main development. The main development works on Sliabh Bawn wind farm are not scheduled to commence until late Spring.

Works will remain suspended until Coillte has issued the formal Commencement Notice commensurate with the development of the main works, in full compliance with the Planning Regulations.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

275. **Deputy Brian Walsh** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding 2014 payments due in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7663/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department received two Transfer of Entitlements applications on 7 May 2014 and 15 May 2014 respectively to transfer 9.28 standard entitlements by way of sale and 5.16 standard entitlements by way of gift to the above herd number from another herd number. Both applications for the transfer of entitlements have been processed and payment has issued in respect of the 9.28 purchased entitlements. With regard to the transfer application of the 5.16 gifted entitlements,

it was necessary to request additional information from the original owner in order to have the application completed. This detail has now been provided and payment to the person named will issue shortly.

Harbours and Piers Funding

276. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when funding will be provided for the completion of the breakwater at Greencastle, County Donegal. [7670/15]

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

The Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme for 2015 is currently under consideration. At this point no decisions have been made on the issuing of a call to Local Authorities for projects for 2015.

Any application submitted by Donegal County Council in respect of Greencastle under a Local Authority capital programme in 2015 or future years, will be given consideration in the context of the criteria set out, available Exchequer funding and overall national priorities.

Installation Aid Scheme Eligibility

277. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures he has put in place to support old young farmers who missed out on the installation grant in 2008 and, in view of the fact that they have been farming in excess of five years, are missing the incentives for new young farmers under the Common Agricultural Policy. [7677/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware that there is a group of young farmers who established their holdings in 2008 and 2009 and who missed out on the Installation Aid scheme which closed to applications in 2008. I intend to prioritise their applications under the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation scheme (TAMS), with grant-aid payable at 40%, being introduced under the new RDP. EU Commission approval is awaited on the proposed schemes under TAMS. Under Pillar 1 the Regulation provides that young farmers and new entrants are priority categories under the National Reserve. It also provides scope to include an optional provision whereby Member States may use the National Reserve to allocate new entitlements or give a top-up on the value of existing entitlements for persons who suffer from a 'Specific Disadvantage'. With regard to the group of young farmers who established their holding in 2008 and 2009, but who missed out on both the Young Farmer Installation Scheme which closed to applications in 2008 and the Young Farmer priority category under the National Reserve which includes young farmers who commenced since 2010, I am glad to say that this category can be considered as a 'group suffering from specific disadvantage'.

The positive result of this development is that these young farmers will be eligible to apply under the second phase of the National Reserve to be given new entitlements or be given a top-up on the value of existing entitlements.

Applications will be made available in early April 2015. This is a very welcome outcome that I feel will address an anomaly in the system and allow for fair and equal treatment for this particular category of young active farmers.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Appeals

278. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a decision on an appeal in respect of the agri-environment options scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7681/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2013 Single Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 14 May 2013 and a payment of €1,169.16 was issued on 20/09/2013 under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme. No payment was due under the Single Farm Payment Scheme as the person named does not have any entitlements. A review of the land parcels declared by the person named under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme revealed that a number of the land parcels declared contained ineligible features and the person named was notified accordingly. This resulted in a reduction of between 3% and 20% to the area payable for the 2013 land-based schemes of the person named. An overpayment of €354.20 under the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was created on 28/11/2014.

Following the review of my Department's decision, sought by the person named, a visit by a Department official to verify the position on the ground was necessary. This check confirmed the 2013 area over-declaration as 48.71% in the case of the Disadvantaged Area Scheme which meant the verification visit determined that the position on the ground was worse than the initial determination. As 48.71% is greater than 20% of the established eligible area in respect of land based schemes no payment is due to the person named under the 2013 Disadvantaged Area Scheme. The person named had received payment under the 2013 Disadvantaged Area Scheme, which is deemed overpaid and will be netted-off future payments made by my Department.

A letter detailing the outcome of the verification check was issued to the person named on the 19/07/2014. In the event that the person named was dissatisfied with the outcome of the verification check the decision could be appealed to the independent LPIS Appeals Committee, within 3 months of the notification letter.

By letter dated 17/09/2014, the person named opted to avail of his right to appeal to the independently-chaired LPIS Appeal Committee; the LPIS Appeals Committee have considered same and a decision will issue shortly .

The person named was approved for participation in the 2010 Agri-Environment Options Scheme (AEOS 1) with effect from 1 September 2010 and full entitlements have issued in respect of the 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 Scheme years. The 2014 payment may be adjusted pending the outcome of the LPIS review issue.

Single Payment Scheme Applications

279. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when single farm payments will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7783/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under 2014 Single Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Schemes was received from the person named on 14 May 2014. Payment under the Single Payment Scheme has not issued as the person named holds no payment entitlements under that Scheme. Payment under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme has not issued as the holding concerned has not satisfied the Scheme minimum stocking density requirements.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Applications

280. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when area based payments for 2013 will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7785/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under 2013 Single Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 19 April 2013. Processing of the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme application has recently been completed with payment issuing directly to the nominated bank account of the person named on 13 February 2015. The person named was paid the advance payment under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme on 16 October with the balancing payment issuing on 2 December 2013.

Milk Quota

281. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department has received an application for a special allocation of milk quota, due to a non-notifiable disease outbreak, in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if, in view of the circumstances, he will consider a special allocation in this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7789/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department received an application from the named person in response to the request for applications under the recent Animal Disease Scheme. This Scheme involves the allocation of milk quota, from the National Reserve, to milk producers who have incurred milk quota difficulties as a direct result of compulsory animal movement restrictions resulting from an animal disease outbreak. Quota allocations are granted on the basis of recommendations made by an independent Milk Quota Appeals Tribunal.

The application submitted by the named person was not presented to the Tribunal for determination because the animals concerned were not subject to a compulsory animal movement restriction.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

282. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of appeals processed by the Agriculture Appeals Office in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7798/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Agriculture Appeals Office, which provides an independent appeals service to scheme applicants dissatisfied with decisions of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in relation to

certain designated schemes, has indicated that the total number of appeals processed to closure in 2013 was 802.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

283. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of agriculture appeals in 2013 dealt with by oral hearings; if he will provide a detailed breakdown of the various decisions under appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7799/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Agriculture Appeals Office has indicated that a total of 341 oral hearings were held in 2013. Of these 37 were allowed, 66 were partially allowed and 188 were disallowed, 44 were revised by the Department and 6 were withdrawn.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

284. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide a breakdown of the 2013 agricultural appeals results; if he will detail the number of appeals under each heading that were successful in full, only partly successful, or not successful; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7800/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The following is a breakdown of the 2013 appeals, as provided by the Agriculture Appeals Office.

Title	Number
Allowed	60
Partially Allowed	84
Disallowed	404
Not valid	26
Withdrawn	40
Out of time	58
Revised by DAFM	193
Open	2

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

285. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of agricultural appeals in 2013 dealt with in writing; if he will provide a detailed breakdown of the various decisions under appeal; if he will provide, under each heading, a breakdown of the results of the appeals; the number of appeals under each heading that were successful in full, only partly successful or not successful at all; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7801/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Agriculture Appeals Office has indicated that a total of 461 appeals were determined on a summary basis, where no oral hearing was requested, during 2013. Of these 23 were allowed, 18 were partially allowed and 152 were disallowed, 149 were revised by the Department and 119 were withdrawn or not valid.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

286. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of appeals processed by the Agriculture Appeals Office in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7802/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Agriculture Appeals Office, which provides an independent appeals service to scheme applicants dissatisfied with decisions of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in relation to certain designated schemes, has indicated that the total number of appeals processed to closure in 2014 was 727.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

287. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of agricultural appeals in 2014 dealt with by oral hearings; if he will provide a detailed breakdown of the various decisions under appeal; if he will provide, under each heading, a breakdown of the results of the appeals; if he will provide, in detail, the number of appeals under each heading that were successful in full, only partly successful or not successful at all; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7803/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Agriculture Appeals Office has indicated that a total of 351 oral hearings were held in 2014. Of these 32 were allowed, 59 were partially allowed and 225 were disallowed, 29 were revised by the Department and 6 were withdrawn.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

288. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of agricultural appeals in 2014 that were dealt with in writing; of these, if he will provide a detailed breakdown of the various decisions under appeal; if he will provide, under each heading, a breakdown of the results of the appeals; if he will provide details of the number of appeals, under each heading, that were successful in full, only partly successful or not successful at all; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7804/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Agriculture Appeals Office has indicated that a total of 376 appeals were determined without recourse to an oral hearing in 2014. Of these 11 were allowed, 18 were partially allowed and 163 were disallowed, 100 were revised by the Department and 84 were withdrawn or not valid.

Legislative Measures

289. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to review the legislation on tree-felling, in view of recent court decisions on personal injury awards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7847/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The felling of trees is legislated for by the Forestry Act, 1946. Provision is included within that Act for the removal, without a licence, by a public authority of roadside trees that are considered danger-

ous. New legislation to replace the 1946 Act, the Forestry Act 2014, was passed in late 2014 and provides for exemptions in certain circumstances from the requirement for a felling licence. These include removal by a planning authority of trees considered dangerous on account of their age, condition or location, and removal by private landowners of trees within 10 metres of a public road which, in the opinion of the owner, are dangerous to persons using the public road on account of their age and condition. It is expected that the provisions of the new Act will be commenced in or around mid 2015.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

290. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a payment due to a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny, under the agri-environment option scheme, has issued in full. [7888/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was approved for participation in the 2010 Agri-Environment Options Scheme (AEOS 1) with effect from the 1 September 2010 and payment has issued in respect of the 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 Scheme years. Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. These checks have been successfully completed in respect of the 2014 Scheme year and 75% payment will issue shortly. The balancing 25% payment will follow thereafter.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

291. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide an update on an agri-environment options scheme and sheep technology adoption programme scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo. [7916/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was approved for participation in the 2010 Agri-Environment Options Scheme (AEOS 1) with effect from the 1 November 2010 and payment has issued in respect of the 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 Scheme years. Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. The application has successfully completed these checks in respect of the 2014 Scheme year and 75% payment will issue shortly. The balancing 25% payment will follow thereafter.

Payments under the 2014 Sheep Technology Adoption Programme commenced in December. Validations are ongoing and payment for the person named will issue shortly.

Fishery Harbour Centres

292. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide an update regarding the action his Department is taking to fill vacant properties on Howth pier, County Dublin, and the reason these properties are vacant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7967/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Howth is one of six Fishery Harbour Centres managed and operated by my Department. Each centre is

a working fishery harbour which has unique features which facilitate a broad range of other diverse activities which are important from both an economic and social perspective. This diversity is reflected in the range of properties managed by my Department in each of the Fishery Harbour Centres.

My Department's aim, working within the Government Framework for the management of State property and relevant legal frameworks, is to ensure that the sites within this diverse portfolio generate a competitive economic return while fostering a diverse range of maritime activities. In this context the Department reviews the portfolio of properties on an ongoing basis in order to maximise those returns to the Exchequer.

There are only a small number of vacant sites in Howth that are available to lease. My Department will be announcing details of a competitive public tender process shortly in respect of those available vacant sites.

Properties while appearing vacant may be subject to ongoing legal correspondence. The properties now being considered were not previously available for tender as they required repairs and or adjustments to render them suitable.

Tourism Promotion

293. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has held any meetings with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport regarding opportunities to promote, and increase, tourism in Howth, County Dublin. [7968/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Howth Fishery Harbour Centre is one of the six designated Fishery Harbour Centres, which are owned, managed and maintained by my Department. All six Fishery Centres are first and foremost working fishery harbours. However each centre has unique features which facilitate a broad range of other diverse activities which are important from both an economic and social perspective. Howth Fishery Harbour Centre is no exception to this diversity, while first and foremost a working fishery harbour, my Department is conscious that it is also a very important tourist destination in addition to being a major venue for leisure activities with a wide range of recreational users of the harbour, including the yacht club, sport fishermen, walkers, tourists and other social users. The Deputy will be aware that there are also a significant number of businesses, particularly restaurants, operating in the Harbour. With that in mind the Department is anxious to increase the profile of the Harbour for the betterment of the wider community.

To this end, the Harbour regularly approves applications for events, yacht races, local celebrations and various functions etc within the harbour precincts. For example, in July 2014, the Asgard Centennial Celebrations were held at Howth harbour, with the keynote Address delivered by President Higgins. It is estimated that this event alone attracted in excess of 25,000 visitors to the harbour.

In addition, the Department approved locating the Howth Tourism Information Office within the confines of Howth Fishery Harbour Centre. This facility opened in July 2014.

My Department liaises with all key stakeholders, in particular Fingal County Council, on an ongoing basis in relation to a wide range of harbour activities at Howth and is of course available to meet the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport to discuss any matters of mutual interest pertaining to the harbour.

Harbours and Piers

294. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the main findings of the most recent annual Howth Harbour users' forum undertaken by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7969/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Howth Fishery Harbour Centre is one of the six designated Fishery Harbour Centres, which are owned, managed and maintained by my Department. All six Fishery Centres are first and foremost working fishery harbours. However each centre has unique features which facilitate a broad range of other diverse activities which are important from both an economic and social perspective. The development and upkeep of Howth as a state of the art Fishery Harbour Centre supporting a broad range of marine related and other activities is and will remain an ongoing process. Any suggestions from Fishery Harbour Users for the development and improvement of the facilities at Howth will, as has been the case, be given due consideration.

Importantly from the perspective of working with the stakeholders a Harbour Users Forum has been established at each of the Centres, and the most recent Howth forum meeting took place in January this year. This provided an excellent platform for sharing ideas and obtaining stakeholder feedback, issues discussed included operational matters, property availability, capital developments and improving the profile of Howth. These discussions will better inform decisions on the future developments in the harbour. In addition, my officials are of course available to meet harbour users collectively or individually as the need arises.

EU Directives

295. **Deputy Áine Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has sought the advice of the Attorney General on the constitutionality of his actions to comply with hen harrier designation, in view of the fact that as a result of his designation these farms have become worthless as there is an opinion that without proper compensation there is a breach of their constitutional rights to private property. [7988/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The designation of land under the EU Birds Directive (Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds), is a matter for the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in the first instance. The National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has designated six Special Protection Areas (SPAs) under the Birds Directive for the protection of hen harriers in Ireland. Where such designation exists, restrictions apply to any type of development which may negatively impact on the conservation of the species. In accordance with the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477 of 2011), any plan or project that is not directly connected with, or necessary to, the management of an SPA site designated under the Birds Directive but is likely to have a significant effect thereon, may only be permitted following an appropriate assessment of the implications of the plan or project for the SPA in view of the site's conservation objectives. Only after having ascertained that the plan or project will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned, can a plan or project be permitted to proceed.

Harbours and Piers

296. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if

his attention has been drawn to the Howth public realm assessment currently being undertaken by Fingal County Council, and its aim to better integrate the Howth Harbour area in County Dublin with the rest of the village and peninsula; if his Department will assist Fingal County Council in any way with the work in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7997/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Howth Fishery Harbour Centre is one of the six designated Fishery Harbour Centres, which are owned, managed and maintained by my Department. All six Fishery Centres are first and foremost working fishery harbours. However each centre has unique features which facilitate a broad range of other diverse activities which are important from both an economic and social perspective. My Department is aware of Fingal County Council's Public Realm Consultation Process for Howth. The Harbour Master for Howth attended the Public Consultation Participatory Workshop on 22 October 2014 organised by the Council. The Department is in receipt of the resultant Howth Public Realm Stakeholder Consultation Draft Report, which is currently being reviewed.

I can assure the Deputy that my Department is anxious to assist where possible in increasing the profile of the Harbour for the betterment of the wider community and accordingly will continue, where appropriate, to facilitate initiatives to promote Howth and to liaise with Fingal County Council and other stakeholders on an ongoing basis in relation to the wide range of harbour activities.

Trade Missions

297. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will report on the work of his Department to open new markets for Irish food products since 2011; the progress which has been made to date on the identified markets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8070/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Since I took office in 2011, I have led a number of trade missions and ministerial visits to the Gulf States, China, the United States and Switzerland, as well as numerous visits to European countries and the United Kingdom, all with a view to developing and expanding markets for Irish food and beverages. I also established a Trade Team within the Department in order to ensure a strategic, coordinated and proactive approach to identification of export targets and markets and pursuit of market access. I hosted numerous inward visits so that I could demonstrate first hand to our target markets the quality and sustainability of Irish agrifood production. I also appointed agricultural attachés to Beijing and Moscow reflecting the importance of the Chinese and Russian markets in our export strategy.

The list below illustrates the main tangible outcomes to date of these efforts. Of course, it does not include the many agreements on greater cooperation and information exchange which have been concluded on a government to government and business to business basis, which are too numerous to list here but which are a major significance in the development of new markets. Nor does it capture the continuous ongoing engagement that is required to arrive at these concrete results. Overall, I am very pleased with the progress made. The value of Ireland's agrifood exports has grown phenomenally in recent years and they are now valued at over €10.5 billion. We have secured access to new lucrative markets in the US, Japan and China and developed and expanded our existing trade. The principal outcomes are as follows:

2011

Turkey: Market opened for beef and live cattle

Singapore: Market opened for beef

Tunisia: Market opened for live cattle

Egypt: Veterinary Certificate agreed for beef and market opened for live cattle

Ukraine: Market opened for breeding pigs

China: Market opened for breeding pigs

Serbia: Certificate agreed for meat products

Chile: Certificate agreed for bull semen

Canada: Certificate agreed for fresh pig semen

UAE: Market opened for bovine semen

2012

Singapore: Veterinary Certificates agreed for sheep meat

South Africa: Veterinary Certificates agreed for sheep meat

UAE: Veterinary Certificates agreed for sheep meat

Morocco and UAE: Veterinary Certificates agreed for poultry meat and poultry meat products

China: Agreement secured on exports of boarfish

Iran: Market opened for beef

UAE: Removal of age restriction on beef exports

China: Agreement secured on export of horse feed

China: Agreement secured on export of porcine semen and export certificate agreed

China: Agreement secured on export of horses direct to China

Hong Kong: Health certificate agreed for export of fishery products

Serbia: Veterinary certificate agreed for fresh/frozen pigmeat

2013

US: Initial positive steps taken to reopen the market to beef

Japan: Market opened to beef

UAE: Market opened for sheep-meat

Libya: Market opened for livestock

Australia: Market opened for pig-meat

Iran: Market opened for beef

GCC: Ban lifted for beef and sheep-meat

Canada: Market opened for Sheep-meat.

China: Market opened for Salmon

Russia: Access permitted for meat products previously excluded.

Azerbaijan: Agreement on veterinary health certificate for finished meat products

2014

Lebanon: Agreement on export of meat/meat products of bovine origin

Lebanon: Agreement on export of meat/meat products of ovine origin

Lebanon: Agreement on export of cooked meat/meat products of bovine and ovine origin

Hong Kong: Agreement on veterinary health certificate for the export of sheep-meat

Namibia: Agreement on veterinary health certificate for fresh/frozen meat of bovine, ovine and caprine origin

Philippines: Agreement on veterinary health certificate for the export of beef

Philippines: Agreement on veterinary health certificate for the export of sheepmeat

Philippines: Agreement on veterinary health certificate for the export of pigmeat

Vietnam: Agreement reached on the export of pigmeat

New Caledonia: Adoption of veterinary health certificate for the export of fresh meat and meat products of bovine origin

2015 (to date)

US: Market opened to Irish beef

China: Market opened to Irish beef

Question No. 298 withdrawn.

Agriculture Scheme Eligibility

299. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will expedite verification of land eligibility, by means of a field inspection, in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8116/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2014 Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Areas scheme application on 28

April 2014. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases Remote Sensing (i.e. satellite) inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was selected for a Remote Sensing eligibility inspection. The inspection identified discrepancies between the area declared and the area found resulting in an over-declaration in area of between 3% and 20%. Under the Terms and Conditions of the Single Payment Scheme this resulted in the 2014 payment 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 decision on 19 December 2014.

Payment, on the basis set out above, under the 2014 Single Payment Scheme issued to the nominated bank account of the person named on 11 December 2014. The payment due under the 2014 Disadvantaged Areas' Scheme was not affected by the over-declaration referred to above. This payment under this scheme issued to the nominated bank account of the person named on 9 January 2015.

A review of the outcome of this inspection identified the need for the verification of the position on the ground by means of a field visit. This inspection has been completed and the results are currently being finalised. The person named will be notified of the outcome of this field visit, and any impact on payments due under the 2014 schemes, as soon as possible. In the event that the person named is dissatisfied with the outcome of this field visit they can seek a review of the decision.

GLAS Establishment

300. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide an update on the green low-carbon agri-environmental scheme; when the scheme will be open for applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8127/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Department's on-line system for advisors opened yesterday 23 February. Work can now begin on preparing GLAS plans. While the formal approval process for the Rural Development Programme as a whole has still to be completed, we now have a very clear understanding with the European Commission as to the shape of the new GLAS, its priorities, the actions that should be applied and the rates of payment that will be made. Having reached this level of agreement, and in order to allow maximum time for farmers to prepare their proposals, I decided to launch GLAS immediately.

The full online system is now open, which allows advisors to start preparing the necessary proposals for their clients. Completed proposals may then be formally submitted when the first tranche opens, following confirmation of the agreed content of the Rural Development Programme, which is expected shortly.

Grassland Sheep Scheme Payments

301. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a payment under the grassland sheep scheme due in 2014 will be paid without further delay in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Laois. [8139/15]

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

tion under the 2014 Grassland Sheep Scheme was received from the person named on 15 May 2014. Payment has not issued to the person named as the holding concerned has not satisfied the Scheme minimum eligibility requirements namely, the submission of the annual sheep census form prior to the extended closing date of 14 February 2014. The person named unsuccessfully applied for the late acceptance of the form on the grounds of force majeure. The person named has been advised of the option to submit an appeal to the Agricultural Appeals Office should he so wish.

Question No. 302 withdrawn.

Departmental Staff

303. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views that it is appropriate that officers of his Department, who have already carried out inspections on a number of controversial commonage files in south Galway, should now be allowed to carry out inspections on these same commonage files, which are the subject of an European Union audit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8154/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department, in the context of delivering the Single Payment Scheme, Disadvantaged Areas' Scheme, which have been replaced by the Basic Payment Scheme and Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme in 2015, and other area related schemes, is required to carry out an annual round of inspections covering both the eligibility of the land declared to draw down payments and also cross compliance aspects to ensure adherence with EU regulatory requirements and that the farm is maintained in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition. The basis for these inspections is governed by EU legislation and there are certain minimum numbers and types of inspections that must be conducted each year. Details of these inspections and the regulations involved are published in the Terms and Conditions of the Schemes which are sent to every applicant annually. These inspections are a necessary requirement in order to draw down approximately €1.5 billion of EU funds annually and to avoid EU disallowances. The inspections are subject to repeated audits by the European Commission, the European Court of Auditors and the Comptroller and Auditor General's Office and this ensures an independent verification that inspections are conducted in full compliance with the legal requirements. In abiding with the findings of these audits my Department ensures that these inspections are conducted in a fair and equitable manner and in full accordance with the legislative provisions. Furthermore inspecting officers are very experienced and are regularly trained to ensure that they carry out inspections in a professional manner, with a process of continuous oversight by supervisors and random verification of inspections to ensure a fair and consistent approach. Also when conducting inspections standardised inspection report forms and guidance documentation are provided to the inspecting officers, with the inspection outcome being recorded on the relevant schemes' IT system. This approach ensures that both the quality and consistency of inspections are maintained at extremely high levels.

A comprehensive appeal mechanism is in place in order to protect the interests of farmers who have difficulties with the inspection findings or who consider that the inspection has not been conducted in accordance with legislative requirements. This appeal system incorporates the option for a farmer to initially seek to have the inspection outcome reviewed internally by an officer more senior than the inspecting officer. Where the farmer remains dissatisfied, the decision can be appealed to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office and ultimately to the Office of the Ombudsman.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

304. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason some of the agri-environment options scheme 2 payments for 2014, in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo, were kept back; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8169/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was approved for participation in the 2011 Agri Environment Options Scheme (AEOS 2) with effect from the 1st September 2011. 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.

For the 2014 scheme year, the person named was paid 100% of the amount calculated for that scheme year, less €249.36 in respect of reduced areas calculated following an on-the-ground inspection in 2012.

However, officials are currently carrying out a full review of the application. It is expected that this review should be completed shortly and the person named will be notified of the outcome once that review has been completed.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

305. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Offaly will receive up-to-date payments under the agri-environment options scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8182/15]

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 full entitlements have 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. Payments in respect of the 2014 Scheme year are subject to a similar administrative checking process which includes the requirement to return a valid Soil Sample Declaration.

My Department has yet to receive a Soil Sample Declaration from the person named and Department officials have been in contact with the person named regarding this. Payment for 2014 will issue at the earliest opportunity once this issue has been resolved and all validations have been successfully completed.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

306. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason penalties on single farm payments were imposed in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8201/15]

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 the land parcels declared by the person named contained ineligible features. This resulted in an over-payments being assessed for years 2012, 2011, 2010 and 2009. It is noted that the holding in question transferred to the person named in 2011 and that the over-payments due in his name have been fully recouped by my Department.

Sheep Technology Adoption Programme Payments

307. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8222/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payments under the 2014 Sheep Technology Adoption Programme commenced in December. Validations are ongoing and payment for the person named will issue shortly.

TAMS Eligibility

308. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the points system, relating to the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme, closed on 31 December 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8308/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes (TAMS) which were established on the basis of the old 2007-2013 Rural Development Programme are now closed for receipt of applications. There were selection criteria in place under these schemes in line with the governing EU provisions in order to ensure the equal treatment of all applicants and the better use of financial resources. All eligible applicants were approved under the TAMS schemes. The proposals for the new TAMS schemes under the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme are currently with the Commission for approval. As required under the relevant regulations, these proposals include application of selection criteria. These will be transparent and will be made available to potential beneficiaries through the application forms and terms and conditions of the various schemes.

TAMS Data

309. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the points system was used for the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme, and the number of applicants who were rejected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8311/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes (TAMS) which were established on the basis of the old 2007-2013 Rural Development Programme are now closed for receipt of applications. There were selection criteria in place under these schemes in line with the governing EU provisions in order to ensure the equal treatment of all applicants and the better use of financial resources. All eligible applicants were approved under the TAMS schemes and no eligible applicants were rejected. The proposals for the new TAMS schemes under the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme are currently with the Commission for approval. As required under the relevant regulations, these proposals include application of selection criteria. These will be transparent and will be made available to potential beneficiaries through the application forms and terms and conditions of the various schemes.

Defence Forces Reserve

310. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Defence if there are allowances, stipends or benefits-in-kind, generally treated like wages, for the membership of the Reserve Defence Force; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8189/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The small number of allowances payable to members of the Reserve Defence Force (RDF) such as Patrol Duty, Uniform Replenishment, Naval and Children's allowance are treated as income by the Revenue Commissioners for the purposes of the payment of PAYE, PRSI and USC, where appropriate, and the charges are levied accordingly.

Members of the RDF are volunteers who undertake training in their spare time. Members of the RDF undertake unpaid training and there is also provision made for them to avail of paid training. However, members of the RDF are not employed or engaged under a contract of employment which stipulates either weekly hours of work or working time and service with the RDF is not pensionable under the Defence Forces Pension Schemes.

Defence Forces Recruitment

311. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Defence his plans to sanction additional recruitment for the Army in 2015. [8106/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government is committed to maintaining the stabilised strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel, comprising of 7,520 Army, 886 Air Corps and 1,094 Naval Service. Targeted recruitment has taken place so as to maintain the level of 9,500 personnel and to ensure the operational capacity of the Defence Forces.

As the Permanent Defence Force is currently below the agreed stabilised strength of 9,500, it is intended that targeted recruitment will continue in 2015, from the recruitment panels formed from the current General Service recruitment competition, launched in March 2014. It is planned that these panels will remain in place until they are exhausted. It is too early to say when this recruitment will commence, as this is dependent on the operational requirements of the Defence Forces and the budget allocation for Defence.

With the support of the Chief of Staff and within the resources available, I intend to retain the capacity of the Defence Forces to operate effectively across all roles and to undertake the tasks laid down by Government both at home and overseas.

Air Corps

312. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Defence if he will explain the number of routine flights over the greater Clondalkin area from Baldonnel; his views on the necessity of these flights, with due regard to noise complaints from local residents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8187/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): Because of the proximity of Clondalkin to Casement Aerodrome Baldonnel, it is necessary that many flights in and out of the Aerodrome must pass over the Clondalkin area.

Baldonnel has operated as an aerodrome since 1917 and the Air Corps currently operates aircraft in support of a wide range of services such as emergency inter-hospital transfers, support to An Garda Síochána and undertaking maritime patrols, in addition to providing support to the Army and the Naval Service.

The Air Corps is aware of the inconvenience that such flights may cause and every effort is made to minimise the time spent at low level or near areas of population.

Defence Forces Reserve Training

313. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Defence the conditions necessary to qualify for a period of paid training; the way time-in-attendance for unpaid training, including voluntary unpaid training, is recorded; the requirement for each category, in time figures, for the individual reservist to fulfil annually; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8188/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): All effective Reserve Defence Force (RDF) personnel are entitled to attend periods of full time training.

The criteria for effectiveness are set out in Defence Forces Regulations (DFR R5). Attendance at RDF training is recorded on the Time and Attendance Module of the Personnel Management System (PMS). The Time and Attendance Module does not specifically record whether attendance at RDF training was paid or unpaid. The status of attendance as paid or unpaid training is recorded at Unit level.

The criteria for effectiveness, including attendance at training are currently being reviewed in line with the recommendation made in the Value for Money Review (VFM) Review of the RDF. DFR R5 will be updated in due course to reflect any changes in these criteria. In the interim, indicative attendance requirements for 2015 were set out in Administrative Order 01/2013, “*Implementation of the Defence Forces Reorganisation Plan Reserve Defence Force (RDF), 2012-2013*”. In this context, the indicative attendance requirements for individual reservists for 2015 are a total of 48 hours paid/unpaid training and a minimum of 12 hours voluntary unpaid experiential training.

Departmental Staff

314. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Defence his views on the proposal to require all public sector workers under the aegis of his Department who interface with service users to wear a name badge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8568/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Defence Organisation includes military personnel and civil servants, along with civilian employees who are attached to military installations. The vast majority of Civil Servants and civilian employees do not have contact with service users in the normal course of their duties. Accordingly there is no requirement for the wearing of name badges by these personnel. However, it is practice for staff of my Department to identify themselves when dealing with the public.

Members of the Defence Forces wear a name tab, when in uniform, with their surname inserted on the tab.

Family Reunification Data

315. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 319 of 20 January 2015, if she will provide a breakdown of the reasons provided for spouses or civil partners of Irish citizens, who were not granted family reunification visas, in the years 2011 to 2014 inclusive; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7773/15]

316. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons who are married to, or in civil partnerships with, Irish citizens who were not granted family reunification visas in the years 2007 to 2010 inclusive; if she will provide a breakdown of the reasons provided for spouses or civil partners of Irish citizens who were not granted family reunification visas in these years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7774/15]

317. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons who are married to, or in civil partnerships with, Irish citizens who were granted family reunification visas in the years 2007 to 2010 inclusive. [7775/15]

318. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons who did not meet the criteria for a family reunification visa, as outlined in her Department's policy document, but were granted a visa, based on ministerial or departmental discretion, for the years 2011 to 2014, inclusive; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7776/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 315 to 318, inclusive, together.

Prior to the introduction of a new computerised visa system by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department in 2008 and rolled out to Irish Missions and Visa Office worldwide throughout 2008 and 2009, only limited statistical information was recorded, often manually, at individual offices. Accordingly, the detailed information sought by the Deputy for the years 2007 to 2009 is not available. I am, however, advised by INIS that in 2009, an estimated 368 entry visas were granted for the purpose of joining Irish spouses or partners. For the reason outlined above, a further breakdown of these figures is not possible, including the number of refusals. In 2010, 539 Irish entry visas were granted for the purpose of joining Irish spouses or partners and 76 were refused.

The total number of refusals of Irish entry visa applications for the period 2011 to 2014, made for the purpose of joining Irish spouses or partners, was 495. A breakdown of the number of applications granted and refused in each of these years was provided to the Deputy in reply to her question of 20 January, 2015.

Applications for visas for family reunification are refused for a range of reasons such as insufficient documentation furnished by the applicant or in some cases suspected fraudulent documents. In addition, visas are refused because of the financial capacity of the Irish national sponsor. Indeed in many cases there can be a combination of these and other reasons for refusal. Accordingly, it is not possible to provide the breakdown sought by the Deputy without the examination of the file of each individual application which would require the expenditure of an inordinate amount of staff time and resources being diverted away from processing of applications which could not be justified.

The Department's Policy Document on Non-EEA Family Reunification, referred to by the Deputy, was published in December 2013 and came into force on 1st January 2014. In that year, a total of 760 entry visas were granted for the purpose of joining an Irish spouse or partner. The policy document specifically recognises ministerial discretion indicating that such discretion applies to most of the decision making in the area of family reunification as covered by the

policy document. It is more a question of the policy document providing greater detail on how that discretion is intended to be applied. Accordingly, the visa deciding officer considers the full circumstances of each case which are fully taken into account in deciding each application. In addition, appeals of decisions are considered by a different officer of my Department who is generally at a more senior level.

Naturalisation Certificates

319. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will reduce the application fee or the fee for a certificate of naturalisation to enable greater access to citizenship to those unable to afford these fees; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7779/15]

320. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views that the fees related to naturalisation are preventing migrants in the State from becoming citizens; her further views that this has a negative impact on the ability of migrant communities to engage in political events, such as referenda, presidential elections and Dáil Éireann elections; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7780/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 319 and 320 together.

The Irish Nationality and Citizenship Regulations 2011 set out the prescribed fees to be paid by an applicant for a certificate of naturalisation. An application fee of €175 is payable on application for a certificate of naturalisation and a fee is payable by applicants on the issue of a certificate of naturalisation. The standard certification fee is €950, while a reduced fee of €200 applies in the case of an application made on behalf of a minor or in certain cases where the application is made by a widow, widower or surviving civil partner of an Irish citizen. In the case of refugees and stateless persons the certification fee is nil. The certification fees were last changed in 2008.

The standard fees payable by an applicant are designed to reflect the effort and cost involved in processing applications for a certificate of naturalisation. Every application must be assessed to establish if the statutory requirements are met. It is notable that the volume of applications for a certificate of naturalisation increased by over 50% in 2011, and increased further in 2012. The Deputy will be aware that following the grant of citizenship it is no longer necessary for the person concerned to register their presence in the State with the Garda National Immigration Bureau which requires the payment of a fee of €300 per registration. I do not accept that the fees related to naturalisation are a barrier to migrants in the State becoming Irish citizens.

As the Deputy will be aware formal citizenship ceremonies have been introduced at no extra cost to applicants. These have been universally well received by participants as the ceremonies provide a sense of dignity and occasion that serves to underscore the importance to both the State and the applicant of the granting of Irish citizenship. Democratic participation by citizens is a cornerstone of our representative democracy and a leaflet informing new citizens of their right to register and vote in all elections in the State and how to register is included in the ceremony packs issued to candidates for citizenship.

All of the fees payable under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 are kept under ongoing review by my Department.

Garda Operations

321. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will assign additional resources to the Tallaght Garda station to allow for effective action to be taken, in respect of crime in Kilnamanagh Estate, Tallaght, Dublin 24, and to particularly support the efforts of Kilnamanagh Neighbourhood Watch; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7836/15]

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 170 is the personnel strength of Tallaght Garda Station on 31 December 2014, the latest date for which figures are readily available. There are also 12 Garda Reserves and 12 civilians attached to the station.

I am very pleased that my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform agreed to the resumption of Garda recruitment. Last September, 100 new Garda recruits entered training at the Garda College in Templemore, the first intake of Garda recruits since May 2009. This was followed by an intake of a further 100 recruits in December and a third intake of 100 this month. This means that there are now 300 Garda students in training. The Garda Commissioner, will of course, continue to keep the needs of Tallaght Garda Station under review within the overall context of the needs of Garda Stations throughout the country.

Community gardaí maintain contact with the Kilnamanagh Neighbourhood Watch and attend their meetings. Any issues identified at these meetings are addressed by community Garda members. Matters of concern are highlighted locally to all station personnel.

The Divisional Burglary Response Unit also provides regular patrols throughout the Tallaght sub-district as part of crime patrols under Operation Acer.

Fuel Laundering

322. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of suspected petrol stretching cases the Garda is currently investigating; the number of these cases that are in counties Longford and Westmeath; if the Garda has prosecuted anyone in relation to petrol stretching; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7841/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I wish to advise the Deputy that it is not possible to provide the data sought in the time available for reply. However, I have requested the Garda authorities to provide the requested information and I will arrange for all available information to be forwarded to the Deputy upon receipt.

Firearms Licences

323. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide an update concerning firearms (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7853/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can inform the Deputy of the number of rifles, shotguns and handguns reported stolen in the past five years. The table beneath refers to each year from 2010 to 2014 and is provided from Garda PULSE records.

Firearms stolen	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total
Handgun	9	12	16	12	8	57 (incl. 40 air pistols)
Rifle	49	79	76	65	48	317
Shotgun	184	216	166	174	113	853
Other	119	93	84	102	85	483
Total	361	400	342	353	254	1710

These figures relate to licensed and unlicensed firearms stolen over the period, which includes those stolen from Firearms Dealers.

The category of other firearms in the table includes firearms as defined under the Firearms Acts such as, humane killer, starting gun and blank firing gun.

The total figure for handguns of 57 includes 40 air pistols.

Figures are operational and are liable to change.

Garda Deployment

324. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide the number of gardaí assigned to each divisional drug unit for 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and to date in 2015. [7868/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): All Gardaí have a responsibility in the prevention and detection of criminal activity whether it be in the area of burglary, drug offences or otherwise. Specifically in relation to drugs, I can assure the Deputy that An Garda Síochána continues to pro-actively and resolutely tackle all forms of drug crime in this jurisdiction. The Garda National Drugs Unit, works closely with dedicated Divisional and District Drug Units and other national units, including the Organised Crime Unit, as well as the Criminal Assets Bureau in targeting persons involved in the illicit sale and supply of drugs.

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the personnel strength of each Divisional Drugs Unit on 31 December 2011-2013 and to 31 December 2014, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was as set out in the table overleaf.

Divisional Drugs Units

Division	2011	2012	2013	2014
DMR South Central	16	13	11	19
DMR North Central	18	20	13	20
DMR North	32	31	27	16
DMR East	15	13	13	10
DMR South	31	30	23	17
DMR West	35	28	26	24
DMR NSS	2	6	0	0

Division	2011	2012	2013	2014
Waterford	10	10	9	5
Wexford	11	6	4	1
Kilkenny/Carlow	8	7	7	5
Tipperary	9	8	7	7
Cork City	24	26	29	28
Cork North	7	9	9	5
Cork West	7	5	4	3
Kerry	10	6	8	10
Limerick	20	12	11	12
Donegal	12	10	10	8
Cavan/Monaghan	8	5	0	0
Sligo/Leitrim	7	8	6	8
Louth	6	7	6	6
Clare	9	7	6	7
Mayo	5	5	5	5
Galway	12	11	12	8
Roscommon/Longford	7	6	7	6
Westmeath	9	7	7	6
Meath	7	6	4	4
Kildare	7	2	2	6
Laois/Offaly	6	3	0	3
Wicklow	11	3	4	4
TOTAL	361	310	270	253

Drugs Crime

325. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her responsibilities in the area of addressing the misuse of drugs here; the number of staff that are assigned in her Department for tackling the illegal use of drugs; the actions she has taken since becoming Minister to address the drugs problem here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7870/15]

326. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when she last held a meeting with the Garda Commissioner to discuss actions to tackle the misuse of drugs here; when she last met with the Department of Health to review same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7871/15]

327. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the budget her Department has, to tackle the illegal use of drugs here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7872/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 325 to 327, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy will be aware, the national response to the problem of drug misuse is set out in the National Drugs Strategy for the period 2009-2016.

The Strategy adopts a comprehensive and pillar based approach to the problem, across the five pillars of drug supply reduction, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and research. The

Strategy is founded on a partnership approach with Government Departments, Agencies and the Community and Voluntary sectors working collectively to tackle the problem.

The Strategy is being led out under the stewardship of my colleague the Minister for Health Mr. Leo Varadkar T.D. who chairs the Oversight Forum on Drugs under which the implementation of the Strategy is monitored.

My Department and its agencies continue to progress the actions assigned to the criminal justice sector under the National Strategy and to actively participate in all of the structures in place under the Strategy, including for example, the Oversight Forum, the National Advisory Committee on Drugs and Alcohol and the National Co-ordinating Committee on Drugs and Alcohol Task Forces.

Of course, that Strategy will now fall to be reviewed and Minister Vardakar was recently in contact with me to flag the development of the National Drugs Strategy post 2016 in respect of which planning has already begun in the Department of Health.

My Department also actively contributes to relevant international drugs policy fora, in partnership with the Departments of Health and Foreign Affairs and Trade, including the EU Horizontal Working Party on Drugs and the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs.

I can assure the Deputy that I meet on a regular basis with the Garda Commissioner concerning law enforcement matters generally which would include drugs related issues. Just last December, I met with the Garda Commissioner, other senior Garda officers and senior officials from my Department and relevant agencies to further develop responses to particular concerns regarding drug dealing and anti-social behaviour manifesting in the Dublin city centre area.

In addition, drug law enforcement remains a key priority area for the Government and An Garda Síochána. This is clearly reflected in the Programme for Government commitments and An Garda Síochána's Policing Plan for 2015 which highlights a strong focus in combating serious crime in all its forms.

The Deputy will appreciate that drugs related issues feature prominently across the criminal justice policy areas for which I have responsibility whether it is in the context of crime policy, penal policy, prison and probation initiatives, youth diversion initiatives etc.

Given the extent to which this issue permeates the work of my Department detailing the resources including staff resources associated with that work is not without its difficulty. Having said that, details of drug related expenditure incurred by national authorities is collated for EU data collection purposes on an annual basis. Within that framework, expenditure by this Department in 2014 was estimated to be €18.5m. This included funding in areas such as the community based addiction projects supported by the Probation Service, Garda Youth Diversion Projects and the criminal justice related costs associated with the Drug Treatment Court and the National Drug Related Deaths Index.

Garda Reserve

328. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the date extra powers in the area of public order will be granted to attested members of the Garda Síochána Reserve; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7873/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I fully support the important role of the Garda Reserve in the delivery of the policing service. I am informed by the

Garda Commissioner that she is currently finalising arrangements to extend the powers and functions of Reserve members with a view to implementation at an early date.

Visa Applications

329. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will examine a stamp 4 application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7880/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Nationalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the current permission of the persons referred to by the Deputy expires on 31 March 2015 and INIS will write to them in the near future to progress their application.

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.

Criminal Prosecutions Data

330. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons who have been prosecuted to date for abuse of elders under the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Persons Act 1997. [7946/15]

331. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons who have been prosecuted to date for abuse of vulnerable adults under the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Persons Act 1997. [7947/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 330 and 331 together.

The Garda Síochána Act 2005 makes provision for the compilation and publication of crime statistics by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose. I have requested the CSO to provide such relevant information as may be available directly to the Deputy.

Garda Transport Data

332. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of marked and unmarked vehicles attached to the Garda technical bureau, that were withdrawn from the fleet in the years 2012, 2013 and 2014; the number that were replaced during each of those years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7981/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will be aware that decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda vehicles are a matter for the Garda Commissioner in the light of her identified operational demands and the availability of resources.

In that context, I am advised by the Garda authorities that no vehicles were withdrawn from the Technical Bureau in the years 2012 and 2013. Four vehicles were withdrawn in 2014, three marked and one unmarked. Three marked and one unmarked vehicle were subsequently allocated to the Technical Bureau in 2014.

The Deputy will be aware that I recently secured a further €10 million for investment in the Garda fleet of which €7 million was made available in 2014. This funding brings the total investment in the Garda fleet in 2014 to €11 million. The remaining €3 million is being made available for the purchase and fit out of additional Garda vehicles in 2015.

Stardust Fire

333. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on correspondence (details supplied) concerning new evidence on the Stardust fire tragedy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7992/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The correspondence referred to by the Deputy is currently the subject of examination in my Department and a response thereto will issue in due course. I wish also to inform the Deputy that the submission of other, related, reports concerning this matter, which were compiled by another researcher associated with the Stardust Victims' Committee, is the subject of ongoing communications with that Committee.

Missing Persons

334. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding missing persons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8055/15]

335. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding missing persons here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8056/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 334 and 335 together.

I would like to express my sincere condolences to the family and friends of the person concerned. The Deputy will appreciate that I do not have a direct role in Garda operational matters. I am, however, assured by the Garda authorities that all incidents where persons have been reported missing remain open and under investigation until such times as the person is located. I am further advised that An Garda Síochána has strong formal and informal relationships with the UK authorities which assists in such investigations. More broadly, the services of Interpol can be utilised, providing An Garda Síochána with a formal network of communication involving 190 international police forces.

In so far as the general Garda Missing Persons Protocols are concerned, when a missing report is made, the Garda authorities complete a risk assessment on PULSE asking specific question about the person's disappearance resulting in a specific level of risk being assigned to the investigation (i.e. High, Medium or Low risk).

A Garda assessment of a missing person as 'High Risk' indicates the person is in danger due to their own vulnerability and/or that they may have been a victim of crime. An Inspector

is required to oversee such cases and all available Garda resources are deployed including the establishment of an incident room, deployment of a Senior Investigating Officer, appointment of a Detective Sergeant and other resources deemed appropriate such as a Search Manager, Family Liaison Officer, Juvenile Liaison Officer or Ethnic Liaison Officer. High risk cases are reviewed regularly and actions taken are based on the presumption that the case may escalate. District Officers (Superintendents) have responsibility for reviewing the incident including the initial risk assessment, quality assuring any actions taken and checking for outstanding and incomplete actions.

All available opportunities to disseminate information regarding missing persons cases are availed of, including through media organisations, and the Garda Community Text Alert scheme. In addition, An Garda Síochána has put in place Child Rescue Ireland (CRI) Alert, a rapid information dissemination process, which enables the Gardaí seek the assistance of members of the public in circumstances where a child has been abducted and there is a reasonable belief that there is an immediate and serious risk to the health or welfare of a child.

I am further advised that that the Garda Missing Person Guidance Manual, which was introduced in May 2012, will be subject to a Garda review process later this year. It is envisaged that part of this process will involve the development of enhanced protocols for Garda engagement with local support and voluntary services with the overall objective of increasing the effectiveness of missing persons' investigations.

Constitutional Convention Recommendations

336. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the date on which she received the report from the Attorney General-led working group which has, for the past two years, been studying the recommendations on gender equality amendments contained in the February 2013 report of the Constitutional Convention; the contents of the working group's report, including any positions proposed on the convention's recommendations regarding amending the women in the home clause, gender-inclusive language amendments, and a proposed new provision setting out a general right to gender equality; if and when she will publish this report; and if and when she will bring the report to Cabinet for decision. [8060/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Government has undertaken to look at the question of the most appropriate wording to be presented to the people arising from the recommendations in the Second Report of the Convention on the Constitution in relation to amending the language in Article 41.2 on the role of women in the home. It has also undertaken to look at the feasibility of including the principle of gender equality as well as the use of gender-inclusive language in the Constitution.

A Task Force composed of officials from the Equality and Civil Law Divisions of the Department of Justice and Equality has been established to examine these issues and has collaborated in its work with the Attorney General's Office and other Departments as necessary. A draft Report, which was submitted by the Task Force in mid-December, is under active consideration at present. I hope to be in a position to bring proposals to Government in the near future. No decision has been taken on publication of the Report of the Task Force.

Firearms Licences

337. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding gun licences; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

[8064/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have asked the Garda Commissioner for a report in relation to the matter and will write to the Deputy as soon as I have further information.

Asylum Applications

338. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 357 of 10 February 2015, the timeframe to assess an application for asylum or subsidiary protection; if this individual case is particularly different; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8083/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My response to Parliamentary Question No. 357 of 10 February, 2015 set out the Department's policy in relation to providing information on individual applications for asylum or subsidiary protection. As previously notified to the Deputy, responsibility for the processing of asylum and subsidiary protection applications rests with the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC).

The Commissioner has informed me that the median processing time for asylum applications is 21 weeks for cases determined to date in 2015. This is due to the substantial increase in asylum applications recorded in 2014 and to date in 2015.

As regards the processing of subsidiary protection applications generally the Deputy will be aware that responsibility for processing such applications transferred in November, 2013 to the Refugee Applications Commissioner under the European Union (Subsidiary Protection) Regulations 2013. The Commissioner announced in March 2014 that he is according priority to certain classes of applications for subsidiary protection. The legal basis for the prioritisation of applications is set out in the 2013 Regulations. Prioritisation relates solely to the scheduling of interviews and has no implications for any recommendation that might be made by the Commissioner. The classes of applications to be prioritised includes those cases longest in the system and those prioritised based on country of origin. The UNHCR as part of its mandate in relation to international protection has provided advice in relation to the prioritisation of applications.

The Deputy will also be aware that the time taken to process a protection application to finality can be prolonged by the lodging by applicants of appeals with the Refugee Appeals Tribunal against determinations made by ORAC or the taking of judicial review proceedings against decisions made at various stages of the protection determination process.

Departmental Staff Careers

339. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason an assessment by managers is required as part of the internal higher executive officer competition but is not required for the internal promotion competition to the grade of assistant principal officer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8101/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The management of internal promotion competitions is a matter for my Department's Human Resources Division. I do not have a role in this regard.

The Deputy may wish to note, however, that my Department has been successful in secur-

ing the agreement of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to hold a number of internal promotion competitions, some of which are ongoing. Different procedures have been adopted for different competitions depending on the relevant grade, the anticipated number of candidates participating in the particular competition and the requirements expected of candidates. All internal promotion competitions are conducted to a high standard in accordance with the guidance laid down by the Commission for Public Service Appointments. In that context, the use of a manager's assessment is regarded as a legitimate element of the competitive process for internal promotion to the position of Higher Executive Officer.

Naturalisation Applications

340. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8123/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As previously stated in my answer to Parliamentary Question No. 123 on 23rd October 2014 the person referred to by the Deputy has not made an application to the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service. This person was first registered in the State on 30/01/2012 as a student and was granted permission to remain in the State until 22/01/2013.

The person concerned has not renewed their permission and has not had any Immigration permission to remain in the State since 22 January 2013 when this person's student permission expired.

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

Residency Permits

341. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress, to date, in respect of entitlement to remain here, under section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999, in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8126/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the persons concerned, having no valid basis to remain in the State, were, by separate letters dated 20th November, 2014, notified of the proposal to make deportation orders in respect of them. These communications advised the persons concerned of the options open to them as a result which were to leave the State voluntarily, to consent to the making of a Deportation Order or to submit, within a period of 15 working days, written representations setting out reasons as to why they should not have deportation orders made in respect of them.

The position in the State of the persons concerned will now be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement. All representations submitted

will be considered before a final decision is made.

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

Residency Permits

342. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding entitlement to residency status, in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8132/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned has been granted permission to remain in the State for the three year period ending 6th February, 2018. This decision was conveyed in writing to the person concerned by letter dated 6th February, 2015.

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

Charities Regulation

343. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the Charities Regulatory Authority is inviting applications from schools and other education bodies; if guidance on the registration process for these charities has been developed; and if they will have to pay registration and annual filing fees. [8133/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Charities Regulatory Authority is not currently accepting applications for charitable registration from education bodies within the meaning of the Charities Act 2009 and this has been signalled on the Authority's website, www.charitiesregulatoryauthority.ie.

I am advised that the Authority will be meeting with the Department of Education in the near future to discuss future arrangements for schools and other education bodies, in the context of the statutory establishment of the Charities Regulatory Authority last October. The website of the Authority will be continually updated to reflect any developments regarding these and related matters.

It is intended that, in time, all charities will be charged fees; these fees will vary depending on the income of the charity. My Department conducted a wide-ranging consultation with the charities sector and other stakeholders on this and other issues in 2013. It is envisaged that an announcement on the appropriate levels of fees for registration and annual reporting will be made in the coming months.

Assisted Human Reproduction

344. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the way the Child and Family Relationships Bill 2013 will deal with couples who have a child by assisted human reproduction, which was carried out in a non-clinical setting, but with the donor's full consent; the status the birth mother's partner will have in this situation; if the birth mother's partner can be recognised as the child's second parent; if the Bill will deal with these situations, in a retrospective manner, as they apply to many Irish couples; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8197/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Children and Family Relationships Bill, which is going through second stage in the Dáil this week, will not change the position of any child born as a result of assisted human reproduction in a non-clinical setting. There is case law concerning the parentage of a child born in such circumstances, and it is very clear that the natural father has parental rights and responsibilities in relation to the child. The birth mother's partner is not a parent.

Families in these circumstances have a number of possible options. The birth mother and her partner may seek to jointly adopt the child, as the Bill will amend the Adoption Act 2010 to allow civil partners or cohabiting couples to be able, subject to being assessed as suitable, to adopt jointly. The father would be entitled to be consulted on any proposed adoption. If adoption is not an option, the birth mother's partner could apply for guardianship of the child.

Court Accommodation Provision

345. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide an outline of the projects undertaken, thus far, as part of the strategic courts project, under the Government infrastructure stimulus programme of 2012; and if she will provide an outline of further court house new builds, and-or refurbishments, due to be delivered under this programme. [8206/15]

346. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there are plans to include County Wicklow as part of any public private partnership project, under the Government infrastructure stimulus programme 2012, or any subsequent programmes, for the purpose of courthouse refurbishments, in order to allow the Courts Service to complete plans, under the strategic courts project; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8207/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 345 and 346 together.

As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts including the provision of accommodation for court sittings, is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions.

The Government Infrastructure Stimulus Programme includes a Courts Bundle which comprises seven new and refurbished courthouses for the Courts Service, to be delivered by Public Private Partnership. The locations of these seven projects are: Cork, Limerick, Waterford, Wexford, Mullingar, Letterkenny and Drogheda. This bundle of projects is currently in the procurement phase. It is expected that construction will commence before the end of 2015 and that the courthouses will be completed during 2017.

The Courts Service has indicated that it has acquired a site adjacent to the existing court-

house in Wicklow which would allow for the refurbishment and extension of the existing courthouse. This matter will be kept under review having regard to available resources, however, any decision regarding a future infrastructure stimulus package is a matter for the Government.

Stardust Fire

347. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on the Knox investigations into the Stardust tragedy; if she accepts that the information unearthed, which was previously not in the public domain indicates that a new investigation is needed to uncover the true facts of the Stardust fire; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8214/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The information referred to by the Deputy is currently the subject of examination in my Department and a response thereto will issue in due course.

I wish also to inform the Deputy that the submission of other, related, reports concerning this matter, which were compiled by another researcher associated with the Stardust Victims' Committee, is the subject of ongoing communications with that Committee.

Garda Disciplinary Proceedings

348. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 325 of 23 October 2014, in relation to gardaí suspended from duty in 2014, the types of activity for which they were suspended. [8243/15]

349. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 325 of 23 October 2014, if she will provide information in relation to the suspension of gardaí, broken down by rank for 2014; and if she will provide a synopsis of the category of complaint against them. [8244/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 348 and 349 together.

I have requested the information sought by the Deputy from the Garda Commissioner and on receipt I will write directly to her.

Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission

350. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide details of any meetings she had with the former chairman of the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (details supplied) in the six months prior to the former chairman's departure, indicating whether these took place before or after the former chairman announced that he was resigning as chairman; if she received any correspondence from the former chairman on the matter of his resignation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8245/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): With regard to meeting with the Ombudsman Commission, which is a statutory independent body, I can inform the Deputy that, as Minister for Justice and Equality, I meet with the Commission from time to time during which a wide range of issues may be discussed that relate to our respective roles. The last such meeting which was attended by Mr. O'Brien was in October 2014.

I previously informed the Deputy, in my response to her Parliamentary Question No. 35 of 15 January 2015, that Mr. O'Brien, in his letter of 7 January advising of his intention to resign as Chairperson of the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, made clear that this was as a result of his being successful in securing the position of Chief Executive of the Pensions Ombudsman Service in the UK and he has since taken up that position.

Bankruptcy Data

351. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she is satisfied with the current numbers seeking bankruptcy under the new legislation; her future plans to review the three-year term for bankruptcy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8259/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): There has been a significant increase in the number of seriously indebted persons seeking bankruptcy by self adjudication since the reduction of the automatic discharge period from twelve years to three.

There were four hundred and forty eight (448) bankruptcies during 2014 compared with fifty eight (58) in 2013. It is expected that this increasing trend will continue.

There has also been a significant reduction in the application costs for bankruptcy. The total cost of applying for bankruptcy is now approximately €270. The cost in 2013 would have been in the region of €1400.

These measures along with the removal of application fees for those wishing to avail of one of the alternatives to bankruptcy under the Personal Insolvency Act 2012 mean that there is now a full suite of viable solutions for people struggling with unsustainable debt, in order to restore them to solvency.

Following a commitment in the Statement of Government Priorities 2014-2016, my Department completed a review of the personal insolvency legislation in December 2014. As I have already informed the Dáil, I am currently considering the outcome of the review and intend to bring proposals to Government shortly for such legislative amendments as may be considered appropriate regarding the suite of solutions available to people struggling with unsustainable debt.

Garda Deployment

352. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans for the deployment of the newly trained gardaí graduating from Templemore, County Tipperary; if such deployments will seek to address the present imbalances in service provision; when these deployments will take effect; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8309/15]

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.

The first intake since 2009 of 100 new recruits entered training at the Garda College, Templemore, on 15th September 2014. As part of Budget 2015, a further intake of 200 recruits in two batches was announced. On 15 December 2014, the first 100 of these batches commenced

their training. The remaining 100 entered the college in early February. This will bring to 300 the number of recruits in the Garda College and is a measure of the Government's commitment to ensure that recruitment to An Garda Síochána continues seamlessly. The September intake will attest as members of the Garda Síochána in May 2015 and the December intake will attest in August 2015. On attestation they will be assigned to Garda stations throughout the country by the Garda Commissioner.

I remain in discussion with my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform on the timing of future intakes of Garda recruits.

Home Schooling

353. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position in regard to his Department's guidelines for children's home schooling for two days a week, while they attend school for the other three days; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7914/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The statutory Education Welfare Service has specific responsibility for the Child and Family Agency's general function to ensure that each child attends a recognised school or otherwise receives a certain minimum education.

Section 14(2) of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 provides: 'Where a parent chooses to educate, or to have educated, his or her child in a place other than a recognised school he or she shall, in accordance with this section, apply to the Child and Family Agency to have the child concerned registered in the register'. The Agency has a statutory obligation to maintain a register of all children in receipt of education in a place other than a recognised school. Section 14 further sets out the obligations of parents in this regard and the form of the application and information to be provided with the application for the child to be included in the register.

The Agency has advised that under Section 14(17) a child may not be on the register of a recognised school, while registered under Section 14 of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000.

If the Deputy has a particular situation that has been brought to his attention, the Agency has advised that it would be happy to arrange a briefing for him on its full responsibilities in such cases.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

354. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the care plans that are being put in place by the relevant authorities for dealing with homeless families with children that are housed in emergency accommodation in the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8173/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): 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 and, as part of this process, care plans are devised. These care plans may, in certain instances, refer to additional supports required by the child's family.

Homelessness as part of a family group is not, in of itself, a basis for seeking to receive a

child into care. Furthermore, there is no statutory basis for the preparation of care plans for families with children entering emergency accommodation.

As the Deputy is aware, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government recently issued a Ministerial Direction to the four Dublin local authorities and to certain other housing authorities prioritising homeless households and other vulnerable groups (including young people leaving State care) for housing in their respective areas for a six-month period. This measure should reduce the number of homeless persons including families in emergency accommodation.

The December 2014 Action Plan to Address Homelessness includes a commitment for the Child and Family Agency and Dublin City Council to coordinate operations to ensure that services are fully responsive to the particular protection and welfare needs that might arise for families in emergency accommodation.

The Child and Family Agency has advised me that they have had meetings with Focus Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and Dublin City Council in relation to vulnerable families and issues facing care leavers. The Agency intends to create a multi-agency protocol to be clear about individual agency and multi-agency responsibilities with regard to homelessness and work on this will commence shortly.

In cases where there are welfare or protection concerns in relation to children in families presenting as homeless, the reporting of such concerns to the Child and Family Agency is governed by Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children [2011].

Child Care Services Funding

355. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he is satisfied with the current level of Government investment in child care; his views that this investment is one of the lowest in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7700/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): My Department supports the provision of early childhood care and education by providing funding in the region of €260 million annually to provide for three child care support programmes that make child care services more affordable. This funding ensures that more than 100,000 children have access to quality child care each year. This high level of support, which is in addition to the support provided to all parents in the form of Child Benefit, has been maintained despite the difficult budgetary situation that prevailed in recent years.

I wish to point out to the Deputy that, while the annual spend on child care related programmes has been in the region of 0.2 per cent of GDP in recent years, this expenditure does not include expenditure under other programmes or by other Departments and therefore does not represent the full extent of State expenditure. Ireland spends over 0.4% of GDP relative to the OECD average of 0.7%.

It is clear that accessibility, affordability and high quality child care can play a critical role in achieving a number of Government priorities, including improving educational outcomes for children, reducing poverty and increasing parents' participation in the labour market. To ensure that all the benefits of child care investments are fully realised, future public investment in child care must be evidence-based and strategically coordinated. I am establishing an Inter-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 child care services.

This new Group will include representatives of the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the Department of Finance and the Department of the Taoiseach and will be led and supported by my Department. I have asked that the work of this Group be carried out within a relatively short time frame and I expect that the Group will be in a position to report to me in the Summer.

Child Care Services Funding

356. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if consideration will be given to re-instating the early childcare supplement funding levels of 2009 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7701/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Early Childcare Supplement (ECS), which in 2008 represented an investment of €480 million, was discontinued by the previous Government with effect from the end of December 2009. Part of the resources made available to support the ECS was redirected to provide for the free preschool provision, introduced under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme.

The ECCE programme represents an annual investment of almost €175 million and provides free preschool care and education to approximately 68,000 children each year. This funding has been maintained despite the difficult budgetary position that has prevailed over the last four years. The introduction of a second preschool year would require considerable additional funding, broadly in line with the cost of the current one-year provision and this additional funding is not presently available due to the financial constraints under which the Government is operating.

I will be looking at the question of appropriate supports for child care in a wider context. It is crucial that we develop a coherent whole-of-Government approach to investment in child care services. To ensure that all the benefits of our full range of child care investments are fully realised, future public investment in child care must be evidence-based and strategically coordinated. I have established an Inter-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. I have asked the Group to report to me by the Summer.

Child Care Costs

357. **Deputy Shane Ross** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his views on the current cost of child care for families where both parents are working; his views on child care costs becoming tax deductible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7714/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I am aware of the relatively high cost to parents of child care in this country and of the difficulties that this presents, particularly where both parents are in employment outside of the home. To help address the issue of child care costs, in the region of €260 million is provided annually by my Department to support a number of child care programmes. More than 100,000 children benefit from this investment each year. These programmes are in addition to the support provided to all parents in the form of Child Benefit.

The programmes include the free preschool year provided under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. In the region of 68,000 children benefit each year from the programme at a cost of €2,375 per child. The Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) programme provides funding to community child care services to support disadvantaged or low income families. In the case of full day care, parents can have up to €95 per week deducted from the overall charge. In the region of 25,000 children each year benefit from the CCS programme. Further child care support is provided under a number of labour activation measures which support parents returning to the work force or availing of education or training opportunities. Increased capitation and subvention payments under the support programmes could reduce the cost to parents and I have indicated that if resources become available, I will review the scope for increasing the level of payments.

The question of tax allowances for working parents was considered prior to the introduction of the support programmes. A number of issues emerged at that time which did not favour the introduction of tax relief for child care. For example, the introduction of tax credits would not help to support quality improvements within the child care sector and would not help those families on low pay who may not have any tax liability. There is also concern that the application of tax credits could lead to increased prices and therefore have limited impact in terms of savings to parents.

I want to look at the question of appropriate supports for child care in a wider context. It is crucial that we develop a coherent whole-of-Government approach to investment in child care services. To ensure that all the benefits of our full range of child care investments are fully realised, future public investment in child care must be evidence-based and strategically coordinated. I have established an Inter-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. I have asked the Group to report to me by the Summer.

National Carers Strategy

358. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the support that is available for young carers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7815/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The National Carers Strategy is led by the Department of Health and many Departments including the Department of Children and Youth Affairs have a role to play in its implementation. In September 2014 officials from my Department and the Child and Family Agency met with the National Carers' Association to discuss the role of the Department and the Agency in relation to the National Carers' Strategy.

The Child and Family Agency Act 2013 brings together a range of existing services for children and families to one agency. As of 1st January 2014, the Child and Family Agency is responsible for the former Family Support Agency, the National Educational Welfare Board and also for the functions of Child and Family services previously provided by the HSE. The Agency's functions include maintaining and developing services in order to support and promote the development, welfare and protection of children and to support effective functioning of families. In so doing the Agency will promote enhanced interagency cooperation to ensure that services are coordinated on the principle of the best interest of all children and their families.

The Educational Welfare Service (EWS) of the Child and Family Agency is in the process of refining and implementing a new strategic approach to service delivery through an integrated model of service committed to the principle of "One Child, One Team, One Plan". The EWS

of the Child and Family Agency is developing national guidelines as a practical support for schools in the preparation of School Attendance Strategies as outlined in Section 22 of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000. The guidelines will assist schools to implement effective measures to support children at risk of poor attendance and participation, including those with caring responsibilities. It is anticipated that the guidelines will be completed before the beginning of the 2015/16 academic year.

In order to learn more about children that undertake caring roles, my Department requested the Central Statistics Office to help to identify the extent to which children have caring responsibilities. The Census of Population 2011 found that 6,449 children, or 5.6 per 1,000 children provided regular unpaid personal help for a friend or family member with a long-term illness, health problems or disability. Rates ranged from 4.3 per 1,000 in Co. Louth to 8.2 per 1000 in Co. Leitrim. Under the National Strategy for Research and Data on Children's Lives (2011-2016) analysis of those figures in the 2011 Census will help to inform future policy as to how best to address the support needs of children and young people who undertake caring roles. This analysis will be published in 2015.

A National Youth Strategy is also being developed by my Department. It will be a universal strategy for all young people aged 10 to 24 years. It will have a particular focus on those who are most disadvantaged or at risk and who have the poorest outcomes and therefore in most need of support. The consultation process in the development of this strategy has included a number of major stakeholder consultation events and I am pleased that representatives of the Carers Association participated in these consultations.

Child Care Costs

359. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs regarding child care costs, his plans to provide any or extra financial relief to families, who pay extortionate amounts for their child care every month; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7845/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): In the region of €260 million is provided annually by my Department to support a number of child care programmes which assist parents in accessing quality and affordable child care. More than 100,000 children benefit from this investment each year. These programmes are in addition to the support provided to all parents in the form of Child Benefit.

Increased capitation and subvention payments under the child care support programmes could reduce the cost to parents, and support child care services to meet the overall costs of child care provision. I have indicated that if resources become available, I will review the scope for increasing the level of payments.

I will be looking at the question of appropriate supports for child care in a wider context. It is crucial that we develop a coherent whole-of-Government approach to investment in child care services. To ensure that all the benefits of our full range of child care investments are fully realised, future public investment in child care must be evidence-based and strategically coordinated. I have established an Inter-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. I have asked the Group to report to me by the Summer.

Youth Services Funding

360. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the total funding, in each scheme, provided in 2014, under his Department's youth services grant scheme, special projects for youth scheme, the young people's facilities and services fund, local drugs task force projects, local youth club grant scheme and youth information centres; the bodies that benefited, and their geographic locations; the total capital funding in each case; the way the spread of funding is calculated, based on need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7860/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work provision to some 380,000 young people and involve approximately, 1,400 youth work staff in 477 projects and 40,000 volunteers working in youth work services and communities throughout the country. In 2014, funding of €49.78m was provided to my Department for these schemes.

The funding allocated by my Department in respect of the schemes indicated in the Deputy's question is set out in the table, below.

Scheme	2014
Youth Service Grant Scheme	€9.949m
Special Projects for Youth	€14.4m
Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund (Round 1 and 2)	€18.397m
Local Youth Club Grant Scheme	€1.035m
Youth Information Centres	€1.234m
Local Drug Task Force projects	€1.151m

In addition, in 2014 a capital allocation of €500,000 was made available to fund small capital projects in the youth services. Some 50 local youth projects received grants under the scheme.

Details of the youth organisations and youth projects throughout the country that received funding under each of the schemes are being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy.

My Department is developing a National Youth Strategy. The new strategy will be based on Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People. It will be a universal strategy for all young people aged 10 to 24 years. It will have a particular focus on those who are most disadvantaged or at risk and who have the poorest outcomes and therefore in most need of support.

A consultation on the new strategy is underway at present. It includes consultation on the priorities for the new strategy and the findings of the recently completed Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Programmes that target disadvantaged young people. The review makes recommendations for the future operation of youth funding schemes and their development in the years ahead to ensure effective, evidence based value for money programmes designed to ensure the optimal outcomes for young people who are at risk of disadvantage and in need of additional support. It is my intention that the recommendations in the review will be progressed over 2015 and 2016 in the context of the new Youth Strategy.

The consultation on the new National Youth Strategy will run to the end of this month and I anticipate that the strategy will be completed promptly thereafter.

Ombudsman for Children Remit

361. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the Ombudsman for Children will be empowered to investigate complaints by the 1,200 children who live in direct provision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7903/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I have no immediate plans to amend the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002 for the purposes outlined by the Deputy.

The direct provision system is under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality. The Department of Justice and Equality has primary responsibility in the area of asylum and immigration.

The Deputy may be aware that a report ‘*Review of the operation of the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002*’, was submitted by the former Ombudsman for Children, Ms Emily Logan to the then Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in March 2012. One of the recommendations contained in that report was that “... *section 11(1) (e) should be amended to clarify that the exclusion regarding the administration of law in the area of asylum, immigration, naturalisation or citizenship relates solely to decisions taken by the relevant authorities in accordance with statutory procedures for determining whether a person is entitled to a particular status.*” My Department engaged with the Department of Justice and Equality on this recommendation, among others. The then Minister for Justice and Equality considered that no legislative change was required and this position has been reaffirmed by that Department.

In a reply to a question by Deputy Brendan Griffin (Reference No. 31092/14 on 15th July 2014), the Minister for Justice and Equality addressed, among other issues, the question of the Ombudsman for Children being given jurisdiction in the direct provision system and for the Health Information Quality Authority (HIQA) to be allowed inspect direct provision hostels. In replying, the Minister made reference to provisions in both the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002 and Ombudsman Act 1980 which excludes either Ombudsman from investigating any action taken by or on behalf of a person in the administration of law relating to, inter alia, asylum. If I may quote from Minister Fitzgerald’s response, she said “*Whilst there are no plans to change those legislative provisions, the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) including RIA, has administrative arrangements in place with both Offices to assist and provide information on matters brought to its attention by them*”.

The Department of Justice and Equality has established a working group to review a range of issues pertaining to asylum seekers and direct provision. The first meeting of the Working Group on the Protection Process was held on the 10th November 2014, chaired by Judge Bryan McMahon. The Working Group consists of children’s rights advocates, organisations engaged with asylum groups and representatives from a range of relevant government departments, including a representative from my own Department. I look forward to learning of the findings and recommendations of the working group in the Spring of 2015.

Aftercare Services

362. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position regarding provision of after care for young persons leaving residential child care and their legal rights to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7906/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Aftercare is a term used to describe the planning and support put in place to meet the needs of a young person who is

leaving statutory care at 18 years of age, to assist him/her in making the transition to independent living. It is essential that all young people leaving care are provided with the type of transitional support that their individual situation requires. Aftercare is available to all those eligible irrespective of previous care placement, for example, foster care or residential care.

The Child Care Act 1991 provides that the core eligible age range for aftercare is from 18 years up to 21 years. This can be extended until the completion of a course of education and training in which a young person who has left care, or is leaving care, is engaged, up to the age of 23 years.

Section 45 of the Child Care Act 1991 provides that the Child and Family Agency may assist a child leaving its care if it is satisfied that the person has a “need for assistance”. The provisions have been interpreted and applied on the basis that young people who have had a care history with the Agency are entitled to an assessment of need, from which an aftercare plan may be prepared and an aftercare service may be offered (based on the assessed needs).

Current aftercare provision incorporates advice, guidance and practical (including accommodation and financial) support. Advocating on behalf of young people to support their development as fulfilled adults in their community and, when necessary, to link them to targeted adult services, are also crucial elements of an aftercare service.

Between 450 and 500 young people leave care annually upon turning 18. According to the Child and Family Agency, at the end of September, 2014 there were 1,698 young people aged 18 to 23 years (inclusive) in receipt of an aftercare service. Of those, 946 (56%) were in full time education.

A significant number of these young people are supported financially to remain living with their foster carers, in addition to having access to an aftercare worker. The most vulnerable group of children are those leaving residential care or short term foster care placements. Children, who come into care late, in their mid to late teens, may not have developed the relationships with staff or aftercare workers that help them achieve good outcomes.

Young people who do not have family support from a foster carer or family base are assisted in finding accommodation in supported lodgings, sheltered housing or independent accommodation and encouraged and supported financially in furthering their training and education.

Furthermore, as the Deputy is aware, it has been decided to strengthen the legislative provisions regarding aftercare. This is in response to concerns that there was insufficient focus in this area and that such planning was not taking place on a properly structured and consistent basis. The approach adopted is to impose a statutory duty on the Child and Family Agency to prepare an aftercare plan for an eligible child or eligible young person. The aim is to create an explicit, as opposed to implicit, statement of the Agency’s duty to satisfy itself as to the child’s or young person’s need for assistance by preparing a plan that identifies those needs for aftercare supports.

It is anticipated that the Aftercare Bill will be published in the early part of 2015.

Inter-Country Adoptions

363. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position regarding negotiations between the Adoption Authority of Ireland and the Russian authorities in respect of the bilateral agreement on inter-country adoptions; when the authority will finalise the wording of the agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[7933/15]

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

Further correspondence was received from the Russian authorities in October and December 2014. Consideration of these communications is currently taking place in my Department.

Adoption Records Provision

364. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the mother's date of birth would ordinarily have been recorded on her file when she was placing her child for adoption; and if, for this or other reasons, the Adoption Authority of Ireland or adoption agencies are likely to have a record of the date of birth of each woman who placed a baby for adoption here since the enactment of the Adoption Act 1952. [8130/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Adoption Authority of Ireland has advised that adoption consent forms only require the age of the mother to be inserted on the form when she is under 18 years of age (or under 21 years of age on the earlier consent forms). The Authority also advised that information regarding the mother's age, held on other forms in relation to the child varies, with some holding details of the mother's date of birth, age, approximate age or no information in this regard.

Bullying of Children

365. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which his Department continues to address issues of bullying among teenagers or young adults outside of the classroom; if a specific provision exists in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8282/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children has as one of its outcomes that children are active and healthy, and another that children are safe and protected from harm.

Bullying Data from Wave One Data Collection from the Child Cohort in Growing Up in Ireland (at age nine) revealed:

A total of 40% of nine-year-olds reported being victims of bullying in the past year, and boys and girls experienced similar rates of victimisation.

Consultation with Young People

A national consultation was conducted with children and young people during 2011 and the report, *Life as a Child and Young Person in Ireland: Report of a National Consultation*, was

published in 2012. Bullying and peer pressure emerged in the top eight ‘not good’ things for both children (aged 7-12) and young people (aged 12-18).

The Action Plan on Bullying

The Action Plan On Bullying: Report of the Anti-Bullying Working Group to the Minister for Education and Skills was published in January 2013 clearly recognised the necessity to tackle this issue in a holistic way which saw schools as pivotal but placed the issue within a much wider social context. One of the recommendations was that a single national anti-bullying website is to be developed to provide information for parents, young people, youth workers, sporting and cultural associations and school staff on types and methods of bullying and how to deal with bullying behaviour. This is now being considered as part of the implementation plan for Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures.

Cyberbullying

The Minister of Communications established an Internet Content Governance Advisory Group under the chair of Dr. Brian O’Neil in December 2013 to ensure our national policy represents best practice in offering the same online protections to our citizens as those available in the offline world.

The Group’s report was approved by Cabinet and published in May 2104 and makes several recommendations aimed at protecting children and young people without unduly limiting their opportunities and rights online. Along with changes to institutional, administrative and legal structures, the report makes four specific recommendations on cyberbullying aimed at providing stronger supports for tackling this issue through primary and post-primary curricula, and additional training and awareness measures.

In Ireland Safer Internet Day is promoted by the PDST Technology in Education and Web-wise.ie. It is also strongly supported by the Safer Internet Ireland Project. This was held earlier in February with the theme “Let’s create a better internet together”.

Work with Youth services

Schools are strengthening collaboration and interaction with youth services and promote the active participation by pupils in youth focused services within their local communities. DCYA supports the National Youth Health Programme which is in partnership with the HSE and the National Youth Council of Ireland. The programme’s aims are to provide a broad-based, flexible health promotion/education support and training service to youth organisations and to all those working with young people in out-of-school settings.

Work with Primary Care Teams

Work is currently under way with primary care teams in the HSE to pilot ‘social prescribing’. Social prescribing creates a formal means of enabling primary care services to refer young people with social, emotional or practical needs which include experience of being bullied or showing bullying behaviour to a variety of holistic, local non-clinical services.

Departmental Communications

366. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which his Department maintains regular contact with groups, bodies or agencies involved in the support of children, with particular reference to voluntary groups; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [8284/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): My Department has contact with various voluntary groups, bodies and agencies involved in the support of children. These contacts relate to a range of responsibilities that come within my remit and some bodies have multiple contacts with my Department in line with their respective areas of interest.

On an ongoing basis, we have contacts with the State Bodies coming within remit of my Department, namely, the Child and Family Agency and the Adoption Authority of Ireland. We have contact with the Ombudsman for Children in the context of our relationship with that Office under the governing legislation.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 is a document for the whole of government and indeed the whole of society. The *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Advisory Council was established in November 2014 and includes representatives from key groups working in the areas of Early Years, Children and Youth, as well as independent experts and individuals nominated by myself. The Advisory Council ensures that the expertise and perspectives from the areas informs the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.

The Advisory Council provides a platform for the community and voluntary sector to support the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, and to connect with the other implementation structures. As the community and voluntary sector connects with and mobilises communities, families and individuals, and are an essential partner to ensuring the successful implementation *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and securing better outcomes from children and young people.

Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs), previously known as Children's Services Committees (CSCs), are an initiative of my Department bringing together a diverse group of agencies in local county areas to engage in joint planning of services for children and are firmly embedded in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, as an important vehicle for local interagency work. All major organisations and agencies working locally on behalf of children and young people up to the age of 24 are represented on CYPSCs. These committees work to improve the lives of children, young people and families at local and community level through integrated planning and improved service delivery. Communications are directed through a National Coordinator reporting to my Department and through a National Steering Group which will be reconstituted in the first quarter of 2015 with support and representation from my Department.

My Department works closely with the youth sector interests in developing key initiatives such as the National Youth Strategy 2014-20. The National Youth Work Advisory Committee, whose members include representatives of the national youth organisations, Government departments and the Education and Training Boards, that support youth services at local level, has an important advisory role to me in matters to do with provision for young people. In September 2014 I met with the representatives of some 30 national and major regional youth organisations to see how we can work together within resources available to ensure that programmes and services being provided are relevant and responsive to young people's needs.

In the development of the Children First legislation, a number of roundtable meetings were held with key stakeholders to brief them on the provisions of the Bill. Further consultations with stakeholders will be undertaken in the context of the passage of the Children First legislation through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

My Department works with a wide range of non-government organisations in the develop-

ment of policy and practice on children and young people's participation in decision-making. A National Strategy on the Participation of Children and Young People in Decision Making is currently being developed.

Some specific topics involve contacts with particular groups. For example,

- the Children's Rights Alliance in relation to policy matters arising under the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child - specifically the Third Optional Protocol to the UNCRC on a Communications Procedure;
- the ISPCC in relation to the Missing Children's Hotline which is now funded by DCYA;
- Barnardos in relation to the provision of Guardian Ad Litem services under the Child Care Act 1991;
- The Children's Research Network for Ireland and Northern Ireland, established in 2010 to support the research community to better understand and improve the lives of children and young people, by creating and maintaining an inclusive, independent, non-profit network through which information, knowledge, experience, learning and skills can be shared.

The Children Detention Schools (CDS) have a service level agreement with certain organisations. Empowering People in Care (EPIC) provide advice, support and individual advocacy services to children and young people in care, those preparing to leave care and those in aftercare. The Youth Advocate Programmes (YAP) organisation build partnerships between vulnerable young people, their families and communities to support their full potential through a community based, strengths focused, intensive support to selected young persons for up to six months on their discharge to aid their re-integration into their community where the child doesn't have other adequate supports in place.

The Early Years Policy Unit in my Department has ongoing interaction on a range of child care related issues with the 31 City and County Childcare Committees and the 7 National Voluntary Childcare organisations that represent child care providers and also advocate in relation to child care issues. The voluntary organisations include Barnardos, Early Childhood Ireland, Childminding Ireland, Border Counties Childcare Network, St. Nicholas Montessori, Irish Steiner Waldorf Organisation and Forbairt Naíonraí Teoranta.

Contacts with any other organisations not mentioned above can take place during the year, either at my request or in response to requests from the organisations concerned.

Departmental Communications

367. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the degree to which his Department continues to liaise with the various voluntary child and youth support agencies in County Kildare, with particular reference to addressing ongoing issues and challenges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8285/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I will refer the Deputy to my reply to his similar question today (Reference No. 8285/15) that addresses this question on a national level. Such liaison with various voluntary support bodies across the spectrum of activity of my Department embraces the ongoing issues and challenges nationwide, including in Co. Kildare.

The Deputy will be aware that Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYP-

SCs), which were previously known as Children's Services Committees (CSCs), are an initiative of my Department bringing together a diverse group of agencies in local county areas to engage in joint planning of services for children and are firmly embedded in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the national policy framework for children and young people 2014-2020* as an important vehicle for local interagency work. All major organisations and agencies working locally on behalf of children and young people up to the age of 24 are represented on CYPSCs. These committees work to improve the lives of children, young people and families at local and community level through integrated planning and improved service delivery.

The inaugural meeting of the Kildare Children and Young People's Services Committee took place in June 2010. Communications are directed through a National Coordinator reporting to my Department and through a National Steering Group which will be reconstituted in the first quarter of 2015 with support and representation from my Department.

Youth Services

368. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which his Department supports youth service programmes throughout the country, with a view to ensuring the availability to young persons of the maximum amount of positive supportive influences in such areas such as health awareness and character building, in order to develop better self-esteem and re-assure those in need of support; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8286/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. Targeted supports for disadvantaged, marginalised and at risk young people are provided through the Special Projects for Youth Scheme, the Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund, Rounds 1 and 2, Local Drugs Task Force Projects and certain other programmes including the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme and Youth Information Centres. The funding schemes support national and local youth work provision to some 380,000 young people and involve approximately, 1,400 youth work staff in 477 projects and 40,000 volunteers working in youth work services and communities throughout the country. In 2015, funding of €49.9m has been provided to my Department for these schemes. There has been no reduction in the overall allocation for youth services in 2015 which was a key priority for youth organisations.

The Deputy may be aware that my Department is developing a National Youth Strategy. The National Youth Strategy will focus on the youth-related policy commitments outlined in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People. It will be a universal strategy for all young people aged 10 to 24. It will have a particular focus on those who are most disadvantaged or at risk and who have the poorest outcomes and therefore in most need of support.

A National Youth Strategy Task Group, convened by my Department, is overseeing the development of the new Strategy. This Task Group comprises statutory youth interests and voluntary agencies and organisations working with young people.

I am keen that all stakeholders have a role to play in the development of the new National Youth Strategy and a comprehensive consultation process is underway at present. It includes online surveys of young people and those working with young people and a number of major stakeholder consultation events. These events are for young people, the youth sector, NGOs working for and with young people, Education and Training Boards, Government departments,

agencies, business and academia and other youth interests. The consultation provides key stakeholders with the opportunity to reflect on the emerging priorities, to discuss the actions that will be required to achieve the Strategy's goals and their own roles in implementing the actions to secure improved outcomes for young people. The events include consultation on the priorities for the new Strategy and the findings of the recently completed Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Programmes that target disadvantaged young people. The review makes recommendations for the future operation of youth funding schemes and their development in the years ahead to ensure effective, evidence based programmes designed to secure the optimal outcomes for young people at risk of disadvantage and their communities.

The National Youth Strategy will provide a framework for actions initiated by Government Departments, statutory and non-statutory organisations into a co-ordinated, society-wide plan for young people. Key priority areas will be underpinned by realistic and achievable actions tied to specific outcomes and measurable indicators. The consultation on the new National Youth Strategy concludes at the end of this month and I anticipate that the Strategy will be completed promptly thereafter.

Suicide Prevention

369. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which his Department remains in contact with, and supportive of, statutory and voluntary agencies providing counselling and support to young persons deemed to be in danger of self-harm; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8287/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Child and Family Agency, Tusla, works closely with other care providers including the HSE, in respect of access to primary care services, child and adolescent mental health services, disability and other services. Tusla and the HSE have in place both a Memorandum of Understanding and a Joint Protocol for inter-agency collaboration which underpins the provision of these services for children. The purpose of the Memorandum of Understanding is to set out the partnership agreement between the HSE and Tusla to continue pre-establishment levels of service across both organisations. The objective of the Joint Protocol is to specify a pathway and associated responsibilities for children and families whose needs cross between Health Service Divisions and Tusla.

Both the Memorandum of Understanding and the Joint Protocol are subject to regular monitoring and review to ensure that they are working effectively in the best interests of children and families.

Responsibility for policy in relation to the treatment and support for young people with mental health problems and those requiring medical care as a result of self-harm rests with the Department of Health.

Direct Provision System

370. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which his Department monitors the well-being of children in direct provision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8288/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I can inform the Deputy that the direct provision system is under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality. The Department of Justice and Equality has primary responsibility in the area of asy-

lum and immigration.

The Department of Justice and Equality has established a working group to review a range of issues pertaining to asylum seekers and direct provision. The first meeting of the Working Group on the Protection Process was held on the 10th November 2014, chaired by Judge McMahon. The Working Group consists of children's rights advocates, organisations engaged with asylum groups and representatives from a range of relevant government departments, including a representative from my own Department. I look forward to learning of the findings and recommendations of the working group in the Spring of 2015.

Direct Provision System

371. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the degree to which his attention remains focused on the needs of children in direct provision, with particular reference to ensuring that normal standards and expectations are met and that areas such as trafficking are dealt with as a priority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8289/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I can inform the Deputy that the direct provision system is under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality. The Department of Justice and Equality has primary responsibility in the area of asylum and immigration.

The Department of Justice and Equality has established a working group to review a range of issues pertaining to asylum seekers and direct provision. The first meeting of the Working Group on the Protection Process was held on the 10th November 2014, chaired by Judge McMahon. The Working Group consists of children's rights advocates, organisations engaged with asylum groups and representatives from a range of relevant government departments, including a representative from my own Department. I look forward to learning of the findings and recommendations of the working group in the Spring of 2015.

Children in Care

372. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which children in care, of all ages, continue to receive adequate support and supervision, with particular reference to those in respect of whom particular problems have been identified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8290/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Child and Family Agency was established in January 2014 and is now the dedicated State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children. It comprises services for the protection and welfare of children, fostering and residential care services, family support, inspection of early years services and services relating to domestic, sexual and gender based violence. In relation to receiving children into care this can be by a voluntary agreement with parents or guardians, or through a care order that is granted by the Courts. The majority of children who are in care are in foster care with other placements being used where this is assessed as not being suitable for their needs. This can include residential care, special care or other placements (including supported lodging or disability placements). As of October 2014 there were 6,454 children in care, of which 93% were in foster care, 5% were in residential care and the remaining 2% were in other placements. There is statutory provision for support and supervision of children in care; latest figures show that the majority of children in care had an allocated social worker

and written care plan. In exceptional cases where an allocated social worker is not in place, the case is monitored at principal social worker level and managed by the duty social work team. It is important to note that urgent cases where a child is at imminent risk are acted upon immediately.

In relation to children for whom particular needs have been identified, it is important to state that children in care attend the same schools and services as other children in the community. This means that if a child in care needs a psychology assessment it would be accessed through the National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS) or through the community psychology service in primary care in the first instance depending on the particular need. These needs would be set out in the child's written care plan. Some residential care services have access to dedicated professionals. For example, children in special care attend school on-site and therapeutic services provided by the Assessment, Consultation and Therapy Service (ACTS).

The Agency has a budget of €643 million for 2015, an increase of €34 million on 2014. I am satisfied that the work of the Agency is being well monitored by my Department and that the Agency has prepared a comprehensive business plan that aims to ensure that all children in care receive the supports and service they require.

Child Poverty

373. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which the issue of child poverty continues to be monitored by his Department, with particular reference to the need to identify the most vulnerable families, with a view to provision of support; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8291/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 (BOBF), which was published and launched by Government in 2014, provides the overarching framework for the development and implementation of policy and services for children and young people. As provided for in the Framework, the Department of Social Protection is the lead department on child poverty and has lead responsibility for the commitment to lift over 70,000 children out of consistent poverty by 2020, a reduction of at least two-thirds on the 2011 level. The Department of Social Protection also has lead responsibility for the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. The outcomes of the recent European Commission/Departmental of Social Protection/Department of Children and Youth Affairs national seminar will inform the development of an implementation plan for tackling child poverty.

My Department is working on a number of initiatives which are relevant in addressing issues related to children poverty. My Department is leading the implementation of the Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme (2013-2016). The ABC Programme is being co-funded by Atlantic Philanthropies and will have a total funding allocation of up to €29.7 million. The ABC Programme draws on best international practice to break the cycle of child poverty where it is most deeply entrenched, and improve the outcomes for children and young people and existing services.

My Department is spending €260 million annually on childcare support programmes which provide childcare to 100,000 children. A number of these programmes are targeted at those on lowest incomes. We know from experience of other countries that investment in quality early childhood care and education is important in breaking the inter-generational cycle of poverty.

I have established an Inter-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. The Group's work involves, inter alia, identifying policy objectives to guide investment in contributing towards improvements in social inclusion and poverty reduction. It is crucial that we develop a coherent whole-of-Government approach to investment in childcare services. I have asked that this work be carried out within a relatively short time frame and I expect that the Group will be in a position to report me in the Summer.

My Department also provides targeted support for disadvantaged, marginalised and at risk young people through the Special Projects for Youth Scheme, the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund, and Local Drugs Task Force projects. In addition, some 31 national and major regional youth work organisations are supported under my Department's Youth Service Grant Scheme. Other grant schemes include the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme and Youth Information Centres. In 2015, current funding of €49.93m will be provided to my Department for these schemes.

Child Protection

374. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which his Department continues to monitor areas such as possible child pornography with particular reference to ensuring that adequate action will be taken to deal with the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8292/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Primary responsibility for issues relating to child pornography rests with the Department of Justice and Equality. Matters related to internet-based pornography are under the remit of the Office of Internet Safety, an executive office of that Department. Obviously, child pornography should be a concern to all of society. As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, my concern is to ensure that any risk to the protection and welfare of a child from any source, including child pornography, is quickly and appropriately addressed.

One of the commitments in *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures*, the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, is a reduction by 2017 in the availability on the Internet of child sexual abuse material, including child pornography. This commitment is led by the Department of Justice and Equality with the support of a number of other Departments, including my own.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, produced a Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook which is intended for social workers and other professionals who refer child welfare and protection cases. The Handbook contains advice in respect of online safety and online child sexual abuse in order to heighten awareness of same.

Youth Services Funding

375. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which he expects to be in a position to continue support for Kildare Youth Services, in line with increased demands and requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8293/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The

funding schemes support national and local youth work provision to some 380,000 young people and involve approximately 1,400 youth work staff in 477 projects and 40,000 volunteers working in youth work services and communities throughout the country. In 2015, funding of €49.9m has been provided to my Department for these schemes. There has been no reduction in the overall allocation for youth services in 2015 which was a key priority for youth organisations. My Department has notified youth organisations and projects, including Kildare Youth Service, of their 2015 allocations in respect of their youth services. An allocation of €488,200 has been allocated for the projects and services under Kildare Youth Services.

Last year, officials of my Department met Kildare Youth Services and have visited their office in Naas to hear about their work and their proposals, for the provision of services in County Kildare. My Department provides funding to Kildare Youth Services under the Special Projects for Youth Scheme in respect of six local youth projects in Athy, Naas, Leixlip, Newbridge, the Curragh and Kildare town and a Youth Information Centre in Naas. In addition, Kildare Youth Hub, Kildare Town has received approval under the 2013 Capital Scheme for the development of a new youth café facility.

Juvenile Offenders

376. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which he continues to monitor the need for rehabilitative support for child or juvenile offenders, with particular reference to identification of families at risk and the putting in place of the relevant necessary measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8294/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Appropriate education, training and other programmes and facilities for children are provided by the children detention schools on the Oberstown campus in line with the principles of the Children Act 2001, in conjunction with the Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board. The delivery of children detention services is focused on education and rehabilitation of those young people detained in order to address offending behaviour and support their early re-integration into the community.

The development project which is currently nearing completion in Oberstown will enable the extension of the child care model of detention to all children under the age of 18 years. The project also includes the provision of new education and recreation facilities as well as dedicated visiting facilities and a medical facility. These facilities will support and enhance the existing services already being provided to children in detention on the campus.

An individual management plan is put in place for each child on admission to the children detention schools which includes a mental health assessment to determine the need for more specialist services provided by the Assessment, Consultation and Therapy Service. This is a national service provided jointly by Tusla - the Child and Family Agency and the children detention schools which provides clinical services to children in detention and also in special care facilities, as well as short term interventions when the child returns to the community.

My Department also provides in the region of €53m to support the provision of quality youth provision throughout the country. This funding supports the provision of youth services and programmes to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. Targeted supports for disadvantaged, marginalised and at risk young people are provided through the Special Projects for Youth Scheme, the Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund and the Local Drugs Task Force Projects.

The Deputy may also wish to note that earlier community based interventions to divert young people from offending behaviour, such as the Garda Youth Diversion Projects and the Garda Diversion Programme are also in place in the community and come under the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality. These programmes aim to engage young people in contact with the criminal justice system in a process of learning and development that enables them to make positive lifestyle choices in the community.

National Drugs Strategy Implementation

377. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health his plans to allocate responsibility for the national drugs strategy to an existing Minister of State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7647/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Health, I have overall responsibility for the National Drugs Strategy at Government level. This role includes chairing the Oversight Forum on Drugs, which is responsible for the high level monitoring of progress being achieved under the Strategy. In addition, I am responsible for implementing the recommendations of the Steering Group Report on a National Substance Misuse Strategy 2012. In the circumstances, I have no plans to allocate responsibility for the National Drugs Strategy elsewhere.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Tobacco Control Measures

378. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if Ireland has officially responded to the objections from ten member states to the plain packaging Bill as it is obliged to do under the EU transparency directive; if the EU Commission has given the go ahead to proceed with this Bill as is also required; if all the correct processes have been followed; and if he will confirm that there is no exposure to the taxpayer of future compensation claims from the tobacco companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7876/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Public Health (Standardised Packaging of Tobacco) Bill was formally notified to the Commission and to Member States under the EU Technical Standards Directive (98/34/EC) and the Tobacco Products Directive (2014/40/EU) on 17 June 2014. As the Deputy has noted, detailed opinions on the proposed measures were received from a number of Member States. Ireland's response to these opinions was submitted to the Commission on 26 January 2015. The Commission has not issued any comment on the matter. Once the stand-still period set down under the Technical Standards Directive elapsed, the legislative process for the Bill could continue. The legislation has now been passed by the Seanad, and Committee Stage of the Bill was completed in the Dáil last week.

The Government considers that the Public Health (Standardised Packaging of Tobacco) Bill 2014 is a justified and proportionate public health measure. It is very important that the threat of litigation should not be an obstacle to the introduction of important public health measures.

Tobacco Control Measures

379. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Health his views on concerns that some legal firms are simultaneously acting on behalf of the State in various matters and also for tobacco

companies which are taking action or are threatening to take action against the State in respect of plain packaging measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8072/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I assume the Deputy is referring to reports last week that Arthur Cox Solicitors are acting on behalf of Japan Tobacco International (JTI) and also as legal advisors to the HSE. In relation to the Standardised Packaging legislation, the legislation is being prepared by the Department of Health and not by the HSE.

The HSE has informed me that its contracting model for legal services came into effect in 2011 following a competitive tender process. The HSE's model for legal services involves in excess of thirty law firms delivering services through four geographical panels; each panel representing a HSE Administrative Area. The law firms on these panels deliver advices and services across a broad range of areas, reflecting the breadth of services and activities of the HSE. Arthur Cox Solicitors act as the service manager for the contract and provide the HSE with corporate legal advice. The HSE should be informed of any direct conflicts of interest that exist between it and other clients of service providers. The HSE indicated that it was not notified by Arthur Cox in relation to JTI, and that it is making enquiries with Arthur Cox regarding any potential conflicts of interest in this regard as a matter of urgency.

Mental Health Services Provision

380. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which child psychiatric services remain adequate to meet modern challenges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8283/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The vulnerability of young people is demonstrated by the fact that this is the time when about 75% of mental illnesses first emerge. It is critical, therefore, that the development of a full range of mental health services, including those for young people, reflects modern national and international practice to best meet evolving challenges within our society. This Government has always recognised the need to bring about the fundamental changes necessary to mental health care, and I think that this is generally acknowledged across the mental health sector.

In line with the Programme for Government, and notwithstanding severe economic constraints, we have prioritised modernisation of mental health services in line with the widely agreed policy document *A Vision for Change*. This year, the total HSE budget for mental health is in the region of €790 million. We have, since 2012, provided an additional €125 million, including around 1,150 new posts to develop the mental health care programme. Approximately 235 of these posts were focused towards the Child and Adolescent area. The large majority of these have been filled, and the remainder are going through normal recruitment processes.

At the start of this year, there were 54 operational child and adolescent beds available to the HSE. Overall, the HSE are targeting to increase its operational capacity to 74 such beds nationally by the end of 2015. It should be noted that difficulties with re-opening some existing beds at local level, already resourced in the system, primarily relates to securing or retaining staff, rather than a question of funding. The question of providing new bed capacity beyond this year can only be realistically considered in the light of evolving annual service priorities and resource availability.

A key element in relation to the issue raised by the Deputy is the recent decision by the HSE to re-focus its various operational initiatives across the mental health spectrum to achieve improvement in mental health services for young people in 2015. This includes clearly indicated,

and agreed, priority actions to enhance performance in this area. I can assure the House that I, and the Department of Health, will continue to liaise closely with the HSE over the remainder of the year to ensure that evolving challenges are met to the greatest extent possible.

Hospital Appointment Status

381. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon will receive an orthopaedic appointment; if the person's case has been listed as urgent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7291/15]

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 specific case 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

382. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of fair deal beds available in the north-east region. [7649/15]

383. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of fair deal beds available in the north-east region, by year, since the scheme began. [7650/15]

384. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of fair deal beds available in the north-east region, by county, for each year since 2009. [7651/15]

385. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the locations in the north-east region of homes where fair deal residents are; if he will provide a breakdown on a county basis; and the number of beds each location contains. [7652/15]

386. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the amount paid out for each fair deal bed in the north-east region by location, home and county. [7653/15]

387. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of citizens who are on the fair deal waiting list in the north-east region, by county, and by each year, since the scheme commenced. [7654/15]

390. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the budget allocated for the fair deal scheme for the north-east region, by year since 2009. [7657/15]

391. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the budget allocated for the fair deal scheme, by county, in the north-east region, since 2009. [7658/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 382 to 387, inclusive, and 390 and 391 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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Data

388. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of fair deal beds across the State, by county and by year, since the scheme began. [7655/15]

389. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the fair deal waiting list across the State, by county and by year, since the scheme began. [7656/15]

393. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the budget allocated for the fair deal scheme across the State, and by Health Service Executive region, since 2009. [7660/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 388, 389 and 393 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.

Questions Nos. 390 and 391 answered with Question No. 382.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Expenditure

392. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the budget allocated for the fair deal scheme across the State since 2009. [7659/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The budget that was allocated to the Nursing Homes Support Scheme for the years 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 is set out in the table.

Year	Budget allocation
2009	€909m
2010	€979m
2011	€963m
2012	€994m
2013	€974m
2014	€939m
2015	€949m

Question No. 393 answered with Question No. 388.

Primary Care Reimbursement Service Payments

394. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health the number of general practitioners who have been subject to the removal of the rural practice allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7661/15]

395. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health the number of general practitioners who avail of the rural practice allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7662/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 394 and 395 together.

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

Cancer Screening Programmes

396. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients referred to Letterkenny General Hospital from BreastCheck in County Donegal for the years 2012, 2013 and 2014. [7664/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): BreastCheck, the National Breast Screening Service, does not refer women to Letterkenny General Hospital.

Hospital Procedures

397. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health the numbers of breast cancer-related surgeries carried out in Letterkenny General Hospital, County Donegal in the years 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014. [7665/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The number of breast cancer related surgeries undertaken at Letterkenny General Hospital is as follows:

-	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014 *
(a) Discharges following surgery for breast cancer	49	68	60	51	52	21
(b) All related procedures	76	103	97	77	78	37

(* data for 2014 is available up to 30 June).

With regard to the data at row (b), this refers to all discharges for surgical procedures associated with breast cancer or its secondary manifestations, including matters such as biopsy of bone, excision of skin and removal of prosthesis.

Hospital Staff

398. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health the cross-Border options that have been examined to enable the appointment of a second breast cancer surgeon at Letterkenny General Hospital, County Donegal, to ensure the long-term sustainability of the service. [7666/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): A backlog of referrals to the Symptomatic Breast Service at Letterkenny General Hospital is being addressed at present through engaging a locum consultant who is providing three days of clinics and through the consultant breast surgeon who is based in Letterkenny General Hospital arranging to see additional patients by adding extra appointments at existing clinics and by arranging a number of additional clinics. Steps are also being taken by the Saolta University Health Care Group to recruit a General Prac-

itioner, who will work with the consultant breast surgeon, and to develop the role of Advanced Nurse Practitioner in Letterkenny over a period of time.

While we are working with the Health Services in Northern Ireland in regard to the provision of radiotherapy services for people from the North West, at this point cross border options have not been pursued in relation to breast cancer services in Letterkenny General Hospital.

Hospital Consultants Recruitment

399. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health the measures he will take to ensure a permanent consultant urologist is appointed to Letterkenny General Hospital, County Donegal as soon as possible; and if he will revisit the offer from Co-operation and Working Together to fund a second consultant urologist at Letterkenny General Hospital. [7667/15]

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

400. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an application under the fair deal scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7673/15]

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

401. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide, in tabular form, the number of public and voluntary hospitals that have single or common waiting lists, a combination of public and private patients combined; if such waiting lists in any of the hospitals are confined to certain specialties; if so, if he will provide details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7675/15]

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

Hospital Appointment Status

402. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a hip replacement surgery in Saint James's Hospital in Dublin 8 will be arranged as soon as possible in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 12. [7683/15]

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.

Medicinal Products Prices

403. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health the reason cancer patients who attend public hospitals for treatment have their intravenous treatment undertaken free of charge whereas patients who are on the same treatment in tablet form must pay the pharmacy for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7703/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Health Act 1970 (as amended) provides that all persons ordinarily resident in the country are entitled, subject to certain charges, to all in-patient public hospital services in public wards including consultant services and out-patient public hospital services including consultants services. For persons availing of public in-patient services, such as the treatment described, the current public hospital statutory in-patient charge is €75 per night, to a maximum of €750 in any twelve consecutive months. Medical card holders are exempt from public hospital charges. In addition, the HSE, under Section 55 of the Health Act, may provide private in-patient services to persons who are not entitled to, or who do not have or have waived eligibility to public in-patient services.

As for those patients receiving treatment by medication outside of hospital care, under the Drugs Payment Scheme, an individual or family in Ireland only has to pay €144 for all their prescribed approved medication each calendar month.

Orthodontic Service Provision

404. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding orthodontic treatment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7705/15]

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.

Nursing Home Repayment Scheme

405. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding nursing home payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7722/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Under Section 12(1)(b) of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act 2009 any refunds which are due to an ap-

plicant under the Scheme can only be paid to the proprietor of the approved nursing home. The HSE is precluded from making payments directly to residents of nursing homes under Section 12(1).

The forthcoming Review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme which will be completed shortly, is considering the operation and management of the Scheme, including the issuing of backdated refunds.

Hospital Appointments Administration

406. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7723/15]

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 specific case 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 Transfers

407. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a transfer request in respect of a person (details supplied). [7735/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As this is a service matter it 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. 408 withdrawn.

Medical Card Applications

409. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for a medical card in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7791/15]

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

410. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Health the progress made with regard to the reconfiguration of gynaecology services in County Cork; the locations where public gynaecology services are now provided; the number of consultants available to treat public patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7806/15]

411. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients awaiting public gynaecology services in County Cork; if he will provide a breakdown of the amount of time patients have been waiting for public gynaecology appointments as follows: three to six months, six to nine months, nine to 12 months and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7807/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 410 and 411 together.

In relation to the particular queries raised by you, as these are service matters, 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 Carers Strategy Implementation

412. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the implementation of the national carers' strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7809/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The National Carers' Strategy was published in July 2012 and sets the strategic direction for future policies, services and supports provided by Government Departments and agencies for carers.

It sets out a vision to work towards and an ambitious set of National Goals and Objectives to guide policy development and service delivery to ensure that carers feel valued and supported to manage their caring responsibilities with confidence and are empowered to have a life of their own outside of caring.

The Strategy also contains a Roadmap for Implementation with a suite of actions and associated timelines, and identifies the Government Department responsible for their implementation. It is important to note that the actions in the Roadmap for Implementation are those that can be achieved on a cost neutral basis.

The National Carers' Strategy committed to the production of an Annual Report on progress which would be published on the websites of relevant Departments. The first Annual Report on implementation of the Strategy was published in November 2013 and the second in January 2015, both of which are available on my Department's website. These Annual Reports will provide the Deputy with a list of actions that were identified in the Strategy and what progress has been made on each one since the Strategy's publication.

Steps have been taken to improve liaison with carers' representatives and to establish clearer lines of accountability. The Department of Health and the Health Service Executive met with

carers' representatives at the Annual Carers' forum hosted by the Department of Social Protection today.

National Carers Strategy Implementation

413. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health his assessment of the level of support that his Department is providing to carers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7810/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The National Carers' Strategy was published in July 2012 and sets the strategic direction for future policies, services and supports provided by Government Departments and agencies for carers.

It sets out a vision to work towards and an ambitious set of National Goals and Objectives to guide policy development and service delivery to ensure that carers feel valued and supported to manage their caring responsibilities with confidence and are empowered to have a life of their own outside of caring.

The Strategy also contains a Roadmap for Implementation with a suite of actions and associated timelines, and identifies the Government Department responsible for their implementation. It is important to note that the actions in the Roadmap for Implementation are those that can be achieved on a cost neutral basis.

The National Carers' Strategy committed to the production of an Annual Report on progress which would be published on the websites of relevant Departments. The first Annual Report on implementation of the Strategy was published in November 2013 and the second in January 2015, both of which are available on my Department's website. These Annual Reports will provide the Deputy with a list of actions that were identified in the Strategy and what progress has been made on each one since the Strategy's publication.

Steps have been taken to improve liaison with carers' representatives and to establish clearer lines of accountability. The Department of Health and the Health Service Executive met with carers' representatives at the Annual Carers' forum hosted by the Department of Social Protection today.

The Department of Social Protection has responsibility for the main funding schemes for carers; the Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit, Respite Care Grant and the Domiciliary Care Allowance. Further details of these schemes are available on their website www.welfare.ie.

Mental Health Act Review

414. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if the Mental Health Act will be amended to require health professionals to involve the carers of mental health patients in their treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7811/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I acknowledge that patient outcomes tend to be better where families and/or carers are involved in the development of the patient's care and treatment plan. Health care professionals should proactively encourage patients at all stages to involve their family and/or carer in the development of these plans.

I also accept, however, that patient confidentiality is important and should not be compro-

mised, where in some limited cases, patients specifically request that contact not be made with families and/or carers. For the benefit of the patient, every effort must be made to encourage him or her to involve family and/or carers, but it is equally important to recognise that breaching this confidence against the patient's wishes, can damage the health professional/patient relationship. It should be noted however that the Medical Council's Ethical Guide does specifically allow a doctor to ethically breach confidentiality if, for example, he/she believes that the patient is at risk of harming himself/herself or others.

An Expert Group which I set up to review the Mental Health Act 2001 has recently completed its work and has presented its final report to me for consideration. The Group examined a range of issues, including the one mentioned by the Deputy. I intend to publish the Expert Group review early next month.

Mental Health Services Provision

415. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the introduction of community mental health teams; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7812/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The core unit of mental health service delivery is now the Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) of which there are 208 in place nationally as follows:

Number of Teams	Description
114	General Adult Teams
25	Psychiatry of Old Age Teams
63	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) Teams
3	CAMHS Day Hospital Teams
3	Liaison CAMHS Teams

These Teams provide care to individuals living in their own home or in supported accommodation within their own community. The additional funding provided for mental health is being used, in part to ensure that at a minimum, at least one of each mental health professional discipline is represented on all of those teams. This has involved the recruitment of a significant number of multidisciplinary health professionals since 2012 to strengthen this service.

In line with the Programme for Government, my priority as Minister has been to modernise our mental health services, notwithstanding the severe resource constraints overall in recent years, and to prioritise new resources to underpin implementation of *A Vision for Change*. In that regard, the Government has provided an additional €125 million and some 1,150 posts for mental health comprising €35m with 416 posts in 2012, €35m with 477 posts in 2013, €20m for the recruitment of approximately 250 posts in 2014 and a further €35 million in 2015. The funding is being used to continue to strengthen Community Mental Health Teams for both adults and children, to enhance specialist community mental health services for older people with a mental illness, those with an intellectual disability and mental illness, forensic mental health services, and to enhance access to counselling and psychotherapy in primary care and investment in suicide prevention measures.

At end December 2014, of the 416 approved posts in 2012, approximately 95% (397) are now filled. Of the 477 approved posts in 2013, 78% (367) are filled. The remainder of vacant

posts are at various stages of recruitment, with some difficulties in identifying outstanding candidates, primarily for geographic and qualification reasons. Therefore, approximately 86% of combined posts over 2012-13 have taken up duty. Recruitment for 225 approved allocated posts for 2014 has commenced with 4 having agreed start dates and a further 5 posts have been accepted. The remaining approved posts are to be recruited in early 2015.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

416. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 428 of 16 December 2014 (details supplied), if he will open the two beds in Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin, Dublin 12, that were closed for cost-containment reasons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7822/15]

417. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 428 of 16 December 2014 (details supplied), if he will report on discussions between Temple Street Children's University Hospital, Dublin 1, and the Health Service Executive, on the opening of the 14 bed St. Philomena's Ward, should there be demand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7823/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 416 and 417 together.

As these are service matters, 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 Services

418. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Health the average waiting time for a computed tomography, CT, scan at University Hospital Waterford; the number of persons that have been waiting for a scan in excess of six months and in excess of 12 months; the number of hours per week the existing scanner is in operation; the reason the new scanner at University Hospital Waterford, launched in May 2014, is not operational; if training has commenced for diagnostic staff to operate the new scanner; when this training will be completed; when the new scanner will be operational; the number of hours per week it is anticipated that the new scanner will be used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7825/15]

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

419. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite final approval for a fair deal nursing home support scheme application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7827/15]

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 Aids and Appliances Provision

420. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if a required shower seat can be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7828/15]

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 Waiting Lists

421. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if a date for a cataract operation will be provided in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry, following a further referral from that person's ophthalmologist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7831/15]

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 a reply is 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 Applications

422. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on a medical card application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7832/15]

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.

National Drugs Strategy Implementation

423. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when he last chaired a meeting of the Oversight Forum on Drugs; the number of times it has met in 2015; the number of times it met in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7844/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Health, I have overall responsibility for the National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016. The Oversight Forum on Drugs (OFD) which I chair, is responsible for the high-level monitoring of progress being achieved across the Strategy and meets on a quarterly basis.

The OFD met on four occasions in 2014 in January, May, July and October. I chaired the October meeting of the OFD, shortly after I assumed responsibility for the Strategy. The OFD has so far met once this year, on 29 January. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend this meeting due to other pressing Government business. However, I am committed to attending future meetings on a regular basis.

Health Care Policy

424. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if the Health Service Executive has any function, or role, from a public health point of view, regarding rats, rodents and infestation in persons' houses, which enter the property from adjoining properties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7849/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I have been advised by the HSE that their Environmental Health Services main involvement with pest control is in dealing with complaints from members of the public and advising on remedial measures to be taken to protect public health.

The responsibility for keeping land or property rodent free under the Rats and Mice (Destruction) Act 1919 lies with the owner or the occupier of the land. Section 1 of the Act states that: "Any person who shall fail to take such steps as may from time to time be necessary and reasonably practicable for the destruction of rats and mice on or in any land of which he is the occupier, or for preventing such land from becoming infested with rats or mice, shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine".

Where an authorised officer of the HSE is of the opinion that the occupier of any land or property has failed to comply with the legislation, a notice may be served. This notice will require the occupier to take the remedial steps necessary as set out in the notice within a specified timeframe. If the occupier fails to take the necessary steps the authorised officer may enter the land or property and take such steps as are necessary and reasonably practicable for the purpose of destroying the rats and mice or of preventing the land from becoming infested with rats and mice. The HSE may recover any reasonable expenses incurred from the occupier of the land or property summarily as a civil debt.

Treatment Abroad Scheme

425. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the treatment abroad scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7852/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. 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.

National Drugs Strategy Implementation

426. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide, in tabular form, an update on the implementation of each of the 63 actions in the 2009 to 2016 National Drugs Strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7858/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016 is a cross cutting area of public policy and service delivery. It is based on a co-ordinated approach across many Government Departments and Agencies in conjunction with the Community and Voluntary sectors and I intend that this approach will continue.

Periodic reviews of progress across the five pillars of the Strategy are carried out through the Oversight Forum on Drugs which I chair.

A progress report on each of the 63 Actions of the National Drugs Strategy is prepared each year and posted on my Department's website at *www.health.gov.ie*. The draft report for 2014 is still under consideration by the Oversight Forum on Drugs. I will arrange for a copy of the report to be sent to the Deputy when it has been agreed by the Forum.

National Drugs Strategy Implementation

427. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide, in tabular form, the funding provided each year, since 2010, by the Health Service Executive, to support implementation of the National Drugs Strategy. [7861/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

2010 Expenditure €m	2011 Expenditure €m	2012 Expenditure €m	2013 Expenditure €m	2014 Expenditure €m
105,400	92,878	90,752	90,392	114,777

The decrease in expenditure in 2011 compared to 2010 arose due to savings, which were achieved as a result of the public service pay cut, HSE staffing redundancies and a reduction in funding to Voluntary and Community Agencies funded under service arrangements. The increase in the 2014 allocation is due to a transfer of €21.57m in funding from my Department's Vote to the HSE Vote in respect of Drug and Alcohol Task Force projects.

In addition, a range of other services in the HSE provide frontline interventions to clients with addiction issues. These include the Health & Wellbeing, Mental Health and Acute Hospital Services Divisions as well as the Emergency Departments, Primary Care Services and General Practitioners.

Local Drugs Task Forces Funding

428. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide, in tabular form, the funding provided each year since 2010 to each of the local and regional drugs task forces. [7862/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In line with the National Drugs Strategy, my Department administers a Drugs Initiative which primarily funds community based drugs initiatives supported by Local and Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Forces. The budget allocation for the twenty four Local and Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Forces for each of the years referred to by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

LDAFs	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Ballyfermot	1,533,826	1,492,413	1,569,489	1,522,404	461,150	255,466
Ballymun	1,243,552	1,209,976	1,180,695	1,145,274	632,817	422,958
Blanchardstown	1,184,200	1,152,227	1,124,343	1,090,613	179,305	179,305
Bray	1,656,849	1,612,114	1,573,101	1,525,908	573,860	573,860
Canal Communities	1,645,413	1,600,987	1,562,243	1,515,376	338,605	338,605
Clondalkin	1,495,408	1,455,032	1,421,577	1,428,930	388,114	388,114
Cork	1,622,621	1,617,730	1,578,581	1,531,224	411,988	411,988
Dublin 12	1,180,005	1,148,145	1,120,360	1,086,749	74,013	70,997
Dublin North East	1,294,199	1,259,256	1,228,782	988,234	422,251	422,251
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	975,475	949,137	926,167	898,382	94,676	94,676
Finglas Cabra	986,452	959,818	936,590	908,492	263,277	263,277
North Inner City	2,495,777	2,428,391	2,369,624	2,298,535	576,956	494,856
South Inner City	2,276,911	2,215,434	2,161,821	2,096,966	255,720	176,043
Tallaght	1,316,913	1,281,356	1,250,347	1,262,837	452,712	341,438
RDAFs	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
East Coast	896,933	872,716	851,596	584,227	58,200	58,200
Midlands	1,576,095	870,581	849,513	824,028	307,810	136,816
Mid-West	894,739	1,533,540	1,496,428	1,451,535	147,982	147,982
North East	1,038,588	1,010,546	986,091	956,508	0	0
North West	806,369	784,597	765,610	742,642	272,485	258,633
North Dublin	870,066	846,574	826,087	801,304	456,080	309,778
South East	1,193,005	1,160,794	1,132,703	1,098,722	0	0
South West	894,750	870,592	849,524	824,038	102,820	102,820
Southern	1,089,369	1,059,956	1,034,305	1,003,276	0	0
Western	740,085	720,104	702,677	681,597	136,994	136,994

The reduction in the allocation in 2014 and 2015 respectively reflects the fact that my Department transferred €21.04m in funding relating to Drug and Alcohol Task Force projects to the HSE on 1st January 2014, with a further €1.02m transferring on 1 January 2015.

HIQA Remit

429. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will take immediate action and amend legislation to allow the Health Information Quality Authority to investigate individual complaints within residential care and nursing homes, as these persons are the most vulnerable citizens; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7874/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Information and Quality Authority is the independent authority established under the Health Act 2007 to drive continuous improvement and to monitor safety and quality in Ireland's health and personal social care services.

Since 2009 all nursing homes - public, voluntary and private have been registered and inspected by HIQA. During the course of this Government HIQA's function has been extended to residential services for those with disabilities and child protection services.

As regulator, HIQA's remit operates at the level of facilities rather than that of individual complaints, but the requirements at facility level impact very directly on how individual cases are dealt with.

All nursing homes are required to have an accessible and effective complaints procedure, including an appeals process. They must investigate all complaints promptly, and following investigation put in place any measures required for improvement. Records of complaints made are required to be kept. These are available for inspection, thus enabling the HIQA inspector to determine whether the complaints system is sufficiently robust.

HIQA takes into account and uses all information received to inform and plan its regulatory activity, and information on individual cases can provide useful pointers in this context. HIQA's programme of both scheduled and unannounced inspections helps to ensure that standards are maintained and where issues of non-compliance arise, that these are addressed and rectified. If a nursing home is found not to be in compliance with the Regulations it may either fail to achieve or lose its registration status. HIQA also has wide discretion in deciding whether to impose conditions of registration on nursing homes.

My Department, in consultation with both HIQA and the service providers, is working on an ongoing basis to improve and update the requirements that apply to nursing home care. Any request from HIQA for an extension of their remit on the lines suggested by the Deputy will be carefully considered.

General Practitioner Services

430. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the number of general practitioners in practice in each of the counties - Cavan, Monaghan, Louth and Meath; the number of these, by county, that are locum appointments; the number of posts, by county, that are unfilled entirely; the steps being taken to secure permanent appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7877/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter and the information requested by the Deputy is not readily available to my Department, I have referred the Deputy's query to the HSE for direct reply. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Health Services Funding

431. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the level of funding approved for a centre (details supplied) in County Kilkenny, in each of the past five years; the amount of funding allocated; the way this funding is accounted for by his Department; if his

attention has been drawn to the issues raised by the parents of clients of the service and if so, the action he has taken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7882/15]

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, please contact my Private Office and they will follow the matter up with the HSE.

Dental Services Provision

432. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details of removal of dental services in Carrick-on-Suir Health Centre, County Tipperary; if alternative local facilities will be secured to offer these services, rather than adding further difficulty to accessing this service by requiring travel to Clonmel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7884/15]

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

Mental Health Services Funding

433. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a project (details supplied) which is currently being delivered by Saint Colmcille's Gaelic Athletic Association Club, Bettystown, County Meath; if his attention has been further drawn to the huge success of the project and its proven mental health benefits to participants; if he will commit to the future funding of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7891/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): My priority as Minister of State with responsibility for Mental Health is to further advance the implementation of *A Vision for Change*, our national mental health policy and *Reach Out*, our national strategy for action on suicide prevention. Both strategies clearly identify the need to build resilience and support the development of services and programmes to reduce the risk of engaging in suicidal behaviour. Through these policies we aim to provide services which build on the strength and potential of our most vulnerable.

I met with the group in question only last week and they outlined for me the various supports and services they are providing which are aimed at maintaining and developing the mental wellbeing and physical fitness of those isolated and in need in their community. Decisions on the funding of such service initiatives would be a matter for the HSE and I recommended to the group that they contact their local HSE to discuss the future funding arrangements for programme.

Medical Card Applications

434. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date in assessment of recently submitted documentation, in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare in respect of a pending application for a medical card; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [7905/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

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

Medical Card Applications

435. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date in determination of an application for a medical card in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7907/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

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

Medical Card Applications

436. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the progress made, to date, in determination of a medical card renewal in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7908/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

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

Medical Card Applications

437. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the progress made to date in determination of application for a medical card in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7909/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

438. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details on the increase in numbers waiting for surgery for over a year in Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9; if any particular plan has been, or will be, put in place to address these lists at the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7911/15]

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

Medical Card Applications

439. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical card in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7912/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Medical Card Applications

440. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for a medical card in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7913/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Appointment Status

441. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in Dublin 10 will receive a date for hip replacement surgery in Cappagh National Orthopaedic Hospital, Dublin 11. [7915/15]

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.

Orthodontic Service Waiting Lists

442. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide, in tabular form, based on local health offices-areas and indicating those of 16 years of age and under, and those above 16 years of age, the numbers waiting for orthodontic treatment, at the end of December 2014. [7922/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The HSE provides orthodontic treatment to those who have been assessed and referred for treatment before their 16th birthday. It should be noted that the nature of orthodontic care means that immediate treatment is not always desirable. It is estimated that in up to 5% of cases it is necessary to wait for further growth to take place before treatment commences. Patients are assessed by the HSE Orthodontic Service under the modified Index of Treatment Need. Patients with the greatest level of need, i.e. Grade 5 or some with a Grade 4 are provided with treatment by the HSE.

Information on waiting times is collated by the HSE by region and for the intervals as shown below only. The information is not collated by age. In general, those waiting over 4 years would

be expected to be 16 years or over since they are usually referred at 12-13 years of age approximately.

The information on waiting times for treatment for Quarter 4 of 2014 is as follows:

Waiting time from assessment to commencement of treatment	1-6 months	7-12 months	13-24 months	25-36 months	37-48 months	Over 48 months	TOTAL
HSE Dublin Mid-Leinster	972	998	1,313	867	448	156	4,754
HSE Dublin North East	283	477	1,020	842	504	637	3,763
HSE South	812	632	703	888	599	24	3,658
HSE West	1,133	1,131	1,894	1,096	112	60	5,426
TOTAL	3,200	3,238	4,930	3,693	1,663	877	17,601

The HSE has established a pilot scheme in Dublin North East which will involve the use of orthodontic therapists in the treatment of a number of eligible children. In addition to the services provided by HSE staff, orthodontic treatment for certain categories of misalignment will be provided by a panel of independent practitioners under contract to the HSE over the next three years. A national procurement process is being finalised. This initiative will especially focus on those waiting for 4 years or longer. It is expected that this initiative will commence later this year and will have a positive impact on waiting times.

Health Services Funding

443. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be made available to a group (details supplied) to meet an immediate budgetary shortfall; if he will guarantee future funding, at an appropriate level, to enable the group to continue working with patients, who were the victims of sexual abuse, in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7929/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Funding for this group is a matter for the HSE.

I understand that a mechanism has now been agreed to address the funding shortfall experienced by the group in 2014 and that the terms of the 2015 Grant Aid Agreement are also agreed. The HSE is awaiting a business case from the group for development funding.

It is also open to the group to submit an application to the National Lottery in respect of a once-off project that does not have on-going revenue implications, details of which are now available on the Department's website (www.health.gov.ie). The closing date for all National Lottery applications is 1 May 2015.

Drugs Payment Scheme Coverage

444. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a treatment for the disease paroxysmal nocturnal hemoglobinuria in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7930/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The HSE has taken a decision to extend access to Eculizumab (Soliris) for sufferers of the diseases Paroxys-

mal Nocturnal Hemoglobinuria and atypical Haemolytic Uraemic Syndrome.

Due to the exorbitant cost of this drug the provision of Eculizumab for patients will be on a case by case basis and on the basis of clinical need.

Treating clinicians can apply to the HSE's Medicines Management Programme in order to commence a screening process for their respective patients.

Health Services Staff Data

445. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health when the employment file of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be released by the Health Service Executive, in view of the numerous requests made by relatives of the person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7931/15]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

446. **Deputy Brian Walsh** asked the Minister for Health if additional hours will be provided for a person (details supplied) in County Galway to ensure adequate support as that person moves into adult services; if further measures will be considered, to enable the organisation concerned to enhance the level of support to persons with disabilities, both at school age, and availing of adult services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7932/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I understand that this individual will leave school in June.

Planning has commenced in respect of all school-leavers and rehabilitative training graduates to ensure that needs are identified and appropriate services are provided to young people with disabilities. The HSE has confirmed that young people and their families will be notified by the end of June of the placement that will be available to them from September.

The HSE has allocated funding of €6 million (at a full-year cost of €12 million) in the Social Care Operational Plan 2015 to meet the need for continuing health-funded supports for young people with disabilities on finishing school or rehabilitative (life-skills) training.

In respect of the specific issue concerning additional support for this individual, as this relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the 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.

Patient Data

447. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he will indicate the current location of data for patients of the former hospital Mount Carmel Hospital, and the way in which these patients can access these data; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7938/15]

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

Hospital Consultants Recruitment

448. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health the plans in place by the Saolta University Health Care Group to recruit a second laparoscopic colorectal surgeon to work at Letterkenny General Hospital, County Donegal [7942/15]

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.

HIQA Investigations

449. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide, in tabular form, the time required to go through the complaints procedure in the Health Information and Quality Authority, from receipt of complaint to investigation and resolution; and the number of complaints dealt with since the authority's inception in 2007. [7948/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The functions of the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), which was established by the Health Act 2007, do not include a statutory complaints function with regard to the delivery of health and social services. While HIQA does not have the power to investigate individual complaints, it does review all information or concerns about services it receives and directs people to the best place to get help, advice, information and support. HIQA takes into account and uses all information received to inform and plan its regulatory activity and information on individual cases can provide useful pointers in this context. If there is a serious risk to the health and welfare of service users, the Authority may decide to take appropriate action in relation to that service.

All nursing homes are required to have an accessible and effective complaints procedure, including an appeals process. They must investigate all complaints promptly and, following investigation, put in place any measures required for improvement. Records of complaints made are required to be kept. These are available for inspection thus enabling HIQA to determine whether the complaints system is sufficiently robust.

Services for People with Disabilities

450. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if, and when, a replacement for the mobility grant scheme will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7955/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Conscious of the reports of the Ombudsman regarding the legal status of the Motorised Transport Grant and Mobility Allowance Scheme, in the context of the Equal Status Acts, the Government decided to close both schemes. The Government decided that the preparatory work required for a new travel subsidy scheme and associated statutory provisions should be progressed by the Minister for Health. The Department is seeking a solution which would best meet the aim of supporting people with severe disabilities who require additional income to contribute towards the costs

of their mobility needs, while remaining within the available budget and satisfying all legal and equality concerns. In the meantime, monthly payments have continued to be made by the Health Service Executive to 4,700 people who were in receipt of the Mobility Allowance at the time that the scheme closed.

Work is ongoing on the policy proposals to be brought to Government for the drafting of primary legislation for a new scheme. Once policy proposals have been finalised and approved by Government, the time frame for the introduction of a new scheme will become clearer.

Hospital Appointment Status

451. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon will receive an appointment for a hip replacement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7956/15]

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.

HSE Agency Staff Expenditure

452. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the amount the Health Service Executive spent on agency staff in January 2015; the proportion of the agency's anticipated expenditure on agency staff in 2015 that was incurred in January 2015; how the January 2015 expenditure on agency staff compares with that for January 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7964/15]

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.

HSE Staff Remuneration

453. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if the Health Service Executive has funding in its 2015 budget to cover increments for staff in 2015; the level of funding that will be required to pay such increments in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7965/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The gross provision for the Health Vote in 2015 is €12.677bn, comprising €12.295bn current and €382m capital expenditure. Following restatement on a like-for-like basis consistent with the new Vote structure, the Exchequer funding provided in 2015 represents an increase of €564m on the original 2014 provision. In addition to the Exchequer funding, increased (non-vote) income collected by the HSE of €130m will support expenditure in 2015. This contributes to a total increase of €694m compared to the 2014 original Estimate. Savings of at least €130m have also been identified which will be retained within the HSE to support services. The overall pay bill, including the cost of any increments accruing in 2015, must be met from within the overall budget of the HSE.

In relation to the level of funding required to pay increments to staff in 2015, I have asked

the HSE to respond to you 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 Consultants Remuneration

454. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if the Health Service Executive has funding in its 2015 budget to pay increased salaries to hospital consultants, who were employed on lower pay rates after October 2012. [7966/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform sanctioned the recently agreed salaries on the basis that all related expenditure will be met from within existing resources. The process that led to the revised arrangements commenced at the LRC last summer with the LRC publishing its initial proposals in September 2014.

Mental Health Services Provision

455. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the action being taken to ensure that reports that a child has spent three weeks in an adult psychiatric unit will not be replicated; if he will confirm that all vacancies in child and adolescent psychiatric units are recorded, and that no child is required to stay in units that are designed only for adults; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2198/15]

456. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure that reports that a child has spent three weeks in an adult psychiatric unit will not be replicated; if he will reassure Dáil Éireann that all vacancies in child and adolescent psychiatric units are recorded, and that no child is required to stay in units that are designed only for adults; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7695/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 455 and 456 together.

As this is a service matter, these questions have been referred to the HSE for direct reply. If you have not received a response within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

457. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 428 of 16 December 2014, and in view of correspondence (details supplied), if the 16 closed beds in paediatric services in Tallaght hospital, Dublin 24 for in excess of 18 months have been used for other purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7990/15]

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

458. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will examine a case (details supplied) regarding the Health Service Executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7993/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The employment and other related issues raised are primarily a matter for the HSE. However, given the nature of the details provided my Department sought a report from the HSE.

The HSE has advised that the person's complaints are detailed and complex and require a comprehensive review by an independent party to the HSE with a view to categorisation and classification of the complaints into specific issues. Once completed a determination will be made at that point on the methodology of how the complaints will be dealt with. My Department has asked the HSE to keep it informed as consideration is progressed.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

459. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health his plans to recognise those employees who are categorised as sessional workers, but have long-service records with the Health Service Executive, in respect of sick pay superannuation and other social entitlements; the number of persons in this category; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8028/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Department of Health Consolidated Salary Scales, as sanctioned by the Minister for Health, set out the salaries for public health service staff. These salary scales must be strictly adhered to and in no circumstances should an employee receive remuneration in the nature of pay and allowances of an amount greater than the amount prescribed.

In the first instance, sessional rates were intended for payment to self employed individuals providing a part-time or temporary service to the HSE. The HSE has advised that there are currently 380 individuals in receipt of sessional rates of pay. However, my Department is aware that certain individuals in receipt of sessional rates of pay are employees even though sessional rates of pay were never sanctioned for payment to employees (under contracts of service) and has requested the HSE to regularise these employees to ensure compliance with the Department of Health Consolidated Salary Scales.

Each individual case must be examined by the HSE to determine whether the individual meets the criteria for employee status as opposed to being a self employed contractor.

Hospital Consultants Contract

460. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce consultants fees, and pay, within the public sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5719/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Consultant Contract 2008 sets out the relative volume of private practice that may be undertaken by consultants, depending on the individual contract held. Depending on contract type, a consultant may have no access to private practice (Type A contract holders), a cap of 20% private activity for newly appointed consultants (Type B) or a cap of up to 30% in the case of certain existing consultants.

The level of fees charged by a consultant who sees a patient privately is a matter between the consultant and the patient. The fees arising may be met personally by the patient concerned,

by the patient's health insurer, or a combination of the two depending on the extent, if any, to which the patient has insurance cover for the service provided. I have no authorisation to set or adjust the fees that consultants charge in their private capacity.

Significant steps have been taken to make savings from hospital consultants pay in recent years. The salary scales for new entrant consultants' were reduced by 10% with effect from 1 January 2011. A further reduction of 30% was applied to these scales for those interviewed for posts on or after 1 October 2012. However, this later reduction has been restored to a significant degree, pursuant to a related recommendation by the MacCraith Group. In addition, on 1 July 2013 consultants' pay was reduced in line with the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2013.

An essential component of the approach to addressing the State's fiscal difficulties has been the firm focus on improving public service efficiency and effectiveness. Consultants have been subject to changes in work practices under the Public Service Agreement and the HRA. These include the range of flexibilities agreed at the LRC in September 2012 to enhance productivity and efficiency and the additional hours under the HRA. I have no plans to reduce consultant pay any further.

Magdalen Laundries

461. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if acupuncture, massage-based therapy and reflexology will be available to Magdalen women; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6975/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As the Deputy will be aware, the Redress for Women Resident in Certain Institutions Bill 2014, which was published by the Minister for Justice, completed Report and Final Stages in the Dáil last week.

The Bill is to make provision for services to be made available without charges to certain women who were admitted to and worked in certain institutions. The Bill also ensures 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.

While the final provisions of the Bill will be determined on completion of the Oireachtas debate, I am aware that there is no provision in the Bill for the services referred to by the Deputy.

However, as alluded to by the Minister for Justice during the course of the Dáil debates on the Bill, at her request, her officials will look at the question of providing some funding to the participants in the redress scheme so that they may avail of complementary therapies. This would be a separate scheme run on an administrative rather than statutory basis.

Medical Card Administration

462. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the processing of first-time applicants (details supplied) for medical cards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8065/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): 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 in-

cludes 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

463. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health his views on the effects on services offered in physiotherapy in Ballymun Health Centre, Dublin 11, due to the moratorium on recruitment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8067/15]

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 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.

Health Services Staff Data

464. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Health when the location the 50 new paramedic posts for the west of Ireland will be posted; if he will provide this data, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8073/15]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

465. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which it is within his remit to consider the health needs of preschool children, with special needs, starting their education in September 2015, if he will ensure enough assessments are made available in good time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8080/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has operational responsibility for the provision of health and personal social services including disability services for children. The Executive is currently engaged in a major reconfiguration of its existing therapy resources for children with disabilities into multi-disciplinary geographically based teams, as part of its *National Programme on Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People (0-18 years)*. The key objective of this Programme is to bring about equity of access to disability services and consistency of service delivery, with a clear pathway for children with disabilities and their families to services, regardless of where they live, what school they go to or the nature of the individual child's difficulties, with health and education working together to support children to achieve their potential.

The Programme is a key priority for the HSE's Social Care Directorate. An additional €4m was allocated in 2014 to assist in implementing the Programme, equating to approximately 80 additional therapy posts. Further investment of €4 million will also be made to support the

development of therapy services in 2015 (equating to €6 million in a full year). Close collaboration between the health and education sectors on children's disability issues is greatly facilitated by the dedicated Cross Sectoral Team, which is in place, comprising representatives of the Departments of Health, Education and Skills, and Children and Youth Affairs and the HSE, NCSE and NEPS.

My Department has asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy in respect of the detailed operational issues that she has raised concerning health needs encompassing therapy supports and assessments for pre-school children with a disability or development delay. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

466. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the status of an application under the fair deal scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8081/15]

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.

HSE Properties

467. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Health the overall cost of converting hospitals and community care databases to accommodate Eircode. [8090/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy 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.

Hospital Procedures

468. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an appointment for a medical procedure in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway. [8104/15]

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.

Health Services Provision

469. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a day care centre (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[8111/15]

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 response within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Health Services Provision

470. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the decision to decline the Resorcyclidene Aminoguanidine, RAG, application in respect of a child (details supplied) in County Cork. [8112/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the particular issue raised by the Deputy relates to an individual case, this is a service matter for the Health Service Executive. Accordingly, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Health Services Provision

471. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide information on the timeframe which persons with dyslexia and dyspraxia typically wait to access therapies following their diagnosis; if he will provide information on the way persons are currently waiting to access such therapies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8117/15]

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

Hospital Appointment Status

472. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Cavan will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8120/15]

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.

HIQA Reports

473. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide the details of concerns raised that the Health Information and Quality Authority is failing to carry out comprehensive reports by not listening, or giving voice, to those with disabilities; and that this flies in the face of our understanding of how to best empower service users, and residents with disabilities; if the views of those with disabilities will be recorded, and taken into account; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8125/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) began to regulate residential services for people with disabilities on 1 November 2013, pursuant to Statutory Instruments 366 (2013) and Statutory Instrument 367 (2013), which assign responsibility to HIQA for registering and inspecting residential services for children and adults with disabilities, including respite services.

I am informed by HIQA that an important part of its inspection process is spending time with residents, listening to them and observing their quality of life in the centre. HIQA considers that this part of the inspection is very important in informing the overall findings of the inspection.

In addition to listening to residents and observing their quality of life while on inspection, HIQA has established a consultative forum for residents' representative groups to ensure that the voice of residents are heard at organisational level in the Authority and to ensure that the views and concerns of residents' relatives and their advocates are listened to.

HIQA welcomes feedback on its processes and reporting and views such feedback as an opportunity to improve the quality of its work.

HSE Investigations

474. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Health if he will investigate the policy, in relation to physical restraints, at a hospital (details supplied); if it is the case that an elderly person admitted to this hospital was forcibly restrained, without the knowledge of the person's family; if he will take action on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8134/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): With regard to specific complaints in relation to experiences of individuals in our hospitals, there is a formal complaints policy, entitled "*Your Service Your Say*", details of which are on the HSE website, at <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/yourhealthservice/feedback/complaints/>.

In accordance with this procedure, a complaint must be made in the first instance to the hospital in which the incident causing the complaint occurred. If an individual is not satisfied with the response from the hospital, a review can be sought from the HSE Director of Advocacy and the Ombudsman, whose details are set out below.

HSE Director of Advocacy, Oak House, Millennium Park, Naas, Co. Kildare, Tel. 1890 424 555.

Office of the Ombudsman, 18 Lower Leeson Street, Dublin 2, Tel. 1890 223 030. Email: ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.ie.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to

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

Health Services Provision

475. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the case of a child (details supplied) in County Louth, who has been assessed by an occupational therapist as meeting the diagnostic criteria for development co-ordination disorder/dyspraxia; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that the occupational therapist has recommended follow-up occupational therapy service, but that the Health Service Executive has indicated a waiting time of 18 to 24 months for this to begin; if he will examine this case, with a view to beginning this treatment, as soon as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8136/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the particular issue raised by the Deputy relates to an individual case, this is a service matter for the Health Service Executive. Accordingly, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Health Services Staff

476. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details of those resident at an address (details supplied) in County Dublin, and the proposal to replace the nursing staff with care administrators; the reason there has been no formal consultation, or communication, with either the residents, or their family members; if the residents and families will be consulted in relation to this major change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8147/15]

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 Agency Staff Expenditure

477. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health the amount of money being spent annually by hospitals on agency nurses, and other agency health staff, due to the public sector embargo on recruitment; and if he will lift the public sector employment embargo in the health sector. [8153/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform announced in budget 2014 that he intends to delegate greater autonomy to Departments and Agencies to manage their own staffing levels. The change from the application of a rigid employment control framework, with its particular focus on a moratorium on recruitment and compliance with employment ceilings and targets, to one operating strictly within allocated pay frameworks will allow for recruitment where it is determined that this can achieve more economical service delivery. It will also allow continuation of the policy of recruiting front line

staff where necessary to ensure service delivery.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has advised that the HSE and Department of Health will be required to submit a 2015 Pay and Numbers Strategy as part of the revised arrangements. The HSE are finalising this submission at present. Following approval the revised arrangements will apply.

The HSE is currently focused on reducing nursing agency expenditure through the appointment of full time staff. The HSE issued a memorandum in October 2014 to management on measures to reduce agency usage and costs across the HSE and HSE funded acute hospital services. It provides for the replacement of NCHD and Consultant agency with fixed term contracts of employment, and limits reliance on doctors employed on an agency basis. It also provides for the identification of nursing posts currently filled by agency staff which could be directly replaced by two year contracts of employment and implementation of this measure.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on the matter raised on the level of agency expenditure. 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 Services

478. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 446 of 20 January 2015, the progress in obtaining a reply from the Health Service Executive; the action he will take to ensure that an early date for the operation is agreed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8157/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I understand that the HSE wrote to you on 10 Feb in relation to this matter. In relation to your further query, 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 Applications

479. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8160/15]

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.

Graduate Nursing Scheme

480. **Deputy Brian Walsh** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the graduate nurse scheme, where newly qualified nurses in the midlands region are receiving 85% salary during their first year of employment while, graduates in other regions are receiving 100% salary; when it is envisaged to introduce 100% salary for all graduates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8179/15]

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 also specifies that any subsequent appointment following completion of the Graduate Nurse Programme will be to the third point of the staff nurse salary scales. A memo issued on the 10th October 2014 by the National Director of Human Resources HSE offered participants in the Graduate Nurse Programme 100% of the staff grade nurse salary on fixed term contracts where agency nursing is being used.

The HRA provides for a review of the Graduate Nurse Programme when the successor to the HRA is being negotiated.

Hospital Waiting Lists

481. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the steps which are being put in place to facilitate spinal surgery at Galway University Hospital; the number of adults awaiting this procedure; the longest waiting time a person is on this list; the number of children awaiting this procedure; the longest waiting time of a child on this list; the interim measures being taken to clear this list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8185/15]

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

Hospital Services

482. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a date will be issued for an urgent operation in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8192/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Deputy's question relates to service delivery matters and accordingly I have asked the HSE to respond directly to him.

If 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.

Drugs Payment Scheme

483. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 342 17 February 2015, the way very elderly or disorientated patients make the necessary applications for refunds; his views that the refund system itself should pick up such

cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8194/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the primary care schemes, including the Drugs Payment Scheme, therefore the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to you. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Patient Transfers

484. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Health the policy position in place within the Health Service Executive to deal with the issue of patient transfer by taxi; if taxi use is carefully co-ordinated; if a budget for this mode of transportation is clearly identifiable; the cost of such services in 2014; if such costs are incurred across regions, health services, and / or hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8195/15]

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

Medical Card Eligibility

485. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if he will review eligibility for a medical card in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8205/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

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

Hospital Appointment Status

486. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment for Saint James' Hospital, Dublin 8; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8208/15]

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 specific case 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 Delays

487. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the average timeframe a person can expect to wait on a decision from the client registration unit, in relation to a discretionary medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8209/15]

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.

Ambulance Service Staff

488. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health his views on utilising the services of fire fighters, employed full-time or on a part-time retainer, across the State, in their capacity as trained emergency-first responders, as a back-up to the ambulance service, where there is a possibility that the ambulance on call, cannot respond to an emergency, within an acceptable timeframe. [8219/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

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

Services for People with Disabilities

489. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the supports a person (details supplied) in County Dublin received from the Health Service Executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8224/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the Deputy's question relates to the provision of health and personal social services to an individual, 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.

Medical Card Eligibility

490. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Health the reason the pension-related deduction is not taken into account when assessing means for a medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8229/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Medical Card Applications

491. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical card application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8231/15]

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 Staff

492. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if the allegations of staff changes from nursing staff to care administrators at a group home (details supplied) in County Dublin, within the community for adults with intellectual disabilities, are true; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8249/15]

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, she can contact my Private Office and they will follow the matter up with the HSE.

Hospital Staff

493. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the total amount spent on agency staff at Portlaoise hospital, County Laois in 2014; and the anticipated spend on agency staff, at this hospital in 2015. [8257/15]

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 Transfers

494. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal was admitted to Letterkenny General Hospital; when this person was referred to Galway University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8271/15]

495. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal may expect to be transferred from Letterkenny General Hospital to Galway University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8272/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 494 and 495 together.

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

Mental Health Services Provision

496. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if counselling services are provided, free of charge, as part of the public mental health service, in view of the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 10. [8274/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The HSE Mental Health Division, as part of the requirement under the Programme for Government to increase access to counselling and psychotherapy developed the *National Counselling Service - Counselling in Primary Care Service (CIPC)*. This was launched in July 2013 as part of the programme for government investment in mental health in 2012 and 2013 and is one of a range of initiatives taken by the HSE to build the capacity of primary care to respond to mental health needs appropriate to primary care. At the end of September 2014, there were 10,601 referrals to the CIPC services, with 1,683 individuals receiving counselling and 31,232 sessions offered.

Counselling is also provided by a range of voluntary organisations across the health service and within the HSE Mental Health Division the National Office for Suicide Prevention funds voluntary organisations such as Pieta House and Console to provide support across a range of needs.

Within the specialist secondary care mental health services, counselling and psychotherapy is provided within community mental health teams when service users are clinically assessed as requiring this intervention and is provided by a health professional on the team.

In relation to the specific case raised, as this is a service issue, this question has been re-

ferred 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 with them.

Primary Care Centre Provision

497. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health when the building of a primary health care centre will commence, consisting of the health centre, the Mother McCauley centre and the Alzheimer's centre on Curlew Road, Drimnagh, Dublin 12; and when the primary care unit will commence operation. [8297/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Crumlin-Drumagh was one of 16 locations to be delivered through the PPP project. Unfortunately it was one of two locations which did not complete the planning process within the timeframe for inclusion in the PPP project; the other was Knocklyon/Rathfarnham. There is limited funding available for new construction projects over the next multiannual period 2015-2019 given the level of commitments and the costs to completion already in place. In addition, the HSE cannot exceed or plan to exceed its commitment thresholds. It is essential that all projects, other than those where existing contractual commitments are in place, are assessed on their merits to ensure that the limited capital funding available goes to those developments which address the greatest service need. The HSE is concentrating on applying the limited funding available for infrastructure development in the most effective way possible to meet current and future needs.

Foreign Conflicts

498. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the actions he has taken to assist in the search for the kidnapped schoolgirls, abducted in Nigeria in April 2014; the actions he will take; if he has conveyed his concern, and that of the Irish people, at the abduction to the Nigerian authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7854/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have repeatedly condemned the abduction of more than 200 young girls by Boko Haram from a school in the Nigerian town of Chibok in April 2014. I have also condemned other appalling acts of violence being perpetrated in Nigeria and its neighbouring countries by Boko Haram. These include the killing in January of a large number of civilians in an attack by militants in the north-eastern state of Borno, and the more recent attacks in Chad, Cameroon and Niger. I have given my full support to the clear demands of the United Nations Secretary General and the High Representative of the European Union that the girls abducted in Chibok be released and that those responsible be brought to justice. I am deeply disappointed that hopes that the girls would be released as a part of ceasefire discussions last October were not realised.

The EU as well as several individual EU Member States, the UN and the USA, continue to assist the Nigerian authorities in strengthening their ability to provide security and to combat terrorism. The EU Foreign Affairs Council, which I attended in Brussels on 9 February, noted that the responsibility to address the immediate security challenge in the region lies primarily with the countries most affected, and called upon them to urgently intensify cooperation and coordination. We welcomed the decision of the States in the region, endorsed by the African Union, to deploy a multinational force to combat Boko Haram, and this is now being established.

The Council also expressed concern about the humanitarian consequences of the Boko Haram attacks and pledged to continue providing immediate relief to those in need and to in-

crease supports at regional level. Ireland provided €1 million in December 2014 to the UNHCR to assist and support Nigerian refugees in Chad.

Our Embassy in Abuja, working locally in co-operation with the EU and other key partners, remains in close contact with the Nigerian authorities on all issues related to the Boko Haram insurgency, including the appalling abduction of the schoolgirls.

Foreign Conflicts

499. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on recognising the Armenian genocide of 1915, which resulted in the loss of life of almost one million persons. [7928/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): These terrible events continue to overshadow relations between Armenia and Turkey and the two sides maintain sharply different historical interpretations of these events. Ireland has not taken a position on the issue of the recognition as genocide. As we in Ireland know well, the process of reconciliation and coming to terms with the past is never easy. In this year of centenary commemorations, Ireland would urge Armenia and Turkey to take advantage of any opportunity to progress reconciliation for the good of their people, the region, and their shared future. The Irish Government has expressed sympathy for the enormous suffering of the Armenian people during the period in question.

Consular Services Provision

500. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide more support in respect of a person (details supplied) awaiting trial in Egypt; if he will make this a priority case. [8062/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I remain deeply concerned at this individual's continued detention as well as the recent further postponement of his trial. From my first day in office, I have taken a strong interest, and an active role, in this case and indeed in my first week in office I spoke to Egyptian Foreign Minister Shoukry setting out my concerns. I have spoken to FM Shoukry on a number of further occasions, stressing that the individual was only 17 at the time of the alleged offences and asking for the case to be reviewed, so that he may be released and can return to his studies and his family. I have also raised the matter with HRVP Mogherini who assured me of the ongoing assistance which the EU institutions can provide. I have met this individual's family on a number of occasions, most recently on 12 February.

We are monitoring all developments closely. This is a difficult case involving a foreign legal system and the judicial processes of another state in which we cannot interfere. However, I wish to assure the deputy of my ongoing commitment to the welfare of this young Irish citizen. I wish also to assure the deputy that officials in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, both in Dublin and in Cairo, are in ongoing contact with this individual and his family, and with the Egyptian authorities, and will continue to work actively towards the achievement of a positive outcome to this case and will continue to offer full consular support to this Irish citizen.

Election Monitoring Missions

501. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will support the international efforts to have a free and fair campaign for democratic elections in Venezuela, without outside interference, and without violence from extreme right wing elements (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8063/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The ongoing situation in Venezuela is a cause of great concern. It is apparent that tensions are growing and the country is suffering an increasing degree of political polarisation. As I have indicated before, the deaths, casualties and detentions arising from the unrest there require full, impartial investigation in accordance with due legal process. The apparently high levels of impunity in the case of serious crimes is a matter of further concern as is, indeed, the serious economic situation affecting the people of Venezuela. I share the concerns expressed by EU High Representative Mogherini, and those expressed previously by High Representative Ashton, concerning the detention of political figures and of students. Human rights, including the freedom of expression, of assembly and of association must be protected and upheld. I renew my call for all parties, including government, opposition, students and civil society, to work together to find a consensus for overcoming Venezuela's current difficulties. I remain of the view that the best hope for progress in Venezuela, and for the successful conduct of the forthcoming elections, is for an inclusive dialogue that will address, through peaceful means alone, the legitimate concerns of all parties.

Easter Rising Commemorations

502. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the Government's invitation to Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom, to the 1916 Commemorations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7713/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The centenary of the Easter Rising in 2016 will be the centre-piece of the Government's Decade of Centenaries programme. The Taoiseach launched the outline plans for the Ireland 2016 commemorations on 21st November 2014. These outline plans are currently being developed and the public are being consulted for their views. My colleague, the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Heather Humphreys T.D., who has lead responsibility for the 1916 commemoration, has tasked a team from her Department to have meetings in all parts of the country to engage with people on how Easter 1916 is most appropriately commemorated. The Government has not issued any invitations to the United Kingdom or other international partners for events in Ireland to commemorate Easter 1916. Clearly, some of the 2016 events will be moments for national commemoration, as may be the case for the Easter Sunday programme on the 27th March and the actual centenary of the start of the Rising on 24th April. There may also be events, at home and abroad, where it would be appropriate to invite our international partners, at a suitable level, to join with us to reflect on the events of 1916 and to mark this key moment on Ireland's path to independence and place amongst the nations of the world.

This will be considered further by the Government following the publication of the Government's programme for Ireland 2016 in the coming weeks.

Emigrant Support Services

503. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 420 of 17 February 2015, that his Department's emigrant support

programme is funding a global networking hub, if this includes the creation of an Irish emigrant register; and if not, if he will create this proposed register. [8107/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In the context of preparing a new Diaspora Policy, the Government is considering initiatives along the lines of the Deputy's question. I expect the Diaspora Policy to be launched very soon, after which, I would be happy to provide the Deputy with more detailed information.

Foreign Conflicts

504. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will condemn the slaughter of the native Christians of Egypt, known as Copts, other Christians, and civilians, by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8161/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I issued a statement condemning the murder of 21 Egyptian citizens by the terrorist group ISIS on 16 February: "I am deeply shocked by the reports of the brutal killing of Coptic Christians in Libya by ISIS. This is a monstrous act beyond comprehension, which must be condemned in the strongest possible terms.

It is also a savage attack on a minority community.

Ireland has repeatedly recalled the duty of States to protect vulnerable minorities in the Middle East, including Christian communities. I reiterate that call and will be raising this with my EU colleagues at the earliest opportunity."

Dublin-Monaghan Bombings

505. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to provide a full briefing to the Justice for the Forgotten Group, in relation to the Stormont House Agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8226/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has a longstanding relationship with the Justice for the Forgotten group. My Department has had several meetings with the group at both official and Ministerial level. The Government continues to support the Justice for the Forgotten group in their campaign on behalf of the Dublin-Monaghan families. In this regard, the group has received grant support of €48,000 in early 2014 from my Department's Reconciliation Fund. The funding will assist Justice for the Forgotten with its important work.

I know that my officials are in contact with the Justice for the Forgotten group in relation to arranging a meeting to discuss the Stormont House Agreement.

The focus of the Government is currently on the effective and expeditious implementation of the Stormont House Agreement. In this context, I participated in the first implementation and review meeting of the Agreement in Belfast on 30 January last at which a detailed implementation timeline was agreed. Work on implementation is progressing well and a second review meeting will take place in March. A progress report will be published in June 2015. The Government remains committed to playing its part in ensuring the full implementation of the Agreement.

Northern Ireland Issues

506. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the legislative measures that will require implementation by the Houses of the Oireachtas, following the Stormont House Agreement; the proposed time scale for the enactment of such legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8227/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Stormont House Agreement identified a number of areas in which legislation may be required, particularly regarding the new institutions to be established under the Agreement's provisions on dealing with the past.

On 30 January, the first implementation and review meeting of the Agreement was held at which a detailed implementation timetable regarding all aspects of the Agreement, including legislation where appropriate, was agreed.

The Government will in due course propose legislation for consideration by the Oireachtas to facilitate the establishment of the Independent Commission on Information Retrieval, a body which will enable victims and survivors to seek and privately receive information about the deaths of their loved ones, as per the terms of the Stormont House Agreement. In this regard, my Department is in ongoing contact with the Department of Justice and Equality which will take the lead in preparing this legislation. We are also in ongoing contact with our counterparts in Westminster and the Northern Ireland Assembly to ensure coherence of legislative provisions given the cross-jurisdiction nature of a number of the Agreement's provisions.

The Government remains committed to playing its role to ensure that the Agreement is fully implemented, and will take all necessary measures in this regard.

Human Rights Issues

507. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the criticisms of the *Global Island* policy document, in relation to the diminished role of Irish foreign policy, pertaining to the promotion of human rights; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8252/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Together with the Taoiseach, I launched the Government's review of Foreign Policy *The Global Island: Ireland's Foreign Policy for a Changing World* on 13 January 2015 at the conference organized by my Department on "Representing the Global Island". The purpose of the review was to provide a progressive and forward looking statement of Ireland's foreign policy written in clear and accessible language. The document includes features which communicate simply and effectively what is delivered across Government to achieve Ireland's foreign policy goals.

As I outlined in my foreword to the review, through our foreign policy we safeguard our peace, security and economic prosperity, and promote reconciliation and cooperation at home. At the core of this foreign policy are the protection of our citizens and the promotion of our values abroad. *The Global Island* considers the challenges and opportunities for Ireland's foreign policy under five interconnected themes: Our People, Our Values, Our Prosperity, Our Place in Europe and Our Influence.

The Global Island is the result of a wide-ranging process of consultation involving other Departments, State agencies, the Oireachtas, civil society and members of the public. In the

coming months, I will elaborate on a series of initiatives that I intend to bring forward to implement the vision and goals set out in the review.

As highlighted in *The Global Island*, the commitment of Ireland to the promotion and protection of human rights is an underlying principle of Ireland's foreign policy and is a priority for the Government. We are also committed to open and constructive dialogue with Irish civil society on human rights issues, which is a highly valued and crucial aspect of the formulation of our international human rights advocacy.

The changing global environment poses new challenges and threats to human rights, which are under considerable pressure today. In *The Global Island*, the Government has reaffirmed its commitment to the universality, indivisibility and interrelationship of all human rights in order to respond to this challenge. As stated in the review, an Inter-Departmental Committee on Human Rights will be established, chaired by a Minister of State, in order to improve the coherence of the promotion and protection of human rights in our foreign policy.

In addressing human rights concerns, we must pursue them in the most effective way, taking advantage of the most appropriate opportunities to make our case, privately or publicly, bilaterally or multilaterally, as best fits the situation. A primary approach is to engage with the international human rights machinery which has been established to monitor implementation of universal human rights standards. As a small state with a limited diplomatic network, Ireland places great value on multilateralism as a platform for raising human rights issue. This includes engaging actively at the UN Human Rights Council and in the Universal Periodic Review, the principal UN mechanism whereby the human rights record of each individual UN Member State is publicly examined by other Member States.

In addition to raising human rights concerns through multilateral channels, Ireland also raises human rights issues in our bilateral contacts. The conversations are generally conducted on a confidential basis, in line with normal diplomatic practice. I discuss human rights issues on a regular basis with Foreign Ministers from other countries, including when visiting foreign countries. I also regularly address human rights issues at Ministerial meetings at the EU level with Foreign Ministers of third countries.

Officials in my Department make Ireland's views on human rights issues clear in their contacts with officials from other governments. Irish embassies work, within the capacity of their resources and often as part of a coordinated approach, to support the work of human rights defenders and civil society organisations in third countries. This includes addressing legislative and administrative restrictions on the operation of human rights defenders, drawing on findings by human rights agencies, raising cases with third country governments and contributing to the development of human rights country strategies by the EU.

The promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms is not confined to our international human rights advocacy. Ireland's new policy on international development, 'One World One Future', reaffirms the centrality of human rights to Ireland's foreign policy and aid programme, and commits to ensuring that human rights principles and standards are promoted, protected and integrated in all of our development efforts. Irish Aid, Ireland's overseas development programme, addresses the root causes of poverty and exclusion by focussing on the most vulnerable and investing in state institutions and independent organisations that promote human rights, governance, and democracy in developing countries, particularly in its nine Key Partner Countries across Africa and Asia.

No country is perfect when it comes to human rights. Ireland's position on the responsibility of each government in relation to the promotion and protection of the human rights of their citizens is quite clear, and none of the countries with which we deal are in any doubt about our

views in this regard.

Overseas Development Aid

508. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the targets for overseas development aid provided for by his Department for the next five years, both as a monetary figure and as a percentage of gross national product; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8253/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Sean Sherlock): This Government is strongly committed to Ireland's overseas aid programme, which is at the heart of our foreign policy. Our policy on International Development, "One World, One Future", reaffirms our commitment to achieving the UN target of providing 0.7% of Gross National Product (GNP) for Official Development Assistance (ODA), when economic circumstances permit.

Over the past four years, despite the very difficult economic circumstances facing the country, the Government has successfully managed to stabilise allocations to Ireland's aid programme. For 2015, we were again determined to protect the aid programme, and have provided a total allocation of just over €600 million in Official Development Assistance, a small increase on 2014.

This clearly demonstrates our commitment to the aid programme and represents a very significant contribution on behalf of the people of Ireland to assist those less fortunate than ourselves. As our economic recovery consolidates and strengthens, I am determined to set out the strongest possible case for building further on our current commitment to the aid programme.

Our priority now is to ensure we continue to focus on tackling the root causes of poverty and injustice, strengthening our key partner countries ability to deliver essential services to their citizens, and delivering real and sustainable improvements to the lives of some of the world's poorest people and communities.

Consular Services Expenditure

509. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his Department's policy with regard to refurbishing embassies and ambassadors' residences; the cost of these works, by year, since 2011 to date in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8254/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade currently utilises 151 properties abroad. Our official diplomatic and consular premises overseas are key platforms for promoting Ireland's interests and values abroad, providing vital services to our citizens, our diaspora and to visa-required business travellers resident in the host state who wish to travel to Ireland.

Accordingly, it is necessary that our accommodation conforms with local requirements, is in good condition and presents a positive image of Ireland.

The complex international security environment also requires that we ensure the protection of our staff and visitors as well as the confidentiality of our work.

Refurbishment of our properties is carried out as necessary to ensure that our small teams

abroad have the facilities necessary to fulfil their duties and responsibilities. Much of the refurbishment work is planned in advance in order to maintain the fabric of our infrastructure. However some must be undertaken on a reactive basis, for example to address unexpected damage to a building by extreme weather. All expenditure undertaken in respect of refurbishment work was duly sanctioned by my Department in accordance with prescribed procurement procedures.

Details of the costs of refurbishments undertaken by my Department in respect of premises from 2011 to 2015 (to date) are provided below.

My Department is responsible for two Votes: Vote 27 - International Cooperation and Vote 28 - Foreign Affairs and Trade. No major refurbishments were carried out from Vote 27 - International Cooperation in 2013 and 2014, nor are there plans to undertake refurbishment to Irish Aid premises in 2015; therefore the figures below are in respect of Vote 28.

Year	Amount (€)
2011	€1,926,624.24
2012	€2,292,541.42
2013	€1,907,358.78
2014	€2,340,649.93
2015 (to 20 Feb)	€49,380

Overseas Development Aid Oversight

510. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if a full audit has been conducted into the budget allocation to Irish Aid in 2014; if there were matters of concern, raised in this audit, to him; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8255/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As with all Government Departments, Irish Aid expenditure is audited annually by the Comptroller and Auditor General. The Comptroller and Auditor General conducted an audit of the budget allocation for the Vote in 2014 and his report was published on 26 September 2014. The report did not highlight any matters of concern.

International Terrorism

511. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the recent comments by the Italian Foreign Minister in relation to the threats posed to Europe from the Islamic State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8256/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): My Italian colleague was referring to the crisis in Libya which is a cause of grave and ongoing concern for the European Union, its member states, and the international community. I condemned the horrific murders of 21 Egyptian Christians by ISIS on 16 February.

It is my sincere hope that the promise of a political resolution to the crisis in Libya can be fulfilled. The convening of talks under the auspices of the UN is a positive step in this direction.

Ireland supports a comprehensive, human rights-compliant approach to counter-terrorism. We must address underlying causes, tackling the threat at source rather than just alleviating symptoms. We must promote a narrative which counters the propaganda of the terrorists. We must work to prevent radicalisation, to share information more effectively, to deter and disrupt terrorist travel and ultimately to bring perpetrators to justice. Ireland will continue to work

closely with our EU partners on all these strands.

EU Agreements

512. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on evidence that European Union countries have been found guilty of committing push-back offences for asylum seekers entering the European Union, in areas such as the Greek / Turkish border, and the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Mililla in Morocco, blatantly showing no regard for European Union law and legislation, by transporting asylum seekers back to the destination they set out from, without processing the refugees / migrants as asylum seekers in the country in which they land, as is the European Union Directive; and if he will voice his concerns at European Union level. [8242/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): This is primarily a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality, whose Department advises my officials that if an EU Member State is not meeting its obligations in relation to EU law, while this would be a concern for Ireland and other Member States, it would ultimately be a matter for the European Commission to address.

Departmental Staff

513. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the proposal to require all public sector workers under the aegis of his Department who interface with service users to wear a name badge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8567/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The HR section of my Department would be happy to discuss such a proposal with Staff Side representatives.

At present, frontline staff in our passport offices provide their names to customers on request and also identify themselves by name in routine correspondence.

Schools Complaints Procedures

514. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a standardised complaints system for schools and a teaching fitness to practice system as proposed is planned. [7902/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Section 28 of the Education Act 1998 provides for grievance and appeal procedures in schools. It expresses a desirability of determining appeals and resolving grievances in the school concerned.

Section 29 of the Act sets out a limited set of circumstances a parent can appeal administrative decisions of a school. These are confined to expulsions, suspensions or refusal to enroll. The Government has approved the drafting of the Admissions to School Bill 2014 in which the extent to which refusal to enroll will or will not be subject to a Section 29 appeal will be addressed.

I am not satisfied with the current provisions of Section 28. I plan to revise it in order to provide in law for a Parent and Student Charter. Changing how schools engage with, listen

and respond to parent concerns will be an important part of a Charter. Providing parents with the rationale for any decision is important. If schools help parents to understand the basis for a decision parents are more likely to accept the fairness of decisions.

The Teaching Council is the body with statutory authority, under the Teaching Council Act 2001, for the professional regulation of teachers. I intend to amend the Teaching Council Act to strengthen the legislative architecture for the Council's fitness to teach function and Garda vetting.

Part 5 of the Teaching Council Act 2001 makes provision for the Council to conduct inquiries into a teacher's Fitness to Teach. I intend to commence Part 5 later this year. Government approval was given on 10th December for drafting The Teaching Council (Amendment) Bill to provide for a wider range of sanctions such as advice, admonishment and censure, which may be applied by the Council following an inquiry.

Procedures were introduced in 2009 under the Education Act (Section 24) for schools and Education and Training Boards (then VECs), as employers, to address teacher competence issues. Generally speaking it will be necessary for these procedures to be exhausted before investigation by the Teaching Council under Part 5.

Once the relevant sections are commenced, the Council will investigate complaints against teachers through a number of phases, up to and including holding a hearing. The staged process ensures that the investigation is robust and that the rights of all parties, including teachers, to a fair hearing and due process is respected.

This process will also allow for measures to be put in place to support those teachers who need help to bring their professional practice up to the high standards expected as well as for sanctions such as suspension or deregistration should the situation require it.

However, it is important to note that the Council's fitness to teach processes will not replace the procedures that are already in place in schools to deal with issues of professional conduct and competence. Underperformance or misconduct should be dealt with first at school level and these procedures exhausted before any inquiry by the Teaching Council would take place. It would be expected that most cases should conclude at the level of the school.

Springboard Programme

515. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide in tabular form the choices and uptake of Springboard courses for persons in receipt of one-parent family payments in 2012, 2013, 2014 and to date in 2015. [7944/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Springboard provides free, flexible reskilling and upskilling opportunities at higher education level for unemployed and previously self-employed people in areas of emerging skills needs. To be eligible for a place on a Springboard course a person must be unemployed, actively seeking employment, and be in receipt of one of the range of qualifying Social Protection payments, or be signing for credits or be previously self-employed. The tables below provide information on people in receipt of a one-parent family allowance who have engaged with Springboard from 2011 to date, broken down by number of applications, number of enrolments and course choices.

One-Parent Family PQ (20th Feb 2015)

Table One: One-Parent Family payment recipient applications and enrolments by cal-

endar year

Calendar Year	Applications from people in receipt of One-Parent Family Payment	Enrolments from people in receipt of One-Parent Family Payment
2011	530	139
2012	720	196
2013	665	185
2014*	570	144
2015*	43	10
Overall	2,528	674

*Includes applications to full-time Springboard 2014 ICT conversion courses.

Table Two: One-Parent Family payment recipient applications and enrolments by calendar year and course NFQ level

NFQ Level	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9	Total
Applications 2011	122	127	175	106	530
Enrolments 2011	37	37	48	17	139
Applications in 2012	164	187	253	116	720
Enrolments in 2012	52	60	58	26	196
Applications in 2013	136	142	226	161	665
Enrolments in 2013	41	49	60	35	185
Applications in 2014	86	157	214	113	570
Enrolments in 2014	29	42	51	22	144
Applications in 2015	11	10	15	7	43
Enrolments in 2015	5	1	4	0	10

Table Three: One-Parent Family payment recipient applications and enrolments by calendar year and skills sector

Skills Sector	Apps in 2011	Enrols 2011	Apps in 2012	Enrols in 2012	Apps in 2013	Enrols in 2013	Apps in 2014	Enrols in 2014	Apps in 2015	Enrols in 2015
Biopharma-Pharmachem	41	10	104	29	10	2	65	21	5	2
Construction/Green Economy	37	11	24	4	1	1	3	2	0	0
Cross-enterprise/Management/Entrepreneurship	181	51	187	55	175	55	124	29	10	0
Food & Beverage	5	0	44	16	0	0	0	0	0	0

Skills Sector	Apps in 2011	Enrols 2011	Apps in 2012	Enrols in 2012	Apps in 2013	Enrols in 2013	Apps in 2014	Enrols in 2014	Apps in 2015	Enrols in 2015
High-level Manufacturing	0	0	8	5	125	35	88	32	7	3
ICT	171	46	244	54	232	56	182	41	13	4
International Financial Services	71	15	80	25	61	22	52	10	4	0
Medical Devices	24	6	26	7	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	3	1	16	6	7	1	1	1
Skills for Enterprise to Trade Internationally	0	0	0	0	45	8	49	8	3	0
Total	530	139	720	196	665	185	570	144	43	10

Table Four: One-Parent Family payment recipient applications and enrolments by calendar year and gender

Gender	Male	Female	Total
Applications 2011	38	492	530
Enrolments 2011	10	129	139
Applications in 2012	57	663	720
Enrolments in 2012	14	182	196
Applications in 2013	36	629	665
Enrolments in 2013	8	177	185
Applications in 2014	40	530	570
Enrolments in 2014	9	135	144
Applications in 2015	2	41	43
Enrolments in 2015	1	9	10

Teacher Secondment

516. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her proposals to limit to five years, retrospective to 2010, experienced advisers on secondment to schools to provide continuing professional development to teachers; and the reason for same. [7672/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My Department, through the teacher support services and education centres, engages teachers on a full time basis annually for the provision of continuing professional development (CPD) through secondment from their schools. These secondments are subject to annual review. The arrangements provide flexibility and ensure that the in-service needs of teachers and other support priorities of the school system can be met within the resources available.

Having teachers with relevant and recent teaching experience and expertise is a key requirement for the role. It is a condition therefore that the maximum length of time that a teacher may be on secondment is five years, following which they return to their teaching roles within their schools. In this way, their expertise and knowledge is not lost to the system.

The support services have engaged in succession planning as a key strategy in ensuring

continued support for teachers and school leaders in implementing national education policy priorities and CPD and which allows for continuity, quality planning and management.

Therefore there are no plans to change the policy of the five year limit.

Schools Data

517. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide, in tabular form, the number of teachers and pupils for the school year 2014/2015 in certain schools (details supplied) in County Cork. [7718/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The number of pupils and teachers in individual schools is provided in the National School Annual Census. Results from the census for the current school year (2014/2015) are being finalised at present. A provisional list of the number of pupils and teachers in each school for 2014/15 will be published on the Department’s website in mid March. A list of all schools and their pupil and teacher numbers for 2013/14 are available on my Department’s website at the following link <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Data-on-Individual-Schools/Class-Size-2013-2014.xls>.

School Funding

518. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of capital funding invested by her Department in schools (details supplied) in County Cork, since 2008, broken down by school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7719/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The information sought by the Deputy is being collated and will be forwarded to the Deputy shortly.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

519. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of pupils in a class in a primary school that is legally considered to be big; if there is such a provision in law; and when an extra teacher is required to be provided to a primary school by her Department. [7724/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department 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 arrangements also include an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board. The Primary Staffing Appeals Board operates independently of the Minister and the Department and its decision is final. The staffing arrangements for the 2015/2016 school year are set out in Circular 0005/2015 which is available on the Department website.

At primary level the staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location. The configuration of classes and the deployment of classroom teachers are done at local school level. The primary staffing schedule currently operates on the basis of a general average of 1 classroom teacher for every 28 pupils, with lower thresholds for DEIS Band 1 schools.

My Department's guidance to schools is that the number of pupils in any class is kept as low as possible taking all relevant contextual factors into account (e.g. classroom accommodation, fluctuating enrolment etc.). School authorities are also requested, where possible, to use their autonomy under the staffing schedule to implement smaller class sizes for junior classes.

The Government's approach to restoring the economy has helped Ireland to return to a position where we are seeing economic growth. It is a continuing improvement in our economic growth over a sustained period that will enable us to move to a point where we can look again at providing for additional teacher resources in schools which could bring about an improvement in PTR, class size and support for classroom teachers.

In the meantime, my Department's focus is on targeting any available resources to cater for the continued increase in student numbers. In this regard, there were a thousand more teachers employed in schools around the country in the last school year, than there was the year before. There will be a further increase of circa 1,300 teachers in the current school year.

School Staffing

520. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of pupils in a class in a primary school that entitles the class to a classroom assistant. [7725/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department does not allocate classroom assistants to schools nor does it have any plans or funding to do so.

The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department 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 arrangements also include an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board. The Primary Staffing Appeals Board operates independently of the Minister and the Department and its decision is final.

The staffing arrangements for the 2015/2016 school year are set out in Circular 0005/2015 which is available on the Department website. These arrangements include detail of the implementation of two new policies which I announced last week i.e., improved retention thresholds for 2nd, 3rd and 4th teacher and also the improved appointment and retention thresholds for isolated one-teacher schools.

The two new policies will provide some improvement to the staffing levels of some of our smallest schools. These improvements particularly recognise the challenges faced by very small schools that are more than 8km from the next nearest school of the same type.

This package of measures will provide rural communities with security about the future of their small schools, recognising the essential social function which small schools can play, especially in isolated communities.

Schools Administration

521. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she understands her position, and that of her Department, to be the primary regulator of State-supported schools; in consequence of this position, if she would act, if she was presented with prima facie evidence that a school was in breach of its constitutional obligations, or if there was evidence that a

school was in breach of its legal obligations. [7733/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Deputy will be aware that my functions as Minister are set out in different pieces of legislation. However, I would refer her to my functions, as set out in Section 7 of the Education Act, 1998.

I can confirm to the Deputy that if I were presented with evidence of a school being in breach of its legal obligations, I would take steps to have the matter dealt with by the appropriate authority.

Given the hypothetical nature of the Deputy’s question and the wide range of possible scenarios it could cover, I cannot be any more specific in my reply. If the Deputy wishes to provide me with specific details of the issue to which she is referring, I would be happy to consider the matter further.

Schools Mental Health Strategies

522. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps she is taking to increase awareness of young carers in the education system, so as to ensure that young persons who are under pressure, with caring responsibilities at home, are fully identified, and supported in school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7816/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I can inform the deputy that my Department promotes no process specifically targeted at this group of students but adopts a holistic and integrated approach to supporting the work of schools in promoting positive mental health and to identifying and supporting those with a broad range of problems, be they behavioural, emotional or social.

The processes span the curriculum in schools, whole-school ethos, quality of teaching, learning and assessment, student support and pastoral care and the provision of professional development for teachers. It also involves other supports such as educational psychological services and guidance and counselling services, and the interface with other agencies, both nationally and locally. Schools also engage in a wide range of sport and cultural co-curricular activities which provide an important opportunity for students to experience success and personal growth.

Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is a mandatory part of the curriculum in primary schools and in junior cycle since 2003 and is designed to promote positive mental health. It is supported by comprehensive teacher guidelines and curriculum support services which provide training and advice for schools and a resource directory. The Department has also issued guidelines to schools on the development of whole-school policies in the areas such as anti-bullying, relationship and sexuality education, substance misuse, managing critical incidents, whole-school guidance planning etc. which are also important in promoting positive mental health.

I can also inform the Deputy that my Department produced and distributed for second level schools in 2013 the Well-being in Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention and I with my colleague, Minister Kathleen Lynch launched in January of this year the Well-being in Primary Schools - Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion.

The guidelines were developed, following a process of wide consultation, by a working group with representation from Teacher Education Section/Inspectorate, SPHE Support Service, National Psychological Service (NEPS), Department of Health and the Health Service

Executive/National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP).

The Guidelines are for all members of the school community, boards of management and in-school management teams who play a central leadership role in mental health promotion. They will also be useful for parents' associations, student councils, health and other personnel who are seeking an understanding of how to work in and with schools. The Guidelines provide practical guidance on how schools can promote mental health and well-being and school connectedness in an integrated way. The Guidelines also provide evidence-based advice on how to support young people who may be at risk. Information is also provided relating to accessing support from external agencies and support services.

The key to successful implementation of these Guidelines lies in taking a coordinated whole-school approach. This involves building and integrating school self-evaluation processes, implementing the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum, developing the whole-school guidance plan, adopting the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) continuum of support, and building effective inter-agency relationships.

The key strategic actions for positive mental health promotion that school personnel can undertake to promote well-being in post-primary schools are:

- Developing and maintaining a safe and caring environment within the school where a sense of belonging and connectedness is fostered
- Building positive teacher-student and student-student relationships to promote participation, social interaction and pro-social behaviour
- Actively involving young people and their parents/guardians in developing and implementing school policies to support mental health and health promotion
- Adopting a whole-school approach to health promotion, where health is promoted by all and not just a few members of staff
- Supporting and implementing a well-planned, consistent and integrated SPHE/RSE curriculum to enable young people enhance their coping, resilience, communication, conflict resolution, and problem-solving skills
- Developing a whole-school systems and structures to support the early identification of young people experiencing social, emotional, behavioural or learning difficulties
- Actively involving, supporting and encouraging young people's participation in extra-curricular activities
- Fostering a whole-school ethos that accepts and values diversity within the student and staff population
- Providing easy access to information for students and staff on supports available to them within the school and wider community
- Facilitating access to continuing professional development for school staff on the promotion of the mental health and well-being of young people.

I hope this clarifies the issue for the Deputy.

Home Tuition Scheme Eligibility

523. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on extending the provision of home tuition in respect of a child (details supplied) in County Wicklow; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7824/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Deputy will be aware that the purpose of the Home Tuition Scheme is to provide a compensatory educational service for children who, for a number of reasons such as chronic illness, are unable to attend school. The scheme also provides a compensatory educational service for children awaiting a suitable educational placement and for early intervention for children with autism.

The allocation in the case referred to by Deputy was appealed and a letter relaying the outcome issued to her parents last week.

Schools Building Projects Administration

524. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans for a new school to cater for the current and future needs of the Ballycullen, Firhouse and Oldcourt areas in Dublin 24; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7835/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Two new primary schools opened in the area to which the Deputy refers in September 2013. Both of these schools will comprise 16 classrooms when fully developed. There are no plans for further new primary schools for the area at this time though this is kept under review.

My Department is currently carrying out a nationwide demographic exercise to determine where additional post-primary school accommodation might be needed from 2017 onwards. This will include an examination of the Ballycullen/Firhouse/Oldcourt area. On foot of this review, arrangements will be made to provide additional post-primary accommodation where this is needed.

Information and Communications Technology

525. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the current status of the digital strategy for schools; the current expected publication date; if the draft strategy has been circulated to stakeholders for consultation; if so, the findings of the consultation and what stakeholders took part; if she will ensure that a working hyper-link to the relevant section is placed on her Department’s website, as the current link is malfunctioning; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7837/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Work is currently being finalised on the new digital strategy for schools. A number of research projects have taken place including an online census of teachers and principals, a public consultation process, focus groups with students, parents and teachers and a number of meetings with stakeholders including teacher unions, management bodies, the Teaching Council, publishers and other interested parties. The findings from the detailed consultation process will be reflected in the strategy.

The main themes which emerged from the findings of the research projects are Learning, Teaching and Assessment Using ICTs, Teacher Professional Learning, Research, Policy and Leadership, ICT Infrastructure, Digital Content and Internet Safety. Recommendations will be based on these themes.

The link referred to by the deputy related to the Digital Strategy consultation process which

is now closed and this link is now expired.

SOLAS Training and Education Programmes Places

526. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding training placement or schemes in respect of persons with intellectual disabilities (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7851/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I am informed by SOLAS that all people with disabilities are eligible to access mainstream education and training services. In addition vocational training for people with disabilities is provided through Specialist Training Providers (STPs), which provide training and employment services specifically for people with disabilities including people with physical, intellectual, mental health or sensory disabilities.

Learners on Specialist Training programmes have the opportunity to participate in training ranging from level 3 to level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). All training programmes delivered address both the generic and vocational skills requirements of participating learners.

Third Level Institutions

527. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans regarding the redevelopment of Clermont College, County Wicklow; and if a decision has been made regarding the redevelopment of the college. [7869/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Neither my Department nor Carlow Institute of Technology is aware of the issue outlined by the Deputy.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

528. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will respond to concerns (details supplied) by parents of a child with Down’s syndrome; if children with Down’s syndrome will be provided with an individualised right to resource teaching hours, outside the general allocation system, similar to those whose needs her Department classifies as low incidence. [7892/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that under the existing allocation system, all pupils with Down syndrome, including such pupils with mild general learning difficulties, currently are entitled to receive additional teaching support.

Such support is provided either from a school’s allocation of Learning Support or Resource Teaching under the General Allocation Model (GAM), or from an allocation of additional resource teacher hours allocated to schools by the NCSE.

I am aware that some parents, and organisations representing children with Down syndrome, continue to have concerns that the existing system does not give them certainty as to the number of resource teaching hours that may be allocated to their child under the General Allocation Model, as these hours are distributed locally by schools.

24 February 2015

I met with Down Syndrome Ireland, and with some parents of children with Down syndrome, recently on 19th February.

This was an opportunity for me to discuss the concerns that they have regarding the provision of resource teaching support for children with Down syndrome.

I intend to meet with more parents over the coming week or so.

I will consider the issues that have been raised by Down Syndrome Ireland and parents, and will keep the Deputy and the House informed of my developing views on this matter.

Emergency Works Scheme Applications

529. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide funding to make a school yard safe in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7901/15]

555. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will examine an application under the emergency works scheme in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Kerry for essential works to upgrade the school yard, which is unsafe and hazardous, as due to excessive deterioration the area is disintegrating, cracking and crumbling and in view of the fact this is the third submission in recent years; if she will ensure that this is prioritised and approved in the near future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8163/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 529 and 555 together.

As the Deputies may be aware, applications have been made by the school, in question, for funding for playground works under both the 2014 Summer Works scheme and also under the Emergency Works Scheme. The works referred to by the Deputy are appropriate to the Summer Works Scheme, the purpose of which is to devolve funding to individual school authorities to facilitate schools carrying out small and medium scale building works that will improve and upgrade existing school facilities.

As the Deputies will also be aware, spending of more than €70 million was approved for the 2014 Summer Works Scheme to allow over 770 schools undertake improvement works. This allowed for the funding of applications received under categories 1-6. Schools which had applied under categories 7-10, including the school referred to by the Deputies, were advised that their applications would be retained for prioritisation if funding for further summer works projects could be secured for 2015.

I am currently considering the feasibility of making further funding available to facilitate consideration of those applications which were received under categories 7-10 under the 2014 Summer Works Scheme.

Schools Data

530. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of one-teacher schools that are located within an eight kilometre distance of a school of similar patronage and language of instruction. [7926/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): In the current school year,

there are twenty-six 1-teacher schools that are located within an 8km distance of a school of similar patronage and language of instruction.

School Enrolments Data

531. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when school enrolment figures for the 2014-2015 academic year will be published. [7927/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): A provisional list of school enrolment numbers in each school for 2014/15 will be published on the Department's website in mid March. A final list will be published in June.

Teachers' Remuneration

532. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will examine the conditions under which an honours degree allowance is awarded to teachers who qualified from Marino Institute of Education in 2012, if she will reconsider whether the requirement to be working on one specified date, which takes no account of any other work, is fair and reasonable in determining whether a teacher receives the allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7984/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The issue raised by the Deputy has been brought to the Teachers' Conciliation Council by representatives of the teachers concerned. The Teachers' Conciliation Council is the recognised forum for dealing with matters relating to pay and conditions of service of teachers. The parties to the forum include representatives of the managerial authorities of schools, the teacher unions, the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

As the proceedings of the Conciliation Council are confidential it would not be appropriate for me to make any comment at this time.

Teaching Qualifications

533. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a qualification (details supplied) will be recognised; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7991/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Under the Teaching Council Act 2001, the Teaching Council is, since March 2006, the regulator and standards body for the teaching profession.

Accordingly, it holds authority and responsibility for registration of teachers in the State.

As the question refers to an operational matter for the Teaching Council, I am referring it to the Council for early direct reply.

School Staffing

534. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of two-teacher primary schools that would have lost a second teacher in 2015-2016 but

now stand to retain a second teacher on the basis of the changes she announced on 17 February 2015; and if she will provide a tabular breakdown, by relevant county and local authority area. [8014/15]

535. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of three-teacher primary schools that would have lost a third teacher in 2015-2016 but now stand to retain a third teacher on the basis of the changes she announced on 17 February 2015; and if she will provide a tabular breakdown, by relevant county and local authority area. [8015/15]

536. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of four-teacher primary schools that would have lost a fourth teacher in 2015-2016 but now stand to retain a third teacher on the basis of the changes she announced on 17 February 2015; and if she will provide a tabular breakdown, by relevant county and local authority area. [8016/15]

537. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of three-teacher primary schools that would in 2014-2015 have a fourth teacher if the measures she announced on 17 February 2015 had been in place for the purposes of staffing in 2014-2015; and if she will provide a tabular breakdown, by relevant county and local authority area. [8017/15]

538. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of two-teacher primary schools that would in 2014-2015 have a third teacher if the measures she announced on 17 February 2015 had been in place for the purposes of staffing in 2014-2015; and if she will provide a tabular breakdown, by relevant county and local authority area. [8018/15]

539. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of one-teacher primary schools that would in 2014-2015 have a second teacher if the measures she announced on 17 February 2015 had been in place for the purposes of staffing in 2014-2015; and if she will provide a tabular breakdown, by relevant county and local authority area. [8019/15]

540. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of two-teacher primary schools that became one-teacher primary schools on foot of the budget 2012 changes that would have retained a second teacher in 2014-2015 if the measures she announced on 17 February 2015 had been introduced in budget 2012; and if she will provide a tabular breakdown, by relevant county and local authority area. [8020/15]

541. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of three-teacher primary schools that became two-teacher primary schools on foot of the budget 2012 changes, that would have retained a third teacher in 2014-2015 if the measures she announced on 17 February 2015 had been introduced in budget 2012; and if she will provide a tabular breakdown, by relevant county and local authority area. [8021/15]

542. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of four-teacher primary schools that became three-teacher primary schools on foot of the budget 2012 changes but would have retained a fourth teacher in 2014-2015 if the measures she announced on 17 February 2015 had been introduced in budget 2012; and if she will provide a tabular breakdown, by relevant county and local authority area. [8022/15]

546. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated full-year cost of the measures she announced on 17 February 2015 with regard to pri-

mary schools; and the estimated additional full-year cost of changing appointment thresholds to the level of the retention thresholds she announced for same. [8026/15]

547. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated additional full-year cost, over and above any costs resultant from the changes she announced on 17 February 2015, of restoring the small school staffing schedule that existed in 2011-2012. [8027/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 534 to 542, inclusive, and 546 and 547 together.

The staffing arrangements for primary schools for the 2015/16 school year were published last week. They are set out in Department Circular 0005/2015 which is available on my Department's website at www.education.gov.ie. The circular sets out the improvements to the staffing schedule for the 2015/16 school year for small schools. These improvements are improved retention thresholds for the 2nd, 3rd and 4th classroom teacher and also the improved appointment and retention thresholds for isolated one-teacher schools. These improvements are estimated to benefit of the order of about 30 small schools. The final number of schools to benefit from these improvements to the staffing schedule will be known in the Autumn after the teacher allocation process has fully transacted. The full year cost of 30 posts is circa. €1.8m (€0.6m in 2015) and is being managed within the Department's budget.

These improvements particularly recognise the challenges faced by very small schools that are more than 8km from the next nearest school of the same type.

This package of measures will provide rural communities with security about the future of their small schools, recognising the essential social function which small schools can play, especially in isolated communities.

These improvements in the Staffing Schedule for small schools are the only changes that I am making to the staffing arrangements for primary schools for the 2015/16 school year.

The Deputy has sought information on what the impact of these improvements would be for the 2014/15 school year if they were also applicable to this school year. Firstly, I wish to make clear that they are not applicable to this year. They come into effect from 1 September 2015. Secondly, there is no scope within my Department to do the detailed analysis requested by the Deputy in relation to the 2014/15 school year given that the focus is now on the staffing and redeployment arrangements for the coming school year. However, the number of schools benefiting for the 2015/16 school year could be used as a guide for the number of schools that would benefit for the 2014/15 school year.

The cumulative savings achieved to date from the 2012 small schools budget measure are of the order of €20m. The number of posts lost is about 120 posts and the number of posts not gained is about 80 posts as a result of the increased pupil thresholds. This gives an indication of the overall costs involved in relation to restoring teacher numbers in small schools.

School Enrolments Data

543. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of one-teacher primary schools, with 19 pupils in 2014/2015; and if she will provide a tabular breakdown, by relevant county and local authority area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8023/15]

544. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of two-teacher primary schools, with 53 to 55 pupils in 2014/2015; and if she will provide a tabular breakdown, by relevant county and local authority area. [8024/15]

545. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of three-teacher primary schools, with 83 to 85 pupils in 2014/2015; and if she will provide a tabular breakdown, by relevant county and local authority area. [8025/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 543, 544 and 545 together.

The number of pupils and teachers in individual schools is provided in the National School Annual Census. Results from the census for the current school year (2014/2015) are being finalised at present. A provisional list of the number of pupils and teachers in each school for 2014/15 will be published on the Department's website in mid March. A list of all schools and their pupil and teacher numbers for 2013/14 are available on my Department's website at the following link <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Data-on-Individual-Schools/Class-Size-2013-2014.xls>.

Questions Nos. 546 and 547 answered with Question No. 534.

Disability Support Services Provision

548. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will review the decision to decline the application for assistive technology in respect of a child (details supplied) in County Cork. [8078/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department provides funding to schools towards the cost of assistive technology for pupils in Primary, Post Primary and Special schools for personal computers and specialist software for educational purposes under the Assistive Technology scheme, as set out in my Department's Circular 0010/2013.

This Circular states that equipment is provided under this scheme for children with more complex disabilities who require essential specialist equipment to access the school curriculum, which they do not already have, or which cannot be provided for them through the schools existing provisions.

Following consideration of information which has been provided by the school in relation to the application for equipment for the pupil in question, I can advise the Deputy that the equipment which has been applied for is already available to the pupil. As such, the application does not meet the criteria for the allocation of support under my Department's Assistive Technology scheme.

School Placement

549. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way the parents of children due to complete their primary education at the autistic unit in a school (details supplied) should progress, in respect of second level education, in view of the fact that they have been unable to secure places in adjoining schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8092/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Deputy will be aware that this Government is committed to ensuring that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with autism, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

Such placements facilitate access to individualised education programmes which may draw from a range of appropriate educational interventions, delivered by fully qualified professional teachers, with the support of special needs assistants and the appropriate school curriculum.

Young people with autism transitioning from primary school placements have a number of alternative options including mainstream placement in post primary school with support, placement in a special class in a mainstream school or placement in a special class in a special school.

The Deputy will also be aware that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), for allocating resource teachers and special needs assistants to schools to support students with Special Educational Needs including Autism. It is also the role of the NCSE to make appropriate arrangements to establish special classes in schools in various geographical areas as required.

SENOs engage with schools annually in order to plan for, and to open, new special classes each year in order to ensure there are sufficient special class placements available at primary and post primary school level to meet demand in a given area.

With regard to post primary placement options for children with autism in the area referred to by the Deputy, the NCSE is actively engaged with parents and schools in the area on the various options.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

550. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if extra special needs assistant hours will be approved in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8119/15]

552. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if extra special needs assistant hours will be approved in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8135/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 550 and 552 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school. Where children have significant care needs to the extent that they need additional support to be able to attend school, the NCSE may make an allocation of SNA support to the school to assist that child.

The NCSE operates within my Department’s criteria in allocating such support. The criteria by which SNA support is allocated to pupils is set out in my Department’s Circular 0030/2014.

All schools have been asked to apply to the NCSE for SNA support for the 2015/16 school year by 18th March, 2015.

The NCSE will consider all applications for SNA support which have been made by schools, including the school referred to by the Deputy. Allocations for SNA support will then be made to qualifying schools. All schools have the names and contact details of their local SENO. Schools who wish to appeal the level of SNA allocation which has been made to them may do so via the appeals process which is set out at www.ncse.ie.

Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

Site Acquisitions

551. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills in relation to the land where a proposed national school (details supplied) in County Cork was to be built but later abandoned for planning reasons, if her Department has sold this land; when and to whom the land was sold; the purchase and sale prices for the land; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8128/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Department did not complete the purchase of land in the area referred to by the Deputy. The acquisition of this site was subject to planning permission being obtained. Contracts were rescinded on the basis that, subsequent to an appeal to An Bord Pleanála, planning permission was not granted.

Question No. 552 answered with Question No. 550.

Community Employment Schemes Operation

553. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the education and training board has ceased its sponsorship of a community arts project (details supplied) in Dublin 11; and if she will review this decision, in view of the invaluable contribution this project makes to the community. [8142/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I understand that this query relates to a Community Employment (CE) project which is funded by the Department of Social Protection and managed by the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb). I have asked the CDETb to contact the Deputy directly to clarify the position, however it is a matter for the Department of Social Protection to consider the allocation of places within the CE scheme.

School Enrolments

554. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps she will take for parents in relation to their children being in the catchment area for a junior school in Malahide, County Dublin, but excluded from the catchment area in relation to national schools, from second class onwards, and from secondary education; and the further steps she will take to resolve this. [8162/15]

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.

Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 provides for an appeal by a parent or guardian to the Secretary General of my Department, or in the case of an Educational Training Board (ETB) school to the ETB in the first instance, where a Board of Management of a school, or a person acting on behalf of the Board, refuses to enrol a student in a school, expels a student or suspends a student for 20 or more days in any school year.

The Educational Welfare Service of the Child and Family Agency (EWS) is the statutory agency which can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child. The EWS can be contacted at 01-8738700.

For school planning purposes the country is divided into geographic districts known as feeder areas each with several primary schools feeding into a post-primary centre with one or more post-primary schools. These defined districts facilitate the orderly planning of school provision and accommodation needs.

The Deputy will be aware that Government gave approval in March last year for drafting the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2014. The Bill is currently at an advanced stage of drafting and is on the Government legislative programme for publication early in the Spring/Summer session.

The objective of the Admissions to School Bill is to provide an over-arching framework to ensure that how schools decide on who is enrolled and who is refused a place in schools is more structured, fair and transparent. The framework also proposes a mechanism for ensuring that every child receives a school place.

A key objective in designing the framework is to create greater confidence for parents that the admission criteria laid down by schools are legitimate, reasonable and fair.

Question No. 555 answered with Question No. 529.

Third Level Admissions Entry Requirements

556. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if students who are educated in the North of Ireland and who undertake A level examinations, yet who reside in the South of Ireland, will be accepted onto the higher education access route admissions scheme, when applying through the Central Applications Office for college places for autumn 2015; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that hundreds of students from the South attend school in the Six Counties, and would hugely benefit from participation in the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8211/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) is a college and university admissions scheme which offers places on reduced points and extra college support to school leavers from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The scheme is operated by a number of higher education institutions and not by my Department. Admissions to the institutions are regulated by the institutions themselves.

I have been informed by the HEAR/DARE Steering Group that HEAR was developed to target students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds attending secondary school (i.e. sitting the Irish Leaving Certificate) and residing in the Republic of Ireland. HEAR is the primary mechanism through which participating HEIs reach national targets, identified by the Higher Education Authority (based on Republic of Ireland data and research), which points to particular socio-economic groups being under-represented relative to their share of the Republic of Ireland's population as a whole.

The six indicators employed by HEAR to identify eligible students are all Republic of Ireland proxies for long-term socio-economic disadvantage. Consequently students educated and resident outside the Republic of Ireland cannot meet the eligibility criteria for the HEAR scheme. This policy was agreed by all participating HEAR institutions when HEAR was established in 2009. It is acknowledged that there is an anomaly regarding students who are for example, resident in the Republic of Ireland and attending secondary school in Northern Ireland and sitting A-Levels. This has been brought to the attention of the DARE HEAR Steering Group and National Policy Group. This will not result in any changes to the HEAR scheme for students applying for entry in 2015 as the terms, conditions and criteria for application were published in August 2014. To date no correspondence or complaint has been received (by the DARE HEAR Shared Services Unit or HEAR HEIs) from third level applicants or parents of applicants residing in Northern Ireland or the border counties on this matter, or from any schools in Northern Ireland. The position of A-Level applicants resident in the Republic of Ireland will be reviewed for those students applying to higher education in 2016.

Individual students who have queries on this matter can contact HEAR Higher Education Institutions directly. The Deputy may wish to contact the Irish Universities Association in this instance.

Planning Issues

557. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made on the redevelopment of an old school building (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8218/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The building referred to by the Deputy is not in my ownership. Queries in relation to the restoration of the building are a matter for the building owner.

Statutory responsibility for the enforcement of the planning and other relevant legislation with regard to works to this property falls within the remit of the local authority.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

558. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide an update on the allocation of resource hours for children with Down's syndrome, who will commence school in September 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8223/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that under the existing allocation system, all pupils with Down syndrome, including such pu-

pils with mild general learning difficulties, currently are entitled to receive additional teaching support.

Such support is provided either from a school's allocation of Learning Support or Resource Teaching under the General Allocation Model (GAM), or from an allocation of additional resource teacher hours allocated to schools by the NCSE.

I am aware that some parents, and organisations representing children with Down syndrome, continue to have concerns that the existing system does not give them certainty as to the number of resource teaching hours that may be allocated to their child under the General Allocation Model, as these hours are distributed locally by schools. I met with Down Syndrome Ireland, and with some parents of children with Down syndrome, recently on 19th February.

This was an opportunity for me to discuss the concerns that they have regarding the provision of resource teaching support for children with Down syndrome.

I intend to meet with more parents over the coming week or so.

I will consider the issues that have been raised by Down Syndrome Ireland and parents, and will keep the Deputy and the House informed of my developing views on this matter.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

559. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on correspondence from a person (details supplied) in Dublin 13 regarding a language unit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8225/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department provides an extensive range of supports for pupils with Specific Speech and Language Disorder (SSLD).

This includes provision for the establishment of special classes for pupils with SSLD in primary schools. The criteria for enrolment in a Special Class for pupils with SSLD is set out in my Department's Circular 0038/2007.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for opening special classes in schools, where sufficient need arises. The NCSE will be able to advise parents with regards to the availability of special classes in their area or with regards to the potential establishment of new classes.

All schools have the names and contact details of their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO). Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

Pupils who are not enrolled in a special class for SSLD and who meet the criteria for Specific Speech and Language Disorder, as outlined in my Department's Circular, may qualify for additional teaching support where he/she is enrolled in mainstream school.

Pupils with mild speech and language difficulties may qualify for supplementary teaching support from within the school's general allocation of learning support/teaching support. It is a matter for individual schools to use their professional judgement to identify pupils who will receive this support and to use the resources available to the school to intervene at the appropriate level with such pupils.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the enrolment of a child to a school is a matter in the first instance for the parents of the child and the Board of Management of a school. My Department has no role in relation to processing applications for enrolment to schools.

Finally, I wish to advise the Deputy that Pupils with SSLD have access to speech therapy services either through the speech and language therapy services provided in the special class setting by the HSE or through the primary care service.

The provision of health supports, including Speech and Language Therapy services, is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive and the Deputy's concerns in relation to this particular issue should be directed to that body.

Third Level Fees

560. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is a stipulation that returning expatriates must be resident here for three of the past five years and in secondary education to avail of free fees in third level colleges. [8232/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Exchequer provides free fees funding in respect of eligible students who are pursuing full-time undergraduate courses of study under my Department's Free Fees Initiative. The main conditions of the scheme are that students must be first-time undergraduates, hold inter alia EU/EEA/Swiss nationality in their own right, and have been ordinarily resident in an EU/EEA/Swiss state for at least three of the five years preceding their entry to an approved third level course.

Where full-time undergraduate students do not qualify for free fees funding they must pay the appropriate fee as determined by their third level institution. Third level institutions are autonomous bodies and it is therefore a matter for the institution to determine the rate of fee payable by students (EU or non-EU).

However, in the case of students who do not meet the residency clause, higher education institutions have been requested to charge the more moderate EU fee to EU/EEA/Swiss nationals who have completed at least five academic years of study (Primary or Post-Primary level) in the EU/EEA or Switzerland.

Apprenticeship Programmes

561. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she has finalised the respective roles for SOLAS and institutes of technology for the apprenticeship implementation plan; if she will examine this matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8298/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department and its agencies are currently implementing the first phase of the Apprenticeship Implementation Plan, focused on several actions including the establishment of an Apprenticeship Council to develop and issue a call for proposals to industry for apprenticeships in new sectors. This call for proposals is under way and I expect a report from the Council in the second quarter of this year with recommendations on the development of new apprenticeships. Proposals will come from consortia of industry sectors and education and training providers and I expect that both Education and Training Boards and Institutes of Technology will positively consider links with industry partners. Later this year, implementation of phase 2 of the Plan will focus on the detailed

development of successful proposals into new apprenticeships. This will include determining the specific arrangements for each new apprenticeship in terms of qualifications, curriculum and programme delivery.

Departmental Staff

562. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on the proposal to require all public sector workers under the aegis of her Department who interact with service users to wear a name badge; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8566/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I am not aware of any proposal being considered by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to introduce name badges for Civil Servants whose official functions entail direct dealings with members of the public and it is not something I am considering for staff at my Department.

It is my Department’s policy that all officials when dealing with members of the public over the phone or in person, give their name and contact details. In relation to written correspondence, officials are required to print their name and contact details at the end of letters in order that the addressee can contact them in the event they need to clarify any aspect of the letter.

Irish Water Funding

563. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the loans raised by Irish Water from private banks; if security has been provided for such loans; if guarantees of any nature have been provided by the State; if there is risk to the Exchequer for such loans raised by Irish Water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7886/15]

568. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of loans Irish Water has; the value of each loan; the name of the lender; the interest rate on each loan; and if each loan is secured or unsecured. [7676/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 563 and 568 together.

Irish Water has a €300m loan from the NPRF at an annual interest rate of 2.5%. There is no security for this loan but the loan is guaranteed by the Minister for Finance, for which a separate guarantee fee is payable.

Irish Water has put in place facilities with commercial banks in the amount of €150m which are unsecured (other than cash backing provisions within an overdraft/demand facility). While the names of lenders and applicable interest rates are commercially sensitive the interest rate on the loans are competitive and at market rates. Further facilities of some €250m are at an advanced stage of negotiation.

Housing Assistance Payments Implementation

564. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when the new housing assistance payment is expected to be introduced in the

Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council area in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8057/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The implementation of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a key Government priority and a major pillar of the Social Housing Strategy 2020, which I published on 26 November 2014. 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. Further to the enactment of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 on 28 July 2014, the first phase of the HAP statutory pilot commenced with effect from 15 September 2014 in Limerick City and County Council, Waterford City and County Council and Cork County Council. HAP commenced in Louth, Kilkenny, South Dublin and Monaghan County Councils from 1 October. Subsequently, on 18 December, Dublin City Council became part of the statutory HAP pilot, with a specific focus on accommodating homeless households. Dublin City Council is implementing the HAP pilot for homeless households in the Dublin region on behalf of all 4 Dublin local authorities, including Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council.

There are now 921 households in receipt of HAP across the local authority areas taking part in the statutory pilot scheme.

During the legislation's passage through the Oireachtas in July 2014 an undertaking was given that a report would be prepared for the relevant Oireachtas Committee, that would include a full review of the statutory pilot phase. Data for this report is being gathered from pilot sites and the report will be submitted to the Oireachtas Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht shortly. Based on data gathered for the review, consideration is currently being given to the sequencing of local authorities to commence HAP on an incremental basis this year.

Motor Tax Yield

565. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the allocation of motor tax proceeds from 2008 to date in 2015; and the revenue received to date in 2015. [7729/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The income and expenditure from the Local Government Fund for the years 2008-2015 is set out in the tables below. The figures for the years 2008 – 2013 are from the Local Government Fund audited annual accounts which are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/LocalGovernment/Administration/>.

The figures for 2014 and 2015 are from the Revised Estimates Volume for 2015, which is available on the website of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Income

€m	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	*2014	*2015
Motor Tax (net)	1,055.3	1,056.3	1,021.4	1,011.6	1,052.9	1,135.5	1,150.0	1,167.0
Exchequer Contribution	548.7	443.0	241.4	175.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	233.1

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€m	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	*2014	*2015
Household Charge	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	113.9	23.3	0.0	0.0
Local Property Tax	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	476.0	440.0
Interest	6.7	1.4	1.1	2.4	0.6	0.2	0.3	0.0
Other				0.4				
Total	1,610.7	1,500.7	1,263.8	1,189.4	1,167.4	1,159.0	1,626.3	1,840.1

*Figures from REV for 2014 and 2015

Expenditure

€m	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	*2014	*2015
General Purpose Grants	999.2	832.7	762.8	699.8	637.1	640.9	282.0	0.0
Local Property Tax Allocation	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	458.9
Road and Public Transport Payments	550.4	548.2	411.4	397.6	404.5	408.0	359.9	363.9
Payment to Exchequer	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	46.5	100.0	520.0	484.0
Irish Water Subvention	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	439.1	399.0
LA Rates payments	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	59.0
Other Miscellaneous	74.1	80.1	69.0	51.0	60.0	58.4	93.9	75.0
Total	1,623.7	1,460.9	1,243.2	1,148.3	1,148.1	1,207.3	1,694.9	1,839.8

*Figures from REV for 2014 and 2015

Postal Voting

566. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to reform the postal voting application system before the date of the next referendum to allow for more categories of reasons to apply for and receive a postal vote; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8411/15]

590. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when the date for the upcoming referendums will be announced; and his plans for an extension of a postal vote in respect of a person (details supplied). [8150/15]

595. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the restrictions on the current criteria for postal voters; and his plans to address these restrictions to ensure that resident Irish citizens, who are temporarily abroad for work or on vacation, can also vote in referenda and general elections. [8175/15]

596. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to implement a voting system whereby persons who cannot access a polling station on voting day, as a result of the fact that they are either away or in hospital, would be provided a chance to have a postal vote. [8177/15]

598. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on changing the current law to provide the postal vote to voters who are temporarily out of the State on a polling day, due to non-work related commitments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8183/15]

603. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to change the criteria for those wishing to exercise their right to vote but who are out of the country on holiday or for a family occasion, in view of the fact referendums are now held annually and there has been a significant amount of emigration over recent years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8202/15]

604. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will change the requirements for postal voting (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8216/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 566,590,595,596,598,603 and 604 together.

In order to be able to vote at elections and referendums, a person's name must be entered in the register of electors for a constituency in the State in which the person ordinarily resides.

Postal voting is provided for in electoral law in respect of certain categories of person who are entered in the register of electors - whole-time members of the Defence Forces; members of An Garda Síochána; Irish diplomats serving abroad and their spouses or civil partners; electors living at home who are unable to vote because of a physical illness or a physical disability; electors whose occupation, service or employment makes it likely that they will be unable to vote in person at their local polling station on polling day and full-time students registered at their home who are living elsewhere while attending an educational institution in the State; certain election staff employed at the poll outside the constituency where they reside; and electors who because of the circumstances of their detention in prison pursuant to an order of a court are likely to be unable to go in person on polling day to vote.

Qualifying voters can apply to their local authority for inclusion in the postal voters lists.

Electors who are eligible for, but not already included in, the postal voters list may apply for entry into the supplement to these lists. Such applications must be received by the registration authority at least 22 days (not including Sundays, Good Friday or Public Holidays) before polling day at a referendum in order to be considered for that referendum.

While electoral law is subject to ongoing review, I have no proposals at present to extend existing arrangements for postal voting. In responding to the recommendation of the Constitution on the Convention in their fourth report that there should be greater access to postal voting, the Government proposed that an electoral commission be tasked in due course with considering the issue and advising in detail on the electoral and operational implications, including costs, of implementing change in this area.

As regards a date for the forthcoming referendums, I will make the necessary polling day order, in accordance with section 10 of the Referendum Act 1994, when the Constitution Amendment Bills have been passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas.

Seniors Alert Scheme

567. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and

Local Government if senior citizens groups which administer the monitored alarm scheme can also apply to administer the carbon monoxide scheme and the smoke alarms scheme; the way in which they may apply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7671/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): My Department manages the Seniors Alert Scheme which encourages community support for vulnerable older people in our communities by providing grant assistance towards the purchase and installation of personal monitored alarms to enable older persons, of limited means, to continue to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind. The scheme is administered by local community and voluntary groups with the support of my Department. My Department undertook to consider new approaches to the Seniors Alert Scheme in 2014 and arising from this, it was decided that the scheme be managed by Pobal, given that organisation's significant experience delivering programmes on behalf of Government.

Pobal's management and administrative services for the Scheme included an invitation to tender for the supply and installation of personal monitored alarms, which was publicly advertised on eTenders on 20 October 2014. The tender included a requirement for suppliers to set out their value added services, including the supply of smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms. The tender process, which is being led by Pobal, is almost complete and following this a panel of regional suppliers will be contracted to provide the equipment within specific regional areas and the question of funding for such value added services will be further considered once the outcome of the competition is made public.

Question No. 568 answered with Question No. 563.

Departmental Schemes

569. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the recipients of his Department's grant scheme for maintaining trails in 2013 and 2014; if his Department will operate it again in 2015; if so, when it is expected to open; the budget for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7715/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): A scheme covering trail maintenance on National Way Marked Ways and other priority walks of national or regional significance was operated by my Department in both 2013 and 2014, and the recipients of funding under the schemes are listed in the tables below. A decision regarding the implementation of a similar scheme in 2015 will be made later this year.

Trail Maintenance Scheme Recipients

2013	2014
Avondu Blackwater Partnership	Coillte
Ballyhoura Heritage & Environment Ltd	Donegal County Council
Clare Local Development Company	West Cork Development Partnership Ltd
Coillte	Aughrim Community Development
Donegal Local Development Company	Avondu Blackwater Partnership Ltd
FORUM Connemara	Offaly Sports Partnership - Offaly County Council
Laois County Council	Ballyhoura Heritage & Environmental Ltd

2013	2014
Mayo Co Council/ NPWS	County Longford Tourism Ltd
Offaly County Council	South West Mayo Development Company
Sligo LEADER Partnership on behalf of Miners Way & Historical Trail Management Committee	Coiste Cosan na Naomh
Sligo LEADER Partnership Co Ltd. & Sligo County Council	IRD Duhallow
Roscommon LEADER Partnership	Kilkenny Leader Partnership
South Kerry Dev partnership	Clare Local Development Company
Tinahely Community Projects	Roscommon LEADER Partnership
Trail Kilkenny	Carlow County Council
West Cork Development Partnership	Limerick City & County Council
	Trail Kilkenny
	Sligo Leader Partnership

Departmental Staff Data

570. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of staff losses from his Department in each year since 2007 in comparison to other Departments. [7730/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The staffing levels in my Department at the end of each of the years 2007 to 2014 along with the change in staffing levels from the previous year is set out in the table below.

Year	Staff at Year End (FTE)	Difference (+/-) from Previous Year End (FTE)
2007	1441.46	67.67
2008	1332.12	-109.34
2009	1191.90	-140.22
2010	1176.53	-15.37
2011	812.21	-364.32
2012	778.78	-33.43
2013	748.21	-30.57
2014	720.51	-27.70

Note: FTE denotes full time equivalents.

There was a significant change in the staffing levels in the Department from 2010 to 2011. The end 2011 figures reflect structural changes that occurred in May 2011 with the transfer of the heritage function to the new Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the transfer of community functions to my Department.

My Department does not have information on the staffing levels of other Government Departments.

Local Authority Housing

571. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when he will issue a call for projects under the capital assistance programme from local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7790/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Under the Capital Assistance Scheme, a 'Call for Proposals' was issued in 2014 covering the period 2014-2016. Projects submitted under this 'Call' are currently progressing through the various stages of design and development. However, given the ambition set out in the Social Housing Strategy 2020, I propose to issue a further 'Call for Proposals' under the Capital Assistance Scheme shortly and I look forward to a strong response from local authorities and approved housing bodies.

Housing Adaptation Grant Funding

572. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of funding that has been allocated for the housing adaption grant scheme in 2015; the amount that has been allocated to Dublin City Council and to Fingal County Council to fund the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7818/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Last year, exchequer funding of over €37 million was provided for the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability, with Dublin City Council and Fingal County Council receiving €3,030,439 and €1,077,562, respectively. I am pleased to be in a position to increase the national funding for the Schemes by some 10% in 2015 to €40.4 million from which I will shortly be making individual allocations to local authorities.

Departmental Schemes

573. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if an organisation (details supplied) will be granted funding under the scheme to support national organisations for its home-from-home apartment in Chapelizod, Dublin 20, which is Ireland's only fully wheelchair accessible, self-catering accommodation. [7855/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): The funding Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) in the community and voluntary sector aims to provide multi-annual funding to national organisations towards core costs associated with the provision of services. Applications for a new round of funding, which commenced on 1 July 2014, were subject to an appraisal process. 55 applications were approved for funding for the two-year period from 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2016. The organisation referred to by the Deputy in the details supplied was not successful on this occasion. Pobal were asked to undertake the appraisal and management of the scheme and, in that context, put in place a dedicated team to deal with any inquiries from applicants and to provide detailed feedback. Furthermore, an appeals process was put in place, on foot of which Pobal submitted a report, which is currently being considered.

On 18 July 2014, it was announced that bridging funding of €1.4million would be allocated for a twelve month period to a number of previously funded health, disability and other organisations that were not approved for funding under the new scheme, pending the carrying out of a review of the public funding of national organisations in the health and disability sector. This bridging funding in 2014/2015 is a once-off transitional arrangement and will enable organisa-

tions to plan for their future, whether with or without State support, such as that provided under the SSNO. The organisation in question was allocated €37,304 for the 12 month period to 30 June 2015.

The review process is underway and is being advanced in consultation with the Department of Health. The Health Service Executive and Pobal are also participating in the review. All organisations in receipt of bridging funding have been contacted to make submissions as part of the review process. I intend to complete and publish the outcome of the review over the coming months.

It should be noted that funding under the SSNO is provided for ongoing core operational costs of national organisations within the community and voluntary sector. The definition of core funding for the purpose of the SSNO refers to financial support that covers basic core organisational and administrative costs of an organisation; this includes core staff, facilities and the direct administration expenses of day-to-day work.

Motor Tax Rates

574. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to set out the motor tax rates for agricultural vehicles owned by persons who do not actively farm; whether they differ to the rates for active farmers or landowners (details supplied); if so, the reason for this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7864/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Motor tax is based on the construction and use of a vehicle. There are two annual motor tax rates for tractors. An annual rate of €333 applies to tractors being used for general haulage purposes. An annual rate of €102 applies to tractors and agricultural engines provided they are being used solely for agricultural purposes. This includes vehicles being used by agricultural contractors where the licensing authority is satisfied that the vehicle is being used on public roads only for the haulage of articles required for the purpose of doing that work.

Library Services

575. **Deputy Shane Ross** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to set out his plans to open public libraries on Sundays in advance of State examinations; his views on whether it is appropriate that despite the €36.6 million spent building the new Dún Laoghaire library, it is closed every Sunday and, therefore, unavailable to the local residents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7889/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The management of library services, including the deployment of library resources in a local authority area such as Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, is a matter for the local authority concerned in accordance with the library development programme adopted by the elected members as a reserved function.

Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible.

Accordingly, I have no function in relation to the setting of library opening hours.

Redundancy Payments

576. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 344 of 1 April 2014 if he will provide an update on discussions between his Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, regarding enhanced redundancy payments in the community and voluntary sector; and if there are proposals for legislation or new regulations to govern this area. [7940/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): My Department has no role in the internal operations of any private organisations and, therefore, does not have a role in relation to staff or employment matters, which are for the Board of the company, as the employer, to manage.

In relation to the Deputy's query regarding the payment of redundancy in the community and voluntary sector, discussions between my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform are continuing. There has also been engagement with the Office of the Attorney General in relation to a number of legal issues arising. Consideration of the matter will be finalised in light of the outcome of these engagements.

Pyrite Remediation Board Expenditure

577. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government from where the pyrite remediation scheme draws its funding and the number of households that have applied for funding to date. [7951/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): Funding of €10 million is being provided by my Department for the implementation of the pyrite remediation scheme in 2015 in light of anticipated activity under the scheme this year. Since the scheme was first published in February 2014, the Pyrite Remediation Board has received in the order of 630 completed applications. A total of 485 applications have been validated and forwarded to the Housing Agency for the verification stage of the process; of those over 300 have now been approved by the Board for inclusion in the scheme and the applicants have been notified. Applications for dwellings not yet included in the scheme are being processed as quickly as individual circumstances allow.

Construction Sector Strategy

578. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in view of his recent statement that property developers will be loaned money at low rates by the State to pay for roads, footpaths and sewage in housing estates to speed up the building of houses, and in view of the fact that this low-cost loan proposal will be initially restricted to the four local authorities in Dublin but could be extended to counties Cork and Galway, to explain the reason he has overlooked County Kerry; if he will provide an assurance that he will extend the scheme to County Kerry; the way he decided to discriminate against County Kerry; the particular financial considerations he took into consideration in making his decision to exclude County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7986/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Dublin Housing Supply and Co-ordination Task Force was established under Action 2 of the Government's Construction 2020 Strategy with an immediate focus on addressing

supply-related issues and to work closely with industry and other parties, including those responsible for key infrastructure such as schools, to identify and address any obstacles to viable and appropriate development.

The Task Force's Second Report on Critical Infrastructure Deficits in Residential Priority Areas in the Dublin Region has been submitted to my Department and I will give due consideration to its conclusions in consultation with my Government colleagues.

Local Authority Staff Recruitment

579. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to explain the effect the current recruitment embargo is having on the ability of local authorities to deliver their services effectively in recent years; the local authorities most affected by staff shortages; the measures he has proposed to address these high-pressure areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5740/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I refer to the reply to Question No. 273 of 5 February 2015, which sets out the position in this matter.

Voluntary Sector Funding

580. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will publish the outcome of the appeals process conducted by Pobal, following the exclusion of funding to over 20 disability organisations, under the new round of the scheme to support national organisations; and if he will reinstate funding to these organisations. [8058/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): The funding scheme to support national organisations in the community and voluntary sector aims to provide multi-annual funding to national organisations towards core costs associated with the provision of services. My Department is providing funding under the scheme of in excess of €8 million over a two year period to mid-2016. This represents an increase in funding of more than 10% per annum compared to the previous scheme.

Pobal were asked to undertake the appraisal and management of the scheme and, in that context, they put in place a dedicated team to deal with any inquiries from applicants and to provide detailed feedback. Furthermore, an appeals process was put in place, on foot of which Pobal has submitted a report to my Department. The report in question is currently being considered.

Pyrite Remediation Programme

581. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to set down the number of homes that have been remediated under the pyrite remediation scheme in the years 2014 and 2015. [8066/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): Since the pyrite remediation scheme was first published in February 2014, the Pyrite Resolution Board has received in the order of 630 completed applica-

tions. A total of 485 applications have been validated and forwarded to the Housing Agency for the verification stage; of those over 300 have now been approved by the Board for inclusion in the scheme and the applicants have been notified. Applications for dwellings not yet included in the scheme are being processed as quickly as individual circumstances allow.

Design professionals have been appointed to 12 projects involving some 255 dwellings. A pilot project involving the remediation of 5 dwellings was completed in the latter half of 2014. I understand that a works contract for 20 houses has recently been awarded and works commenced last week, while a number of procurements in relation to a further 4 developments involving some 74 dwellings are nearing contract award stage.

Environmental Protection Agency Expenditure

582. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to outline the policy and practice of the Environmental Protection Agency on the recovery and enforcement of legal costs, following the conclusion of judicial review litigation and in circumstances where the agency has been awarded its legal costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8068/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): As provided for in the Environmental Protection Agency Act 1992, the EPA is independent in its operations, and accordingly, I have no role in this matter. However, I am advised by the Agency that Section 50B of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended by the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 and the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2011, may apply to judicial review proceedings seeking to challenge a decision of the Agency.

There have been no judicial review proceedings in which the Agency has been awarded its costs since Section 50B was enacted, and so the matter inquired about has not arisen. The Agency will decide what recovery and enforcement policy and practices are appropriate, if and when a costs order is made in its favour.

Rental Accommodation Scheme Criteria

583. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to set out the circumstances under which a local authority may withhold payment of rent to a landlord who has agreed to participate in the rental accommodation scheme. [8084/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): A Residential Tenancy Agreement under the Rental Accommodation scheme (RAS) involves a three way contractual relationship between landlord, tenant and the housing authority.

Under the agreement, in return for a guarantee that the housing authority will pay an agreed monthly rent to a landlord under the scheme, the landlord agrees to fulfil certain terms and conditions. These terms and conditions include providing the authority with a tax clearance certificate, repairing and maintaining the property to the proper standards, notifying the housing authority when the property becomes vacant and terminating a tenancy when requested to do so by the housing authority.

In the event of a persistent breach by the landlord of a Residential Tenancy Agreement,

for example, where a landlord has failed to carry out essential repairs or improvements to the property, in the first instance the housing authority should make every effort to reach agreement with the landlord to remedy the situation. However, in the event that the breach continues then the housing authority can suspend payment to the landlord, by giving 21 days written notice.

Commercial Rates

584. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if a local authority has the power to levy commercial rates on the owner of a commercial premises rather than the tenant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8093/15]

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 levying and collection of rates are matters for each individual local authority.

Under rates legislation the person liable for payment of rates is the person in occupation of a rateable property on the date of the making of the rate by the relevant local authority. The owner, rather than the occupier, may be liable for commercial rates if the property in question is unoccupied on the date of the making of the rate.

Local Authority Housing Eligibility

585. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide details, in tabular form, on the local authorities which require local authority housing applicants to provide documentation from land registries outside Ireland as evidence that they do not own property, and from what year each local authority has sought this particular form of documentation. [8099/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The information requested is not available in my Department.

The assessment of households for social housing support is a matter for individual housing authorities under the provisions of the Housing (Miscellaneous) Provisions Act 2009, the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 and having regard to the particular circumstances of each case. I am precluded from becoming involved in individual cases.

Regulation 22 of the 2011 Regulations provides that an applicant household for social housing support is ineligible for social housing support if a household member owns alternative accommodation that could meet their needs, either through occupation or through the proceeds of selling that accommodation. Part 11 of the prescribed social housing application form therefore asks for information on applicants' property ownership either in the State or abroad.

In seeking to determine the eligibility for social housing support the housing authority may seek additional documentation from applicants. It is a matter for the local authority to determine what is required in individual cases.

While my Department has not directed housing authorities to seek specific forms of documentation, it would expect that any such requests by a local authority would be appropriate having regard to the particular circumstances of the applicant.

Building Regulations Amendments

586. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to outline his plans to amend the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014 to address the concerns relating to self-builds; and if so, the timeframe he envisages for bringing any such amendments before the Houses of the Oireachtas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8109/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The Building Control Act 1990 places a statutory obligation on owners, designers and builders to design and construct buildings in compliance with the requirements of the Building Regulations. Following public concern with regard to the widespread failure to comply with regulatory requirements in all sectors of the construction industry, the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014 (S.I. No. 9 of 2014) were introduced to strengthen the arrangements in place by requiring greater accountability in relation to compliance with Building Regulations. Over 5,000 construction projects have commenced to date since the new regulations took effect on 1 March 2014 and thus require statutory certification of design and construction, lodgement of compliance documentation, mandatory inspections during construction and validation and registration of certificates.

In relation to the self-build sector I refer to the reply given in response to Questions Nos. 541 and 542 of 18 December 2014. Price is determined by market forces and is therefore outside of the scope of my regulatory powers. Nevertheless, I recognise the importance of ensuring that the regulations do not impact unduly on the self-build sector, particularly in relation to cost. As indicated previously, my Department, in conjunction with the Housing Agency and the construction professional bodies, is currently finalising additional guidance on an appropriate inspection plan for a typical single dwelling. This guidance will be helpful in better informing the market in relation to offering realistic and appropriately priced professional services for such work.

I also intend to announce details of the imminent review of S.I. No. 9 of 2014 early next month. A full report on the matter will be produced by the second quarter of 2015 and will inform further regulation in this critical area. I will arrange for a copy of the report to be made available in the Oireachtas Library in due course.

Water Charges Administration

587. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is in a position to fully appreciate the considerable difficulties which have been placed on families by the failure of Irish Water legislation to properly take account of situations in which an adult person with complicated care needs is living in the family home; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that many such adults have little or no income or capacity to earn income, yet are treated the same as an able-bodied adult in terms of liability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8114/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): A new water charging regime was announced by the Government on 19 November 2014. The capped annual charges will be €160 for single adult households and €260 for all other households until the end of 2018. All households will know what their capped bills will be until the end of 2018, which is particularly important for larger households or those with high usage due to medical needs.

In addition, a water conservation grant of €100 per year will be available to qualifying households. The Department of Social Protection will administer the grant on behalf of my Department, which will be available to households (principal private dwellings) that complete a valid response to Irish Water's customer registration process.

The water conservation grant replaces the tax rebate and social protection measures previously announced and 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.

Building Regulations Qualifications

588. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update on the Fennelly recommendations on the registration of architects; if he will provide the registration arrangements which have been put in place since the publication of the report; if his Department plans to introduce any further registration arrangements to address the concerns of architectural technologists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8131/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): In 2013 Mr. Garrett Fennell, Solicitor, who is chairperson of the Admissions Board established by the Royal Institution of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) to oversee the registration of architects under the Building Control Act 2007, was tasked with reviewing the arrangements in place for registration. Mr. Fennell's report, which was welcomed by my Department, made a number of recommendations intended to improve and streamline the arrangements for registration, in particular those which apply to practically trained persons who had been operating as architects for 10 years prior to the commencement of the Act of 2007. Implementation of these recommendations, in consultation with the Architects Alliance of Ireland and others, has seen a number of reforms which now make it easier for such practically trained persons to become registered. Such reforms include administering the technical assessment process on a cyclical basis where briefing, guidance and support for candidates can be administered in a structured manner, mentoring and supporting applicants, facilitating assessment based on recent projects, facilitating applicants with reassessment/reapplication (i.e. ensuring it is not seen as a one chance only route to registration) and reviewing and simplifying guidance materials with direct input from practically trained persons. I have asked my Department and the RIAI as registration body to continue to work with the Architects Alliance of Ireland and others in this manner to achieve whatever further reasonable and practical improvements of the technical assessment process can be made in the context of the Fennell report or otherwise.

In relation to the proposals for the statutory registration of Architectural Technologists, I refer to the reply given to Question No. 519 of 18 November 2014 which remains the position. 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 early publication of legislative proposals thereafter.

Register of Electors

589. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 499 of 17 February 2015 to outline the work his Department will do to advertise the supplementary electoral register to new citizens, citizens who have turned 18 years of age and those who may have moved address in the run-up to the deadlines for entry on the supplementary register for the upcoming referendums; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8149/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): As indicated in response to Parliamentary Question No. 499 of 17 February 2015, my Department plans to advertise the opportunity for eligible voters to apply for inclusion in the supplement to the register of electors following the making of the Polling Day Order for the forthcoming referendums. This advertising will be done through the main national newspapers and the Department's website.

The advertising will draw attention to the requirement that applications for entry in the supplement must be received by the relevant local authority at least 15 days (not including Sundays, Good Friday or Public Holidays) before polling day at a referendum in order to be considered for that referendum. The advertising will also draw attention to the requirement that applications for inclusion in the supplement to the postal or special voters lists must be received by the relevant local authority at least 22 days (not including Sundays, Good Friday or Public Holidays) before polling day at a referendum in order to be considered for that referendum.

Question No. 590 answered with Question No. 566.

Irish Water Remit

591. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the precise statutory provision which enables Irish Water to charge a connection fee for the connection of new developments to a public water main and-or sewer, which replaced the former power of local authorities to charge development contributions in respect of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8159/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provided for the transfer of responsibility for the provision of public water services from the local authorities to Irish Water. The Act provides that Irish Water shall charge each customer for the provision of services provided by it in accordance with a water charges plan to be approved by the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER). Section 22(5) of the Act provides that a water charges plan may make provision for a charge in respect of the provision of a service connection (within the meaning of the Water Services Act 2007) to or in respect of a premises. In its decision on Irish Water's Water Charges Plan, published in October 2014, the CER stated that, until it made a decision on Irish Water's new connection charges, Irish Water should continue to apply rates equivalent to the water and wastewater related development levies which were applied by the local authorities at 31 December 2013.

The CER is currently working with Irish Water to develop a high level work plan for the year ahead and this will include the new approach to connection charges. This plan will be published in the coming weeks. A more detailed work plan outlining the consultation schedule will be published later this year.

592. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when the results of the public tendering process, to select local programme implementers to deliver the social inclusion and community activation programme in each area, will be released; and the reason the due date for release of the tender process results has been delayed. [8168/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): My Department's Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP) superseded the Local Development Social Inclusion and the Community Development Programmes in 2010. LCDP is the largest social inclusion intervention of its kind in the State and is being implemented on a transitional basis until the end of March 2015, pending the roll out of the new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) on 1 April 2015. In accordance with the Public Spending Code, legal advice, good practice internationally and in order to ensure the optimum delivery of services to clients, SICAP is subject to a public procurement process, which is in its final stages. The results of the tender process will be released over the coming week in line with commitments previously given that tenderers would be informed of the outcome of their tender by end February 2015.

I am satisfied that the procurement process, which is nearing completion, is in line with good practice and I look forward to the commencement and roll out of SICAP on 1 April 2015.

Homeless Persons Data

593. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide, in tabular form, the number of persons exiting emergency homeless accommodation to take up accommodation in the private rental sector in 2012, 2013, 2014 and to date in 2015. [8171/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Traditionally it has been difficult to quantify the number of homeless persons on an ongoing basis; this is in part a consequence of the volatility within this cohort of housing need. Prior to 2014 national data on homelessness was available through Housing Needs Assessment reports, which were generally carried out every three years, or through the CSO's special Census report, Homeless Persons in Ireland, which was published in 2012. The Housing Needs Assessment reports break down the categories of housing need, including in respect of homelessness but only where an application had been made to a housing authority. The Pathway Accommodation and Support System (PASS) was developed as a single integrated national data information system on the use of homeless services and is provided through Dublin City Council as a national shared service. The PASS system allows housing authorities to produce good quality, timely data in relation to homelessness and how it is addressed and, in quantifying its ongoing dynamics, supports the development and implementation of appropriate policy responses.

PASS was initially piloted in the Dublin Region and was rolled-out on a national basis during 2013, which means that 2014 was the first year for which PASS produced composite national data on homelessness. Quarterly reports from lead housing authorities are published on my Department's website as soon as they are available. These quarterly reports provide a range of data on homelessness, including details of Individuals moved on to independent living. These reports are available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/SpecialNeeds/HomelessPeople/>.

Homelessness Strategy

594. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will report to Dáil Éireann on the current implementation of his national housing and homeless strategy, in view of the fact that there is now no emergency accommodation available for families presenting as homeless in the Dublin area, and that up to four homeless families a day are presenting to the Dublin City Council homeless section alone. [8174/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities. The purposes for which housing authorities may incur expenditure in addressing homelessness are prescribed in Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988. Housing authorities provide monthly reports on homelessness in which identify the number of people utilising State-funded emergency accommodation on a regional and county basis. These monthly reports also provide details of the numbers of new families presenting as homeless in the Dublin Region each month; there were 47 such families presenting in January 2015. The details provided by housing authorities are available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/SpecialNeeds/HomelessPeople/>

A range of measures are being taken to secure a ring-fenced supply of accommodation to house homeless households and mobilise the necessary supports in order to deliver on the Government's target of ending involuntary long-term homelessness by the end of 2016. These measures have been identified in the Government's Implementation Plan on the State's Response to Homelessness and in the Action Plan to Address Homelessness. Progress in implementing these plans is reported through the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform. The plans and progress reports are also available on my Department's website at the link provided above.

Questions Nos. 595 and 596 answered with Question No. 566.

Local Authority Housing Eligibility

597. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if a local authority is required to adopt and publish rules in relation to succession to tenancy; and the actions that can be taken against a local authority which does not adopt or publish such rules. [8180/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): It is a matter for each housing authority, as part of its housing management functions, to determine the conditions in relation to succession to local authority tenancies in its area. I understand that the conditions vary from one authority to another, but any prospective successor would typically have to have resided in the property for a specified period, prior to the death of the family member, and have been included in the family household details for rent assessment purposes for a minimum period.

I will keep the issue of succession under consideration in the context of future housing policy and legislation.

Motor Tax Rates

599. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will reduce the level of motor tax paid for periods of less than one year, so there is not a financial disadvantage for motorists taxing their vehicle for periods of less than one year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8184/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Motor tax is payable on an annual, half-yearly or quarterly basis. The rates applicable for the half-yearly and quarterly options are 55.5% and 28.25% of the annual charge, respectively. These relativities have remained generally consistent since the 1960s. The differential takes account of the extra workload for staffing in motor tax offices and the National Vehicle and Driver File Unit of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, and the resultant administrative costs and printing costs that arise, including the issuing of renewal notices. Each quarterly renewal of motor tax follows the same administrative procedures as the annual renewal process. Consequently, renewing on a quarterly basis generates four times the workload of an annual renewal for the equivalent period.

Local Authority Housing Provision

600. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will devise a policy which will allow inter-transfers for local authority tenants between the various county and city councils; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8191/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The practice of a household receiving social housing support from one housing authority that wishes to transfer to another housing authority area, is currently operated on an informal basis by agreement between housing authorities. The Government's Social Housing Strategy 2020 includes a commitment to examine the possibility of introducing a "housing passport". This measure has the potential to enhance significantly the responsiveness of the social housing system to changing housing needs by allowing households in receipt of, or qualified for, social housing support in one local authority area to transfer to, or be allocated, social housing in another local authority area.

Planning Issues

601. **Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if landowners who are subject to a historic land sterilisation order have a right to have the order partially lifted by means of a review of that order, in view of the fact that the agricultural land in question is protected under designated zoning in a county development plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8196/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I understand that the Question relates to a form of condition which is sometimes attached to a planning permission - also known as a "**sterilisation agreement**" - under section 47 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, between a planning authority and a person

with a legal interest in land for the purpose of restricting or regulating the further development or use of land, permanently or for a specific period. The decision as to whether to grant a planning application, with or without conditions, is a matter for the relevant planning authority or An Bord Pleanála as appropriate and I have no role in relation to the matter. Any decision to remove an inurement clause attached to a grant of permission is similarly a matter for the relevant planning authority.

Water Quality

602. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if funding will be made available for localities (details supplied) currently being provided with inferior quality drinking water due to their geological conditions but which water technically qualifies as acceptable, according to the European Union (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014; if he will address the matter; if consideration will be given to allowing connections to be made with alternative sources from superior geological locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8200/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides that Irish Water can collect charges from each customer in receipt of water services provided by it. The Act also provides that responsibility for the independent economic regulation of the water sector is assigned to the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) and the CER has been given statutory responsibility for protecting the interests of customers. The Water Charges Policy Direction issued to the CER in July 2014 referred to a number of matters relating to domestic water charges, including where the quality of water services provided by Irish Water to its customers is impaired or where services are reduced or restricted. Where customers are subject to a drinking water restriction notice, the affected customers will receive a 100% discount to the water supply portion of their bill for the duration of the restriction. However, as neither hard water nor the substances associated with it, including lime, require the restriction of a supply, discounts would not apply in such cases.

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 further progression of all water services capital projects, whether in County Kerry or elsewhere in Ireland, is now a matter for consideration by Irish Water.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives and has contacted all Oireachtas members to provide details of an improved level of service which it is aiming to provide. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a new dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Questions Nos. 603 and 604 answered with Question No. 566.

Register of Electors Administration

605. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the Dáil Éireann constituency electoral register for the year 2015-16, provided to Deputies, may be provided in the same computer disk format as in previous years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8266/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The requirements on local authorities, as registration authorities, in relation to the publica-

tion and provision of copies of the electoral register are set out in rules 13, 14 and 25 of the Second Schedule to the Electoral Act 1992, as amended. Under rule 25, where any document is required to be published in accordance with the Second Schedule to the Electoral Act 1992, the document may be published in such manner as the local authority consider desirable for the purpose of bringing the contents to the notice of persons interested. When publishing the register of electors, the local authority is also required under rule 13(4) to send a copy to each member of the Dáil in relation to their constituency. The format in which that copy is sent is a matter for the local authority. Under rule 14(3) a local authority may provide to any person a copy of the register in printed form or in electronic format on payment of a fee. The electronic format in which a copy of the register may be provided in such cases is not specified in the Act.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Administration

606. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when the incremental tenant purchase scheme for existing local authority dwellings will be operational; the discounts that will apply for tenants; the way this will relate to household income; the way the discounted related charge on the property will gradually expire over a period; when regulations outlining the new scheme will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8300/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The Government's Social Housing Strategy 2020, published in November 2014, includes a commitment to introduce the new scheme for the tenant purchase of existing local authority houses provided under Part 3 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 by the second quarter of this year. The scheme will operate along the lines of the incremental purchase model. As with the existing incremental purchase sales schemes for local authority apartments and newly built local authority houses, Part 3 of the 2014 Act provides that, where the tenant purchaser complies with the conditions of the sale of the house, the incremental purchase charge on the property will reduce annually by the equivalent of 2% of the value of the property, thus eliminating the entire charge by the end of the charge period. Where the tenant purchaser, with the consent of the housing authority, resells the dwelling within the charge period, he or she must pay to the council the value on the date of resale of the remaining incremental purchase charge on the property.

Full details of the new scheme, including the income related discounts available to tenant purchasers, will be set out in regulations that I will make in advance of its introduction.

Public Service Obligation Levy Application

607. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to reduce the public service obligation levy on charities and sporting organisations due to the increased costs in the public service obligation levy, which directly impact sporting bodies and charities nationwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7848/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The Public Service Obligation (PSO) levy is the support mechanism used for two very important objectives. Firstly, it supports electricity generation which was constructed for security of supply purposes, including peat generation. Secondly, it supports the development of renewable electricity which is important for both security of supply and for reducing carbon emis-

sions from electricity generation. The levy is designed to compensate electricity suppliers for the additional costs they incur by purchasing electricity generated by these producers. It has been in place since 2001. 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 Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) determines the PSO levy which is a charge on all electricity customers without exception. 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.

While I fully understand and appreciate concerns about the cost of the PSO levy to customers, the development of renewable energy in Ireland, supported by the renewable part of the PSO, will enable Ireland to reduce its fossil fuel dependency and vulnerability to rises in fossil fuel prices. 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 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 being driven by lower international gas prices which in turn drives up the PSO levy. However, lower gas and wholesale prices also reduce the wholesale cost of electricity that suppliers pay. In turn, suppliers are in a position to reduce their retail prices and potentially offset the PSO levy increase. Increased competition in the retail electricity market has led to a number of suppliers reducing their retail prices of late and I welcome these developments. The CER is tasked with retail market monitoring and executes this role vigorously to ensure competition leads to the fairest prices for customers.

Broadband Service Provision

608. Deputy Patrick O'Donovan asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to update broadband in the Ballycanew and Ballyoughter area of County Wexford. [7808/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure that every citizen and business, regardless of location, has access to a high quality, high speed broadband service. This will be achieved through a combination of commercial investments and a State led intervention in areas where commercial services will not be provided.

The commercial telecommunications sector is currently investing approximately €2.5 billion in network upgrades. Approximately 1.6 million of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland are expected to have access to commercial high speed broadband services over the next two years. These very significant investments represent a step-change in the quality of broadband services available.

A public consultation on a national high speed coverage map 2016 which was launched last November, closed on the 12th February. 27 submissions have been received to date and will be assessed over the coming weeks in terms of the overall intervention strategy. The map continues to be available at www.broadband.gov.ie. The areas marked BLUE represent those areas that will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016. The AMBER areas show the target areas for the State intervention and includes Ballycanew and Balloughter, Co. Wexford.

The map allows all members of the public, be they business or residential, to see whether their premises or home will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016 or whether they will be included in the Government's proposed intervention. It also provides detailed information on over 50,000 townlands throughout the entire country including County Wexford.

It is anticipated that speeds of at least 30Mbps will be also delivered through the Government's intervention and the network will be designed to cater for future increased demand from consumers and business.

In tandem with the mapping consultation, intensive design and planning work is underway in my Department to produce a detailed intervention strategy. The strategy will address a range of issues in relation to the intervention including the optimum procurement model, ownership model for the infrastructure and likely market impact.

Following a public consultation process on the draft Intervention Strategy during next summer, I hope to move to formal procurement phase towards the end of this year in order to select a preferred bidder or bidders.

The Department will design a tender in a way that maximises efficiencies and keeps the cost of the network build as low as possible. I anticipate that the first homes and businesses will be connected in 2016 and connections will continue thereafter, with the intention of having all premises connected within a 5 year period. This complex and ambitious project is a key priority for Government. It aims to conclusively address current connectivity challenges in Ireland.

Fisheries Protection

609. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide an update on plans to tackle the infestation of Asian clam on the River Shannon at Lanesboro in County Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7838/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh): I am advised that following the initial identification, by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) of the Asian Clam (*Corbicula Fluminea*) in the 'hot water' stretch and 'cut' areas of Lough Ree at Lanesborough, early action was taken to close the fishery and erect public warning signs to reduce the threat of further spread. I visited the site at the initial stages and met with local representatives and community groups. The fishery reopened, with strict biosecurity conditions, very shortly after the outbreak. The design and build of a disinfection station prototype has been completed and four units, funded by ESB have been installed on site.

While IFI has no statutory remit as regards Alien Invasive Species, they are coordinating the response actions of a range of State bodies. Following these initial steps, IFI also conducted a comprehensive scientific survey to provide critical information on the nature and extent of the infestation.

Since it discovered the outbreak IFI has been facilitating and chairing meetings of relevant Agencies, including Waterways Ireland, the ESB, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Bord Na Mona and Longford and Roscommon County Councils. The cross agency group has agreed a plan to carry out a trial dredge operation on the "hot water" stretch. This trial will inform on the feasibility and success rate of the method(s) to be used in any larger scale operation. Consultation with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government is also underway as regards disposal.

I am advised that the trial dredge will commence once water levels facilitate an operation which is safe for personnel and which takes precaution against further spread. I am advised that equipment to carry out the trial is already on site while the appropriate weather window and water level is awaited. IFI, on behalf of the Agency Group, has kept local stakeholders advised of developments as they occur and will provide further updates closer to the commencement of the trial operation.

However, it is important to understand that Asian Clam, like many other aquatic invasive species, is extremely pervasive in the environment, and once in a water body it is likely that operations will be focused on managing the infestation rather than eradication.

Fishing Industry

610. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the income for 2014 for the State-owned fisheries on the River Moy at the Ridgepool Cathedral beat and the Spring Wells beat; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8151/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh): I am advised by Inland Fisheries Ireland that the permit income from the Ridgepool, Cathedral beat and the Spring Wells beat on the river Moy for the 2014 season amounted to €96,403.57. Permit income contributes to the effective management by IFI of the Moy Fishery.

Fish Farming

611. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the count on the salmon-run returns on the boxes in the Ballina fisheries in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8152/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh): I am advised that the primary index of salmon abundance on the Moy is the comprehensive rod catch statistics returned annually. The refurbished weir in Ballina includes three fish counters: a LOGIE resistivity counter is installed in box 1 and two VAKI infra-red fish counters have been installed in boxes 2 & 3. These counters operated in the months from April to September 2014.

The counters primarily provide very good indicative data on the timing (and to a lesser extent quantum) of salmon runs. The count on the salmon run returns on the boxes in the Ballina Fisheries in 2014 was 2056. This figure is the net upstream count representing the gross upstream count, less the gross downstream count.

During summer 2014 an additional LOGIE resistivity fish counter was installed in box 7 and, following testing and calibration, is expected to be operational during 2015. The boxes are numbered from the east or Ardnaree bank.

Broadband Service Provision

612. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when an area (details supplied) in County Tipperary will be included for high-speed

broadband; the reason for the delay in same; if 10 Mbps will be available under the national broadband plan for this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8203/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure that every citizen and business, regardless of location, has access to a high quality, high speed broadband service. This will be achieved through a combination of commercial investments and a State led intervention in areas where commercial services will not be provided.

The commercial telecommunications sector is currently investing approximately €2.5 billion in network upgrades. Approximately 1.6 million of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland are expected to have access to commercial high speed broadband services over the next two years. These very significant investments represent a step-change in the quality of broadband services available.

A public consultation on a national high speed coverage map 2016 which was launched last November, closed on the 12th February. 27 submissions have been received to date and will be assessed over the coming weeks in terms of the overall intervention strategy. The map continues to be available at www.broadband.gov.ie. The areas marked BLUE represent those areas that will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016. The AMBER areas show the target areas for the State intervention and includes Moneygall, Co. Offaly.

The map allows all members of the public, be they business or residential, to see whether their premises or home will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016 or whether they will be included in the Government's proposed intervention. It also provides detailed information on over 50,000 townlands throughout the entire country including Counties Offaly and Tipperary.

It is anticipated that speeds of at least 30Mbps will be also delivered through the Government's intervention and the network will be designed to cater for future increased demand from consumers and business.

In tandem with the mapping consultation, intensive design and planning work is underway in my Department to produce a detailed intervention strategy. The strategy will address a range of issues in relation to the intervention including the optimum procurement model, ownership model for the infrastructure and likely market impact.

Following a public consultation process on the draft Intervention Strategy during next summer, I hope to move to formal procurement phase towards the end of this year in order to select a preferred bidder or bidders.

The Department will design a tender in a way that maximises efficiencies and keeps the cost of the network build as low as possible. I anticipate that the first homes and businesses will be connected in 2016 and connections will continue thereafter, with the intention of having all premises connected within a 5 year period. This complex and ambitious project is a key priority for Government. It aims to conclusively address current connectivity challenges in Ireland.

Broadband Service Provision

613. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will consider the matters raised in correspondence by a person (details supplied) in County Cork regarding the provision of broadband services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8307/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White):

The provision of telecommunication services, including broadband, are a matter in the first instance, for the many commercial players who operate in the Irish market. Therefore, decisions on when and where to locate investment are always taken on commercial grounds, having regard to the likely return on investment. As Eircom is a private company, I have no role in relation to directing them to invest in any particular project. The State can only intervene in this market in cases of clear market failure.

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure that every citizen and business, regardless of location, has access to a high quality, high speed broadband service. This will be achieved through a combination of commercial investments and a State led intervention in areas where commercial services will not be provided.

The commercial telecommunications sector is currently investing approximately €2.5 billion in network upgrades. Approximately 1.6 million of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland are expected to have access to commercial high speed broadband services over the next two years. These very significant investments represent a step-change in the quality of broadband services available.

A public consultation on a national high speed coverage map 2016 which was launched last November, closed on the 12th February. 27 submissions have been received to date and will be assessed over the coming weeks in terms of the overall intervention strategy. The map continues to be available at www.broadband.gov.ie. The areas marked BLUE represent those areas that will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016. The AMBER area shows the target areas for the State intervention and includes Currabinny, County Cork.

The map allows all members of the public, be they business or residential, to see whether their premises or home will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016 or whether they will be included in the Government's proposed intervention. It also provides detailed information on over 50,000 townlands throughout the entire country including County Cork.

It is anticipated that speeds of at least 30Mbps will be also delivered through the Government's intervention and the network will be designed to cater for future increased demand from consumers and business.

In tandem with the mapping consultation, intensive design and planning work is underway in my Department to produce a detailed intervention strategy. The strategy will address a range of issues in relation to the intervention including the optimum procurement model, ownership model for the infrastructure and likely market impact.

Following a public consultation process on the draft Intervention Strategy during next summer, I hope to move to formal procurement phase towards the end of this year in order to select a preferred bidder or bidders.

The Department will design a tender in a way that maximises efficiencies and keeps the cost of the network build as low as possible. I anticipate that the first homes and businesses will be connected in 2016 and connections will continue thereafter, with the intention of having all premises connected within a 5 year period.

This complex and ambitious project is a key priority for Government. It aims to conclusively address current connectivity challenges in Ireland.

Road Safety Strategy

614. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will examine the speed limits in residential estates, schools, places of assembly for example cinemas, theatres, community centres and so on, around the country with a view to reducing the speed limits in these areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7857/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In the examples cited by the Deputy, local authorities already have the necessary powers to provide for a 30 km/h Special Speed Limit if they deem such a limit to be appropriate and necessary. Special speed limits may also include periodic speed limits which can be designed to apply and operate at specified periods, for example when children are arriving at and leaving a school.

To assist local authorities in the application of Special Speed limits, my Department is currently finalising an update to the Guidelines on Special Speed Limits and will be available to all local authorities early next month.

I have also made €2 million available in the current year to assist local authorities with the purchase of signs and, where required, with traffic calming measures where they wish to reduce speed limits in housing areas. I have also committed to providing for a lower special speed limit of 20km/h limit for use in certain residential areas. This will be done in the Road Traffic Bill 2015. It is appropriate to allow local authorities the freedom to decide where lower speed limits should apply.

Public Transport Provision

615. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures in place to ensure that private bus operators who have been found to use illegal fuel are disqualified from tendering for Coras Iompar Éireann bus routes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7669/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The competitive tendering process mentioned is a statutory function of the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Driver Safety

616. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider relaxing the regime with regard to L-plate drivers, to allow them to travel unaccompanied, within a 20 km radius of their residence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7678/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The purpose of the licensing system is to promote safety through ensuring that people licenced to drive on our roads are qualified to do so. Learners, by definition, are not yet qualified. The presence of an accompanying driver is therefore essential.

Learner permits are not driving licences. They are permits allowing the holder to drive unlicensed on public roads while they are learning, and subject to certain conditions. The presence of an accompanying driver is perhaps the most important of these conditions. In fact,

when a learner permit holder drives without an accompanying driver, they are not complying with the conditions of the learner permit and therefore not covered by it. I appreciate that many people, particularly in rural areas, feel that this is harsh. However, it is important for people to understand that a learner permit is not meant to be a substitute for an actual licence, and holders should not expect to be able to drive freely in the same manner as licence holders.

Road Network

617. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is satisfied that motorists are catered for adequately on the M8 motorway connection between Dublin and Cork, with no online services and rest facilities; his plans to install online services on this route, in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7702/15]

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, including service areas, is a matter for the National Roads Authority under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. In particular, Section 54 of the Roads Act 1993 specifically provides for the National Roads Authority or a local authority to provide and/or operate service areas.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects, such as motorway service areas is a matter in the first instance for the NRA in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy’s questions to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don’t receive a reply within 10 working days.

Motor Tax Yield

618. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the portion of the proceeds received from motor tax in 2015 that will go towards repairing roads and footpaths. [7729/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department receives a contribution from the Local Government Fund, which is derived from Motor Tax receipts, as an Appropriation in Aid every year. This Aid partially funds the expenditure programmes for Roads and Public Transport with the balance funded directly from the Exchequer. In 2015, the LGF contribution to my Vote is estimated to be €376.4m, which will part fund expenditure programmes for Roads (at €728.5m), including for repairing roads and footpaths, and for Public Transport (at €271m).

Haulage Industry Regulation

619. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the action the Road Safety Authority has taken to investigate possible breaches of regulation 10 of the European Communities (Road Transport) (Organisation of Working Time of Persons Performing Mobile Road Transport Activities) Regulations 2012 (SI No. 36/2012) by a company (details supplied), which may constitute a serious risk to road safety, for both hauliers and other road users, in view of the levels of fatigue which drivers experience when forced to work in condi-

tions, such as are currently in place by the company. [7732/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not be received within 10 days.

Harbour Authorities Membership

620. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a schedule of the current directors of Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company, to include the date of their first appointment to the company, amount of terms served, and the date their current directorship expires; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7865/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A complete list of all State boards including the current directors of Dun Laoghaire Harbour Company is available on <http://membership.stateboards.ie/http://membership.stateboards.ie/>.

The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the current directors serving on the board of Dun Laoghaire Harbour Company is set out in the following table.

Eithne Scott-Lennon (Chair)	3/3/1997	23/09/2018	5
Gerry Dunne (CEO)	N/A Ex-Officio	N/A Ex-Officio	N/A Ex-Officio
Name	Date First Ap- pointed	Expiry date of cur- rent appointment	Number of Terms of Office served
James Jordan	12/02/2014	11/02/2019	1
Mark Finan	12/02/2014	11/02/2019	1
Don McManus	5/2/2004	01/07/2018	3
Justin McKenna	12/02/2014	11/02/2018	1
Pam Kearney	05/12/2012	04/12/2017	1
Peter Brennan	05/12/2012	04/12/2016	1

Harbour Authorities Membership

621. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will confirm that no chief executive on any State harbour company is in receipt of bonuses or directors' fees for attending their respective companies' board meetings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7866/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In accordance with Government policy, no bonus payments are being made to any Chief Executive of any of the State harbour companies.

In accordance with the One Person One Salary direction issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in late 2011, payment of Board Fees to public sector employees with a contractual obligation in place, with certain exceptions, can be paid but should be stopped at the earliest legally acceptable opportunity (normally on expiry of the appointment).

Details of directors fees paid to Chief Executives are available in the Annual Reports and Accounts of the individual harbour companies.

Harbour Authorities

622. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will confirm that all moneys agreed to be repaid by a person (details supplied), a former director of Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company, back to the company in relation to expenses, the subject of previous parliamentary questions, have been repaid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7867/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I have stated previously, the payment of expenses to Directors is a matter for the Company in accordance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. As the matter is currently subject to legal proceedings by the Company, I am not in a position to comment any further on this matter at present.

Driver Licences

623. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of cases of driving licence fraud that the National Driver Licence Service has identified since October 2013; if any cases were identified, due to the requirement of drivers to visit the offices of the service, prior to issuing a licence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7910/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The operation of the National Driver Licensing Service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Tourism Industry

624. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide, in tabular form, by county, the amount of Fáilte Ireland capital grant paid over the past five years. [7917/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The matter raised is an operational one for Fáilte Ireland. I have, therefore, referred the Deputy's Question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Fáilte Ireland Expenditure

625. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide in tabular form, by festival, the amount of Fáilte Ireland grant paid to arts festivals over the past five years. [7918/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The provision of festival funding grants is decided on an annual basis by Fáilte Ireland, based on applications received. It is a competitive grant process, and funding is awarded to those applicant events and festivals that best meet the advertised criteria for the relevant programme, including the expected impact on tourism.

The award of grants is an operational matter for the Board and management of Fáilte Ireland. Therefore I have referred the Deputy's Question to Fáilte Ireland for further information and direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Road Traffic Legislation

626. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to legislate to address the regulation of rickshaws in Dublin and other urban tourist centres. [7950/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Currently, rickshaws are not specifically defined in law, nor is there any legislation to regulate carriage of passengers by these vehicles. Rickshaws fall under the category of pedal cycles for legal purposes. If we were to consider creating a separate class of vehicle licence to cover rickshaws, the primary reason would be to promote safety. While I am open to considering this, neither An Garda Síochána nor the Road Safety Authority, the two bodies most involved in road safety issues, has raised any concerns with my Department about the safety aspect of rickshaws.

Dublin City Council has written to me regarding the need to regulate rickshaws from a number of perspectives but primarily health and safety. However its legal advisors have advised that the type and extent of regulation proposed would appear to go beyond what a local authority would usually wish to regulate by bye-laws under the Local Government Act 2001. The Council sought that provision be made through primary legislation to regulate the operation of rickshaws.

As it is a requirement that a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) be prepared in respect of any proposal to Government seeking permission to regulate through primary legislation and given that rickshaws are a local matter, I have responded to the Council that it would be appropriate that the Council prepare a RIA. The purpose of the RIA is to establish more clearly the issues that need to be addressed and the kind of regulatory initiative that is most appropriate to deal with those issues. The RIA would include, amongst other things, an assessment of the measures that could be adopted within the existing bye-law making powers of local authorities and also help determine whether any proposal for primary legislation should be dealt with as a matter of road traffic legislation or local government legislation.

Railway Stations Upgrade

627. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if European funding is available for the railway system, for example, the re-opening of Dunleer railway station in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7952/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): EU co-funding is potentially available for qualifying rail projects under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) 2014-2020. The vast bulk of the CEF funding is provided for projects on the Trans European Network (TEN-T) Core Network, which on the island of Ireland comprises the Cork-Dublin-Belfast rail line and the freight only line to Shannon-Foynes Port.

All TEN-T projects put forward under CEF must be supported by the relevant Member State, demonstrate that it will contribute to developing the Core European rail network and have a strong business case including a positive Cost Benefit Analysis. In addition there must be a

committed national funding source for the balance of funding which could be as high as 90%.

Under the current capital plan the focus of Exchequer funding available for heavy rail is on protecting existing assets and maintaining safety standards. There is no Exchequer funding available for the re-opening of train stations such as Dunleer. Moreover CIE is in a difficult financial position and it has no resources of its own available to fund new stations.

If additional funds become available under the next capital plan currently under consideration, there will be many competing projects from all transport modes in all regions. Any additional funds will be prioritised for projects for which there is a clear need, which are affordable, have a sound business case and add value to existing infrastructure. The availability of non-Exchequer funding sources including under TEN-T will also be taken into account in prioritising projects.

Public Transport

628. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the public transport projects that received European Union funding in the years 2013 and 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7983/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Under the Trans European Network Transport (TEN-T) 2007-2013 programme funding has been provided for two eligible heavy rail projects since 2013.

A total of €724,000 was received in 2013 and 2014 in EU co-funding in respect of the City Centre Re-signalling project. Also under that programme €620,500 was provided this year towards the planning and design of a new rail Central Traffic Control Centre.

Under the INTERREG IV 2007-2013 programme a total of €6.1m has been awarded towards the Refurbishment of the Drogheda Viaduct project. €1.47m of this co-funding was received last year with the remainder expected to be drawn down this year.

My Department will keep under review the opportunities for EU co-funding under the new TEN-T/CEF and INTERREG V 2014-2020 programmes.

Air Traffic Control Services

629. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the alleged use of Irish controlled airspace by two Russian bomber planes on 28 January 2015; if he has spoken to the Russian authorities regarding the incident; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7104/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In line with International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) rules, it is normal practice for the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) to be informed by the relevant State of any military flights operating in Irish controlled airspace. Ensuring the application of this practice is an important consideration and as this did not occur in this particular instance my Department has raised the issue with ICAO and outlined concerns arising. It is emphasised that the IAA coordinated closely with its UK counterparts at all stages during the incident so as to avoid a risk to any civil aircraft during the incident. Although there was no such risk on this occasion, such non-notified and non-controlled flight activity is not acceptable.

I have collaborated closely with other members of the Government in relation to this incident and on the development of an agreed response. As part of that agreed response, and under the instruction of my colleague, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, a senior official from that Department has met with the Russian Ambassador. The official conveyed the serious concerns of the Government about the unacceptable safety risk which could be posed by non-notified and non-controlled flight activity. The Ambassador undertook to bring the concerns expressed to the attention of his authorities in Moscow.

Road Improvement Schemes

630. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the poor state of repair of Fintra bridge in Killybegs, County Donegal; if he will provide funding in order that improvements to the bridge can be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8213/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads (including bridges) 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.

I announced the 2015 regional and local road allocations on 3rd February, of which €17.7m was allocated to Co. Donegal. A total of 8 bridges in Donegal received allocations for bridge rehabilitation works in 2015 however Fintra Bridge was not among the applications received by my Department.

Funding for 2015 has now been allocated but it is open to the Council to use monies from its Discretionary Grant allocation or its own resources towards the remedial works. It is also important to reiterate that the role of Exchequer grants for regional and local roads is to supplement Councils in their own resources spending in this area.

Tourism Project Funding

631. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the criteria used for the allocation of capital funding for tourism projects; and if he will provide, in tabular form, the allocation of funding, by county, in the years 2010 to 2014, inclusive. [8220/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The matter raised is an operational one for Fáilte Ireland. I have, therefore, referred the Deputy's Question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Air Navigation Orders

632. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a breakdown of the exemptions granted under section 6 (weapons and munitions designed for use in warfare), and section 7 (dangerous goods) of the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order in each of the years between 2011 and 2014, in relation to civilian aircraft landing at Shannon Airport. [8246/15]

633. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a breakdown of the companies that were granted exemptions under section 6 (weapons and munitions designed for use in warfare), and section 7 (dangerous goods) of the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order, for each of the years 2011 to 2014, inclusive, in relation to civilian aircraft landing at Shannon Airport. [8247/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 632 and 633 together.

The information sought regarding munitions exemptions granted and airlines that they were granted to is as follows:

Airline	2011	2012	2013	2014
Omni Air International	938	545	355	260
Delta Air Lines	5	5	-	4
Atlas Air, Inc.	-	4	-	6
North American Airlines	71	6	3	2
National Airlines	-	-	-	13
Antonov Company	1	-	-	-
Lynden Air Cargo	2	-	-	-
Volga Dnepr Airlines	-	1	-	1
Total	1017	561	358	286

Dangerous goods exemptions that are not munitions of war are granted by the Irish Aviation Authority. I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the IAA for direct reply. If you do not receive a response within the next 10 working days please contact my Office.

Air Navigation Orders

634. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of occasions that either he, or an authorised person, entered and inspected an aircraft at Shannon Airport, for the purpose of ensuring that the flight was not in breach of Articles 6 and 7 of the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order, as provided for in the order. [8248/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Responsibility for the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973, as amended, is divided between my Department and the Irish Aviation Authority. My Department is responsible for issuing exemptions from Article 6 of the Order regarding munitions of war and the IAA is responsible for issuing exemptions from Article 7 regarding dangerous goods.

Under the Order the carriage of munitions of war on board Irish registered aircraft or at Irish airports or in Irish airspace is prohibited without an exemption from my Department.

I have no reason to believe the provisions of the Order are not being complied with by airlines. My understanding is that there have not been inspections carried out by authorised officers of my Department in relation to the carriage of munitions of war in recent years.

In relation to the carriage of dangerous goods in accordance with Article 7, I have forwarded

the Deputy's question to the IAA for direct reply. If you do not receive a response within the next 10 working days please contact my Office.

Severe Weather Events Response

635. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a breakdown of the allocation of funding of €16.2 million, for the repair of damage caused by severe weather, to each local authority, resulting from the damage in the period from December 2013 to January 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8258/15]

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. Based on projected expenditure by Councils €14.1 million was included in my Department's budget in 2014 to cover expenditure related to severe weather and a provision of €2.1 was carried forward to 2015.

Actual expenditure by local authorities in 2014 to repair roads damaged as a result of the severe weather during the period 16 December 2013 - 6 January was as follows.

Local Authority	Paid 2014
Cork City Council	25,500
Cork County Council	710,292
Clare County Council	1,612,557
Carlow County Council	16,000
Dublin City Council	100,000
Donegal County Council	115,892
Galway City Council	44,500
Galway County Council	1,442,405
Kerry County Council	575,291
Limerick County Council	12,332
Longford County Council	150,464
Louth County Council	75,000
Leitrim County Council	245,250
Laois County Council	211,690
Meath County Council	2,800
Mayo County Council	1,225,890
Sligo County Council	153,585
North Tipperary County Council	547,489
South Tipperary County Council	772,454
Waterford County Council	3,878,000
Wexford County Council	720,033
Total:	12,637,424

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.

Commemorative Events

636. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if invitations are being extended to relatives of those who fought in the 1916 Easter Rising for the Government's celebratory events; the way relatives can become involved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7679/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I, together with my Government colleagues, am committed to ensuring that the commemorations to mark the centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising will be inclusive, appropriate and respectful. The relatives of those who fought and those who died during the Rising will play a key role in the *Ireland 2016* programme and I am actively engaging with them to ensure that will have a central involvement in a number of key State events. I have met with a number of relatives, including representatives of relatives' groups and individual relatives, to highlight the important role that they will have in the plans to commemorate the centenary of the events of Easter 1916.

I have established a 2016 Project Office within my Department, tasked with co-ordinating all activities relating to the commemoration of 1916. The relevant officials are now liaising with the Department of Defence in relation to matters regarding relatives, including the compilation of lists in this regard for the official events that are to be organised to commemorate the centenary of 1916. The Project Office may be contacted at 2016projectoffice@ahg.gov.ie.

I am also working with the Oireachtas All-Party Consultation Group on Commemorations, the Expert Advisory Group and a wide range of stakeholders to seek to ensure that the events of Easter 2016 are a special and poignant tribute to all those involved.

Departmental Funding

637. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when her Department will issue payment for a replacement crane on a boat (details supplied); the reason for the long delay in issuing this payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7829/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department has not approved any payment in this case. This decision was communicated to the claimant in 2009 and again in 2013, following a review of the case.

Departmental Funding

638. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the funding available to restore thatched cottages; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7953/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My De-

partment does not administer a funding scheme specifically for thatched structures. However, the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government administers a grant scheme for the renewal or repair of thatched roofs of owner occupied houses. I refer the Deputy to that Department for details of eligibility criteria for that scheme.

A number of State financial supports provide for the conservation and preservation of heritage structures in general. On 9 February last, 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, which are protected under the Planning and Development Acts 2000, as amended, and are deemed to be at significant risk of deterioration. This Fund, which will be administered through the local authorities, encourages the regeneration and reuse of heritage properties and helps to secure the preservation of protected structures, which might otherwise be lost. The Fund is open to two applications per local authority, of which only one application may be in respect of a publicly-owned building. The amount of funding available per project will be subject to a minimum level of €15,000 and a maximum level of €60,000. Final details of projects funded will be made available once all applications are received by the local authorities and assessed by my Department. Since 2011, over 100 structures have been safeguarded for the future as a result of the Structures at Risk Fund.

The Heritage Council, which my Department also funds, is administering a community-based heritage grants scheme for the protection and preservation of the built heritage. I understand that applications are open until 20 March 2015 for the scheme. The Heritage Council's website is www.heritagecouncil.ie.

In addition, as part of an Architectural Advice Series, my Department plans to publish an advice book on thatching this year, which will include practical advice and guidance on aspects of conserving and restoring thatched structures.

Special Protection Areas Designation

639. **Deputy Áine Collins** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she has sought the advice of the Attorney General on the constitutionality of her actions to comply with hen harrier designation, in view of the fact that as a result of her designation these farms have become worthless, as there is an opinion that without proper compensation, there is a breach of their constitutional rights to private property. [7987/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Ireland, like all EU Member States, is bound by the requirements of the Birds and Habitats Directives. This is a legal obligation and a number of EU Member States, including Ireland, have been subject to adverse judgements of the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) in relation to failures to fully comply with the Directives.

The Hen Harrier was a key issue in the judgment of the CJEU in 2007 against Ireland in the "Birds Case" for failure to provide adequate protection for wild birds. In that context, Ireland designated six Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for the conservation of the Hen Harrier in 2007. This case remains open, with the continuing possibility of reputational damage and fines being imposed on Ireland if it is not seen to be in compliance with the judgment.

The designation of land under the Directives has been tested in the Irish courts on a number of occasions. While the nomination of a site for designation as an SPA or Special Area of Conservation (SAC) may have an impact on the manner in which certain lands may be farmed, the designation does not mean that the lands are subject to blanket restrictions, although they must

be managed appropriately.

There is significant funding available via the Basic Payment Scheme and agri environment schemes (operated by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) to assist farmers in meeting the requirements of the Birds and Habitats Directives. Participation in the Basic Payment scheme requires farmers to abide by the statutory requirements relating to Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation. Furthermore, my colleague the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine announced this week that he was extending GLAS+ to all farms identified as habitats of endangered birds, including the hen harrier. This means that all such farmers will be able receive up to €7,000 a year, if the area they have to manage is large enough.

My Department, in partnership with other stakeholders, is working on a Threat Response Plan, which is intended to improve the prospects for the Hen Harrier, while bringing clarity to wider issues of concern for landowners and farmers. It is intended to examine all issues at hand, including forestry consents, planning permissions for wind farms and financial supports for farmers, with a view to determining the appropriate course of further action. The Threat Response Plan will be key in ensuring the long-term conservation of the Hen Harrier.

EU Programmes

640. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to the fact that her Department and an agency under its aegis, (details supplied), have recently been forced to abandon involvement in a major European online collections project, resulting in significant financial and reputational loss, and the necessity to return funds drawn down; if she has ordered an investigation into the reasons for the failure of this project; her views that it should be referred to the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8186/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Whilst my Department provides funding to the agency referred to by the Deputy, the board and executive of that body are responsible for all operational matters and I have no direct function in that regard.

My Department has had no direct involvement in the project referred to. However, my Department has been advised by the body in question that it has decided to withdraw from an EU-funded programme to provide content for an EU web-based project. As the body is not participating further in the programme, funding already allocated will be repaid to the extent required. The body has indicated its view that the work which it carried out on the project to date will be of benefit to it and that no financial or reputational damage will result.

National Monuments

641. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the contact her Department has had with Kildare County Council in relation to works required at a location classed as a national monument (details supplied) in County Kildare; if her Department will support these works; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8217/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In response to notice given to my Department under the National Monuments Acts, Kildare County Council was informed on 25 August 2014 that, apart from a small number of sites that did not

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include the specific location referred to by the Deputy, there was no objection to the Council's proposals to carry out a series of works to graveyards around the county.