

## **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 7, inclusive, answered orally.*

### **National Broadband Plan Expenditure**

8. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if there is a projected cost to the Exchequer for the roll-out of fibre broadband under the national broadband plan; and a projection of the number of jobs that could potentially be created. [10503/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The proposed State intervention under the National Broadband Plan represents a very significant capital investment project for the State. The Minister has undertaken to complete a detailed intervention strategy that will be submitted to Government in mid 2015. This process is complex and will include close examination of issues such as:

- The appropriate ownership model for the infrastructure;
- Whether there will be a single contractor or multiple contractors to build the infrastructure;
- The potential cost of the intervention;
- Funding options;
- The appropriate duration of the contract; and
- How the service quality is to be measured and assured.

Because a very competitive procurement process is anticipated, it would be neither advisable nor appropriate to speculate about potential costs at this stage and it is preferable to allow the market players bid what they deem an appropriate price, taking account of the Government's decisions on the key issues, such as those I have already outlined.

There are a number of different perspectives in relation to the Deputy's reference to job creation. There will obviously be jobs created during the construction and deployment of a new high-speed network. The precise numbers will be very much a matter for the successful bidder or bidders to determine, particularly as it is very likely that the contract with the State will contain clear deadlines for the completion of this work.

More importantly, the delivery of high quality reliable broadband to every premises in Ire-

land will open up new job opportunities right across the economy. The digital economy currently represents 5% of GDP and is one of the fastest growing sectors in the economy. Irish consumers spend around €700,000 per hour, 24 hours a day online and the digital industry supports almost 100,000 direct and indirect jobs

The importance of focusing on digital and its potential to contribute to economic growth and job creation cannot be under-estimated. In a fully functioning digitally enabled economy, research from McKinsey suggests that for every job displaced by digital, 1.6 additional jobs will be created. Research also shows that companies which have a meaningful online trading presence grow twice as fast, export twice as much and employ twice as many people. Ensuring that all businesses have access to reliable broadband is therefore important. It will also allow the opportunity for new digital enterprises to emerge.

In delivering a reliable high speed network the Government aims to catalyse employment opportunities, particularly in rural areas, which heretofore may have struggled to create and sustain employment.

### **Energy Policy**

9. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will report on the consultation process with interested parties on the new energy policy document that is due to be published this summer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10514/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** An extensive consultation process was undertaken on the Green Paper on Energy Policy in Ireland following the publication of the Paper on 12 May 2014. This process included:

- a public written consultation process where members of the public had ten weeks in which to lodge their submissions;
- six seminars, one on each of the policy priority areas identified for consideration in the Green Paper;
- a separate seminar on the broad topic of energy costs for businesses; and
- four regional seminars.

Over 1,200 submissions were received as part of the written consultation process.

The six “priority” seminars and the “costs” seminar were organised by the Department and held in Dublin. The four regional seminars were organised by Irish Rural Link on behalf of the Department to ensure, insofar as was possible, that local, rural and regional interests were represented and provided with an opportunity to express their views on all aspects of Irish energy policy.

The purpose of the public consultation and stakeholder engagement events was to invite observations and suggestions from interested parties, to tease out the most important points highlighted, to express any other views, whether in writing or orally, and to identify policy points for consideration.

The next stage, now underway, involves a thorough analysis of the issues raised to distil the main themes into the policy paper. In this regard, the Minister will be advised by the expert members of the Energy Policy Advisory Group, which he established in September 2014. The

members of the group are Professor John FitzGerald, formerly of the Economic and Social Research Institute, Ms. Helen Donoghue, a member of the Institute of International and European Affairs, and formerly of the European Commission, and Dr. Brian Motherway, CEO of the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland. The forthcoming policy paper will, when published in September 2015, set a clear policy framework out to 2030.

### **Renewable Energy Generation**

10. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to expand the use of renewable energy. [10511/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The overarching objective of the Government's energy policy is to ensure secure and sustainable supplies of competitively priced energy to all consumers. The 2009 EU Renewable Energy Directive set Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy requirements from renewable sources by 2020, to be achieved through 40% renewables in electricity, 12% in heat and 10% in transport. In 2013, 7.8% of Ireland's overall energy requirement was met by renewable energy.

Transitioning to greater use of renewable energy is important for sustainability. Using our indigenous resources is also important given that we currently import 89% of our total energy use including all of our oil, and over 95% of our gas. In 2013 we spent approximately €6.7 billion on imported energy. Keeping some of that €6.7 billion in our own economy would facilitate investment, growth and jobs, and enhance our balance of payments.

There are a range of policies in place to incentivise the increased use of renewable energy. The REFIT schemes underpin the development of a range of renewable electricity technologies, including hydro, biomass combustion, biomass combined heat and power, landfill gas and onshore wind. To date, wind energy has been the most cost effective renewable technology in the Irish electricity market, contributing most towards the achievement of the 2020 target.

Part L of the Building Regulations supports the uptake of renewable heat and the recently published Draft Bioenergy Plan recommends the introduction from 2016 of a Renewable Heat Incentive for larger heat users to change to heating solutions that produce heat from renewable sources. The Biofuels Obligation Scheme and grant support for the purchase of electric vehicles underpin the deployment of renewable energy in the transport sector.

Looking beyond 2020, the October 2014 European Council endorsed a binding EU target of at least 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in the EU by 2030 compared to 1990. In addition, an EU target of at least 27% is set for the share of renewable energy consumed in the EU in 2030, and an indicative target at EU level of at least 27% is set for improving energy efficiency in 2030 compared to projections of future energy consumption.

Ireland intends to make a cost-effective, achievable and fair contribution to these high level EU goals. The Department is overseeing detailed and rigorous energy system and economic modelling to identify the contribution which is appropriate for Ireland, taking account of our specific economic circumstances. This analysis will address issues such as the quantum of additional renewable electricity we should seek to achieve by 2030, the technologies that should be supported in this regard, and the level at which any future supports should be set.

*Questions Nos. 11 to 13, inclusive, answered orally.*

## National Broadband Plan Implementation

14. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to provide priority to those areas which have had little or no broadband service to date in seeking tenders to implement the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10232/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The National Broadband Plan aims to ensure that every citizen and business, regardless of location, has access to a high quality, high speed broadband service. This will be achieved through a combination of commercial investments and a State led intervention in areas where commercial services will not be provided.

The commercial telecommunications sector is currently investing approximately €2.5 billion in network upgrades and enhanced services with approximately 1.6 million of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland 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.

Last November I published a national high speed coverage map for 2016. This map is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). The areas marked BLUE represent those areas that will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016. The AMBER areas show the target areas for the State intervention. The map allows all members of the public, be they business or residential, to see whether their premises/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.

A public consultation on the map, which commenced in November, closed on the 12th February last. 29 submissions have been received to date and will be assessed over the coming weeks. This will help inform the key decisions that require to be taken in order to finalise the comprehensive Intervention Strategy which the Minister intends publishing for consultation in July next.

The strategy will address a range of important issues in relation to the intervention including the optimum procurement model, ownership and governance options, funding issues and levels of service for end-users. Part of the analysis being undertaken involves consideration of identifying and prioritising strategic connection points such as enterprise parks, schools, and other points of economic or social activity within rural communities.

The proposed Intervention will also be subject to State Aid clearance from the European Commission.

Following the public consultation this summer, a detailed procurement process, in line with EU and Irish procurement rules, will be undertaken in order to select a preferred bidder or bidders. The Department will design the 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.

## An Mol Digiteach

15. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** den Aire Cumarsáide, Fuinnimh agus Acmhainní Nádúrtha cé na hathruithe a thiocfaidh ar an Mol Digiteach agus é á bhogadh faoi réim Chomhairle Cathrach Bhaile Átha Cliath. [10419/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** D'fhógair an tAire ar 16 Eanáir 2015, d'fhonn plean an Rialtais i gcomhair cuíchóiriú Gníomhaireachtaí Stáit a thabhairt chun cinn, go mbunófar an Ghníomhaireacht Forbartha don Mhol Digiteach mar chomhlacht neamhspleách faoi Chomhairle Cathrach Bhaile Átha Cliath.

Is é an fhís do chomhlacht nua an Mhoil Dhigitigh faoi Chomhairle Cathrach Bhaile Átha Cliath go dtiocfaidh fás leanúnach ar ionad beoga gníomhaíochta fiontraíochta digití i gceantar Bhaile Átha Cliath 8, ag a mbeidh tacaíocht ó mheascán d'fhorbairtí de chuid na hearnála poiblí agus príobháidí araon a rachaidh i ngleic leis an anchaoi leanúnach shuntasach ar a champas, a thacóidh le cruthú post agus ar toradh dó athghiniúint shuntasach cheantar na Saoirsí.

Mar chomhlacht neamhspleách, coinneoidh an Mol Digiteach a fhócas digiteach tráchtála agus an fhéiniúlacht agus brandáil ar gné thábhachtach í den fhorbairt rathúil atá déanta aige ar fhiontraíocht dhigiteach in Éirinn. Cinnteofar leis seo go leanfaidh an Mol Digiteach de chlú Bhaile Átha Cliath agus na hÉireann a mhéadú agus a dhaingniú mar ionad barr feabhais digiteach.

Tugann an cónascadh deis do Chomhairle Cathrach Bhaile Átha Cliath agus don Mhol Digiteach araon leas a bhaint as sinéirgí a chuimsíonn fás na fiontraíochta, bainistíú agus forbairt réadmhaoine, athghiniúint uirbeach agus tionscnaimh phobail.

Ag ullmhú dóibh i gcomhair an athraithe, tá samhail nua straitéise agus maoinithe comhaontaithe ag Bord an Mhoil Dhigitigh a chuirfidh ar chumas an chomhlachta feidhmiú trí fhócas níos mó ar an bhfiontraíocht dhigiteach agus cur lena mheallacht mar shuíomh braisle le haghaidh eolais, nuála agus cruthaitheachta agus an comhlacht a chur go láidir i dtreo na neamhthuilleamaíochta ag an am céanna.

Éascófar leis an straitéis nua don Mhol Digiteach freisin méadú na hacmhainne oifige trí fhorbairt agus athchóiriú na bhfoirgneamh a bhfuil cuid mhór díobh in anchaoi nó ar struchtúir chosanta iad, ar a champas i mBaile Átha Cliath 8.

Tá mo Roinn ag obair ar na gnéithe riaracháin agus dlí den chónascadh agus i gcomhairle leis na croípháirtithe leasmhara, Ranna eile Rialtais san áireamh, maidir leis seo.

## Renewable Energy Incentives

16. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to introduce a renewable heat initiative to companies and-or homeowners that generate and use renewable energy to heat their buildings, as is done in the UK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10461/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Minister published a Draft Bioenergy Plan in October 2014 which will undergo Strategic Environmental and Appropriate Assessments to inform the content of the finalised Plan. These assessment processes will commence shortly. The draft Plan sets out the broader context for the development of Ireland's biomass sector, and the cur-



rent status with regard to the range of policy areas that must be coordinated in order to create the conditions necessary to support the development of this sector.

The analysis underpinning the draft Plan is that an additional bioenergy focussed measure in the heat sector would represent the most cost effective means of meeting a number of different policy goals including reducing the emerging gap, in terms of meeting our 2020 Renewable Heat target, anticipated in the heat sector. Accordingly, the draft Plan recommends the introduction of a Renewable Heat Incentive to incentivise larger heat users in the industrial and commercial sector to change to heating solutions that produce heat from renewable sources in order to deliver the additional heat required in the context of meeting 12% of heat demand from renewable sources by 2020. There are no plans at this time to introduce such a scheme for domestic heat users.

The design of the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme will commence this year and will include public consultation, the first stage of which will be launched shortly. The consultation process will seek views on a range of issues including the technologies that should be included. Once designed, it will require State Aid clearance from the European Commission and further Government approval. Subject to these approvals, it is proposed to have the scheme in place in 2016.

### **Renewable Energy Generation Targets**

17. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will increase funding to Teagasc's bioenergy research into renewable energy in order for Ireland to increase its chances of meeting renewable heat targets through essential research; his plans to increase funding to University bioenergy research projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10462/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** In October 2014, the Minister published a Draft Bioenergy Plan which will undergo Strategic Environmental and Appropriate Assessments, including public consultation, which will inform the content of a finalised Plan. These assessment processes will commence shortly.

The draft Plan sets out the broader context for the development of Ireland's bioenergy sector, and the current status with regard to the range of policy areas, including research, that must be coordinated in order to create the conditions necessary to support the development of this sector. The draft Plan also identifies the next steps that must be taken to support the sustainable development of the sector.

The draft Plan acknowledges that research and development in the bioenergy sector remains a key priority of energy policy and recommends that appropriate bioenergy research continues to be carried out in Ireland along the entire innovation chain, from basic research to pre-commercial demonstration. The Bioenergy Steering Group, which has been established to oversee the implementation of the draft Plan, has set up a working group specifically to coordinate actions across bioenergy research and development. Reflecting the cross-sectoral nature of bioenergy research, the working group will draw membership from the relevant Departments and Agencies, including Teagasc as well as engaging with third level institutions and commercial bodies.

The Department does not directly provide bioenergy research funding to Universities nor does it do so for Teagasc. It does, however, provide the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland with funding to support research, development and demonstration projects in the area of renewable energy, including bioenergy.

I am advised that Teagasc, along with other research bodies, applies for research funding through competitive research programmes such as the Research Stimulus Fund and from other sources such as EU funds and industry. It is also in receipt of an annual grant-in-aid allocation from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to fund the delivery of core research, advisory and education services to the agriculture and food sector.

### **Tourism Promotion**

18. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources with regard to inland fisheries and EU funding that was not fully used under the LIFE project for Leader development companies, if he is satisfied with this; his strategy-policy to maximise the tourist potential of inland fisheries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10508/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The LIFE Programme is the EU's financial instrument supporting environmental and climate action projects throughout the EU. I understand that, nationally, the lead contact for the programme is the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

I understand that funding is not allocated to Departments or Agencies for their discretionary reallocation to projects. Under the Environment Sub-programme the selection process for projects is entirely merit based with projects competing against applications from other EU member states.

Inland Fisheries Ireland has participated in a number of projects that have successfully secured LIFE funding. IFI were the lead partner in a LIFE project concerning invasive species. This project is now complete and all funding was utilised. Work is completed on a further LIFE project led by IFI on the Mulkear River in Limerick with all funds utilised and the final report on the project is now being prepared. IFI is an associate partner in a third LIFE project, led by a LEADER company which is not yet complete but it is expected that full expenditure and the work programme will be completed in order to draw down the funds awarded to the project by the project end date.

IFI continues to examine closely further potential funding opportunities under the LIFE and other EU programmes within the parameters of these schemes and the competitive application process in which they operate.

### **State Bodies Mergers**

19. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide an update on the merging of Coillte and Bord na Móna; and if he will provide a timescale of the establishment of a joint venture; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10463/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** In June 2014, the Government decided to streamline and refocus the commercial operations of Bord na Móna and Coillte, primarily in the bioenergy and wind energy sectors. The decision requires Bord na Móna and Coillte to proceed with a partial merger in four key areas: wind; biomass; tourism and recreation; and shared services.

An Interdepartmental Steering Group, comprising senior officials from relevant departments, has been charged with overseeing the project which involves interaction with both companies as they progress with the partial merger. Both companies are committed to moving ahead with this challenging agenda and detailed work is proceeding on all areas of the initiative. It is anticipated that, subject to appropriate regulatory and other approvals and clearances being confirmed, the initial corporate structures will be in place later this year.

Progress is being made across all areas including:

- Establishing a biomass business, to be called BioEnergy Ireland, which will procure biomass at market rates from both Coillte and private sources and use this to supply the entire market, including Coillte's board companies and Bord na Móna's power station, on a competitive, commercial basis;

- Establishing a wind business comprising initially of two Coillte windfarms, with further integration of the wind assets of both companies over time;

- Developing shared services to consolidate central support services and drive cost efficiencies; and

- Developing Recreation and Tourism to realise the green / agri-tourism potential inherent in the combined land banks of the two companies.

### **National Broadband Plan Implementation**

20. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the timeframe for the roll out of high speed broadband to rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10240/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The National Broadband Plan aims to ensure that every citizen and business, regardless of location, has access to a high quality, high speed broadband service. This will be achieved through a combination of commercial investments and a State led intervention in areas where commercial services will not be provided.

The commercial telecommunications sector is currently investing approximately €2.5 billion in network upgrades and enhanced services with approximately 1.6 million of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland 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.

Last November the Minister published a national high speed coverage map for 2016. This map is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). The areas marked BLUE represent those areas that will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016. The AMBER areas show the target areas for the State intervention. The map allows all members of the public, be they business or residential, to see whether their premises/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.

A public consultation on the map, which commenced in November, closed on 12 February last. 28 submissions have been received to date and will be assessed over the coming weeks. This will help inform the key decisions that require to be taken in order to finalise our comprehensive Intervention Strategy which the Minister intends publishing for consultation in July



next.

The strategy will address a range of important issues in relation to the intervention including the optimum procurement model, ownership and governance options, funding issues and levels of service for end-users. Part of the analysis being undertaken involves consideration of identifying and prioritising strategic connection points such as enterprise parks, schools and other points of economic or social activity within rural communities.

The proposed Intervention will also be subject to State Aid clearance from the European Commission.

Following the public consultation this summer, a detailed procurement process, in line with EU and Irish procurement rules, will be undertaken in order to select a preferred bidder or bidders. The Department will design the tender in a way that maximises efficiencies and keeps the cost of the network build as low as possible. It is anticipated 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.

### **Energy Efficiency**

21. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if the 5 per cent charge on energy efficiency obligation is to be transferred on to customers. [10502/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The 2012 EU Energy Efficiency Directive imposes an obligation on Member States to achieve energy savings each year from 2014 to 2020 of 1.5% of the amount of energy sold annually to final customers. The Directive also requires the involvement of energy distributors and retailers in meeting this obligation. Ireland has decided to meet this target by imposing a lower target of 0.75% on the energy industry, with additional Government measures to deliver the remaining 0.75% of the EU target. By splitting responsibility for the required savings between industry and Government, an appropriate balance has been struck that allows Ireland to meet its obligation at a lower cost to the consumer.

To implement this obligation, Energy Efficiency Notices have issued to energy suppliers under Statutory Instrument No. 131 of 2014. These notices impose legally binding energy saving obligations on all energy suppliers that sell more than 600 gigawatt hours of energy for the years 2014-2016. Suppliers have considerable flexibility in how they seek to achieve the required energy savings. However, 70% of the required savings must be delivered in the commercial sector, a further 25% in the domestic sector, with 5% focused on customers experiencing energy poverty.

The obligation encourages suppliers to offer more innovative energy service products to their customers. Developing the scope for energy consumers to manage their energy use is becoming increasingly important in the transition to a more sustainable energy system.

It is the Minister's intention to publish a report on the operation of the obligation scheme later this year. This report will detail the energy savings achieved in 2014 and the costs associated with achieving those savings. The Minister is confident that this EU obligation can be achieved at a minimal cost to consumers. It is up to energy suppliers how they reflect these

costs on consumers' bills, subject to the regulatory requirements of the Commission for Energy Regulation.

## Renewable Energy Generation

22. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans for the development of renewable energy. [10515/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The overarching objective of the Government's energy policy is to ensure secure and sustainable supplies of competitively priced energy to all consumers. The 2009 EU Renewable Energy Directive set Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy requirements from renewable sources by 2020, to be achieved through 40% renewables in electricity, 12% in heat and 10% in transport.

Policies and schemes are in place to incentivise the use of renewable energy. The REFIT schemes underpin the development of a range of renewable electricity technologies, including hydro, biomass combustion, biomass combined heat and power, landfill gas and onshore wind. To date, wind energy has been the most cost effective renewable technology in the Irish electricity market, contributing most towards the achievement of the 2020 target.

Part L of the Building Regulations supports the uptake of renewable heat and the recently published Draft Bioenergy Plan recommends the introduction of a Renewable Heat Incentive for larger heat users to change to heating solutions that produce heat from renewable sources.

The Biofuels Obligation Scheme and grant support for the purchase of electric vehicles underpin the deployment of renewable energy in the transport sector.

Looking beyond 2020, the October 2014 European Council endorsed a binding EU target of at least 40% domestic reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. In addition, an EU target of at least 27% is set for the share of renewable energy consumed in the EU in 2030, and an indicative target at EU level of at least 27% is set for improving energy efficiency in 2030 compared to projections of future energy consumption.

Ireland intends to make a cost-effective, achievable and fair (in terms of effort sharing among Member States), contribution to these high level EU goals. The Department is overseeing detailed and rigorous energy system and economic modelling to identify the contribution which is appropriate for Ireland taking account of our specific economic circumstances. This analysis will address issues such as the quantum of additional renewable electricity we should seek to achieve by 2030, the technologies that should be supported in this regard, and the level at which any future supports should be set.

## Legislative Measures

23. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans for legislation to remove surcharges on top-ups for pay-as-you-go meters for electricity and gas, considering those who avail of them are those who are most at risk of fuel poverty. [10501/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I am aware of reports of some retailers continuing to apply surcharges to top-up payments for Pay As You Go meters for electricity and gas.

Pay As You Go meters are offered free of charge to energy consumers experiencing financial difficulty. Since their introduction in 2011, more than 120,000 meters have been distributed. These meters have proved to be effective in helping to reduce disconnections. The Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) has recently reported a 38% fall in disconnections for quarter three of 2014 compared to the same period in 2013. I understand the CER views Pay As You Go meters as contributing significantly to this improvement.

In light of the assistance that Pay As You Go metering is providing to households under financial pressure, it is critical that these households do not incur any charges for availing of them. In recent months the Minister has publically called for an end to this practice by retailers. Senior officials from the Department have also met with the payment service providers to communicate to them the critical importance of them making every effort to address this issue. The payment services providers have advised that the level of customer complaints is low and that they are working with energy suppliers to investigate and address persistent problems. The willingness of the payment service providers to engage is acknowledged, and the Minister would wish to see such a response from representatives of the retail sector. In the coming weeks the Department will be meeting with some retailers principals. Should the problem of surcharging continue, the Minister is prepared to consider the legislative options that may be open to him.

In the meantime, it is recommended that consumers would report any instances of the application of surcharges to Pay As You Go transactions to both their energy supplier and the relevant payment service provider.

### **Broadcasting Charge**

24. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide an update regarding his plans to introduce a broadcasting charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10233/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Programme for Government commits to examining the role and collection of the TV licence fee in light of existing and projected convergence of technologies and to transforming the TV licence into a household based Public Service Broadcasting Charge to be applied to all eligible households and applicable businesses, regardless of the device used to access content or services.

The Minister is currently considering the Charge in the context of funding of public service broadcasting, arising from the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland's five year review of broadcasting, including a new system of determining the adequacy of funding for public service broadcasters and a revision of the current governance arrangements for advertising minutage.

In conjunction with this, the Minister is also considering possible amendments in relation to certain administrative and operational issues identified in the period since the Act came into effect.

Until the Minister has given full consideration to these matters, and brought proposals in that regard to Cabinet for decision, there will be no change to the current arrangements.

### **Energy Policy**

25. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the degree to which policy is being finalised in respect of ongoing measures

required to reduce dependency on fossil fuels by way of various replacements; if he is satisfied that the progress to date in this regard will sufficiently reduce Ireland's dependency on fossil fuels; if the full extent of reliance on wind energy has been determined along with other renewable sources of energy and keeping in mind the need to maintain carbon reduction targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10499/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The overarching objective of Ireland's energy policy is to ensure secure, sustainable supplies of competitively priced energy to all consumers. As a State we have ambitious targets for 16% of our energy from renewable sources by 2020 through meeting 40% of electricity demand from renewable sources, with 10% renewables in transport and 12% in heat. In 2013, 7.8% of Ireland's overall energy requirement was met by renewable energy. Policies and schemes are in place to incentivise the use of renewable energy. The REFIT schemes underpin the development of a range of renewable electricity technologies, including hydro, biomass combustion, biomass combined heat and power, landfill gas and onshore wind. To date wind energy has been the largest driver of growth in renewable electricity. The total amount of renewable generation connected to the grid is 2500 MW of which 2,200 MW is wind. It is estimated that between 3,500 and 4,500 MW of onshore renewable generation capacity will be required to allow Ireland to meet its 40% renewable electricity target.

Part L of the Building Regulations supports the uptake of renewable heat. The Draft Bio-energy Plan, which I published last year, recommends the introduction of a Renewable Heat Incentive for larger heat users to change to heating solutions that produce heat from renewable sources. Additionally, the Biofuels Obligation Scheme and grant support for the purchase of electric vehicles underpin the deployment of renewable energy in the transport sector.

In 2014, Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) published a report on Quantifying Ireland's Fuel and CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions Savings from Renewable Electricity in 2012, which found that wind generation displaced an estimated 586 kilo tonnes of oil equivalent of fossil fuels, valued at €177 million, with a consequent carbon dioxide saving of 1.51 million tonnes, valued at €11million.

### Seirbhísí Leathanbhanda

26. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Cumarsáide, Fuinnimh agus Acmhainní Nádurtha an gceapann sé gurb ionann córas leathanbhanda snáthoptaice agus córas leathanbhanda gan sreang; cad iad na buntáistí agus na míbhuntáistí a bhaineann le gach córas díobh; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [10239/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I líonra snáthoptaice baintear úsáid as solas le sonraí a tharchur i bhfad níos gasta agus i bhfad níos faide ná líonraí traidisiúnta copair. Is féidir freastal ar leithead banda i bhfad níos mó freisin, rud a fhágann gur féidir le cuid mhaith úsáideoirí a bheith ar líne san aon am amháin gan meathlú a theacht ar chaighdeán na brabhsála acu. Meastar gurb é snáithín an t-ardán teicneolaíochta is fearr le tacú le gníomhaíochtaí gnó agus eacnamaíochta an lae inniu, agus meastar freisin gurb é is fearr a sheasfaidh an aimsir agus a mbeidh teacht aniar ann.

Maidir leis an teicneolaíocht gan sreang (seasta agus soghluaiste araon), tarchuirtear comharthaí raidió ó stáisiúin bhunáite nó ó chrainn go trealamh glactha in áitreabh an tomhaltóra. Tá an líne amhairc fiorthábhachtach ina leithéid seo d'ardán, mar sin. Tá tábhacht freisin le bacainní fisiceacha (sléibhte, cnoic, crainn etc) agus le líon na n-úsáideoirí in aon chill ar leith atá ar líne ag an am céanna. Dá mhéad líon na n-úsáideoirí atá gníomhach in aon am ar leith is amhlaidh is ísle an caighdeán brabhsála dóibh siúd atá sa chill. Is féidir leis an drochaimsir cur

isteach ar chaighdeán na seirbhíse freisin.

Is amhlaidh is féidir seirbhísí ardchaighdeáin agus ardluais a chur ar fáil trí líonraí gan sreang, ag brath ar na toisí. Ní sheasfaidh siad an aimsir chomh maith céanna le líonraí snáithín, áfach, agus is gá cuid mhaith obair leanúnach cothabhála a dhéanamh orthu.

Maidir le hidirghabháil an Rialtais, caithfimid déanamh de réir bheartas na neodrachtá ó thaobh na teicneolaíochta de lena bheith ag teacht le treoirlínte an Choimisiúin faoi Státchabhair. Beidh ár n-idirghabháil ceaptha sa dóigh go gcuirfear 30 mbps ar a laghad ar fáil do gach áitreabh sa cheantar idirghabhála, agus caithfear a bheith in ann é seo a mhéadú ó scála de réir mar a mhéadóidh an t-éileamh ar leithead banda amach anseo.

## **Renewable Energy Generation**

27. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources noting the lack of progress during 2014 reported by Westwave to the Marine Renewable Energy Industry conference in which he participated, his views that the Westwave strategy of dependence on multinational and Irish private developers - with claimed technical readiness level of 7-9 to deploy devices at the site off the County Clare coast has not worked; and if he will now review the potential of Irish wave energy developers who have received Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland grant funding, have demonstrated proof of concept, are at TRL level 2-3 and consider whether the Government should buy the useful IP of these devices and direct the ESB to develop the most promising TRL level suitable for deployment at Westwave site. [10230/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Wave and tidal energy is still at the research, development and demonstration stage globally, and while promising experimental devices have been developed, much research, development and demonstration is required to bring wave energy technology to commercial viability.

Policy action across a range of areas is required to support developers in bringing ocean energy devices from prototype to full scale commerciality. This action is being taken in the context of the implementation of the Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan (OREDPP) 2014, which sets out Government policy in relation to the sustainable development of Ireland's abundant offshore renewable energy resource.

Exchequer support for ocean research, development and demonstration has been provided to the sector in recent years and is being increased under the OREDPP. In total, the Department has allocated €26.3 million for ocean energy for the period 2013 to 2016. This funding supports, inter alia, the Prototype Development Fund operated by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland. This fund provides grant aid for the development of prototype ocean energy devices and in line with the approach taken internationally, the emphasis is on industry led projects as the best way of supporting innovation.

Options for an additional €30 million capital funding in the years 2016 to 2018 are being discussed cross-departmentally. This funding is expected to facilitate innovative projects, including an ESB led project called Westwave, that can meet certain compliance criteria.

The Westwave project, which is located off the County Clare coast and was discussed at the MRIA conference on 6 February, aims to make a significant contribution to the international development of wave energy technology. The Department understands from the ESB that, despite some delays in 2014, the project is progressing well, with a consenting application due for



submission in mid-2015. While some technology companies have experienced difficulties in recent times, others are progressing and ESB is maintaining an active dialogue with the industry with a view to Westwave deployment .

### **Biofuel Obligation Scheme**

28. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide details of plans to make biofuel more readily available through fuel pumps in retail garages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10234/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Biofuels are readily available in Ireland and regulations on fuel standards, introduced by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in 2011, and which transpose the Fuel Quality Directive, permit the sale of petrol with up to 10% bioethanol and diesel with up to 7% biodiesel.

The Biofuels Obligation Scheme was introduced in July 2010 as the primary means to meet the target of at least 10% renewable energy in transport by 2020, which was mandated by the 2009 Renewable Energy Directive.

The scheme works by obliging road transport fuel suppliers to bring a certain amount of sustainable biofuel, currently 6% by volume of total transport fuel sales, to the market. The gradual increase to the current 6% rate has facilitated increased amounts of biofuel used in Ireland since the scheme was introduced and, in 2013, approximately 150 million litres of biofuels were placed on the Irish transport fuel market blended with petroleum products. Further increases to the 6% rate will be required in the context of achieving our 2020 target and the Minister intends to consult on a proposed increase shortly.

### **Natural Gas Grid**

29. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on the Western Development Commission paper Why Invest in Gas which outlines the clear benefit of extending the natural gas distribution network to the north west; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10241/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** As the Deputy will be aware from replies to previous Parliamentary Questions raised by him on this issue, the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) is the statutory, independent body, charged with the assessment and licensing of prospective operators seeking to develop and operate a gas distribution system within the State. The Minister has no direct statutory function in relation to the connection of towns to the gas network.

The CER, in 2006, approved a network connections policy which enabled reassessment of the feasibility of connecting certain towns to the gas network. In order for any town to be connected to the gas network, certain economic criteria need to be satisfied as a prerequisite. The policy allows for the appraisal of a town either on its own or as part of a regional group of towns.

This policy framework provides that, over a certain period, the costs of connecting a town, or group of towns, to the network are recouped through the actual economic consumption of gas and the associated tariffs. Uneconomic projects are not permitted as they would increase

costs for all energy consumers.

Under the CER's policy framework, Bord Gáis Networks, and more recently Gaslink, carried out a comprehensive review of towns not connected to the national gas network. Gaslink published its New Towns Analysis Phase 3 report in 2010. It assessed the feasibility of connecting 11 towns in the West and North West region which are the focus of the Western Development Commission paper, "Why Invest in Gas". However, the Gaslink review found that none of the towns qualified for connection on economic grounds.

As the successor to Gaslink, Gas Networks Ireland (GNI) will continue to review the towns which did not qualify for connection in 2010 as well as other towns. The key factor which would qualify a town or group of towns in any future review would be a significant increase in demand for natural gas, usually as a result of the addition of a new large industrial or commercial facility.

The CER is currently consulting on a submission received by it from GNI on revisions to CER's existing connections policy, as mentioned above.

### **Energy Efficiency**

30. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide details of his Department's analysis of a deep retro-fit programme and its potential impact on reducing energy use and thus contributing towards helping achieve 2020 targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10333/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The 2020 targets for emissions reduction, renewable energy and energy efficiency form a cornerstone of EU energy policy. The EU aims to deliver a 20% improvement in energy efficiency by 2020, an objective that has been incorporated into Irish energy policy through the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan.

In 2014, at the request of the Department, and as part of the ongoing development of Ireland's energy efficiency strategy, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) commissioned a detailed analysis of the potential for energy efficiency improvements across all major energy consuming sectors in Ireland to 2020. I understand that analysis is ongoing and will be finalised shortly. When published, the analysis will, for the first time, provide a comprehensive overview of the entire commercial and industrial building stock in Ireland and identify additional cost effective renovation measures for every category of building in Ireland-domestic, public sector, commercial and industrial. Accordingly, the analysis will provide the basis for the identification of a range of measures with the potential to enhance progress towards our 2020 target in a cost effective manner. The implementation of any additional measures would require consideration in the context of wider Government policy on the range of actions to be taken across the energy and climate agenda to 2020.

### **Carbon Monoxide Poisoning**

31. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views that carbon monoxide alarms should be installed in all public places such as hotels as a matter of public safety; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10236/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The regulation of installation of carbon monoxide alarms is a matter for the Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government. I understand that with effect from 1 September 2014 it is compulsory, under revised Building Regulations made by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, to install approved carbon monoxide alarms in new domestic dwellings. I further understand that the scope of these Regulations does not extend to premises such as hotels. Safety must always be the highest priority. As the Minister for Energy, I fully support Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week which is now an annual event. The Awareness Week campaign operates in addition to regular safety messages from the gas industry, in particular from Gas Networks Ireland, throughout the year and such campaigns have been shown to heighten public awareness of carbon monoxide risks.

The key messages of Carbon Monoxide Awareness week are:

- Carbon Monoxide can be produced when any fuel is burned, including oil, gas, wood and coal;

- To prevent Carbon Monoxide, have appliances serviced annually and keep vents, flues and chimneys

clean;

- Carbon Monoxide is odourless and colourless so for added protection install an audible Carbon

Monoxide alarm.

### **Renewable Energy Generation**

32. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources following the welcome announcement by an ICT company of its plans to develop a facility which will be fully self-reliant on renewable sources for its energy requirements, his Department's plans to enable other organisations, both public and private, to develop more sustainable energy sources and, in particular, the plans to assist with retrofitting of existing facilities. [10237/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The overarching objective of the Government's energy policy is to ensure secure, sustainable supplies of competitively priced energy to all consumers. As a State we have ambitious targets for 16% of our energy from renewable sources by 2020 through meeting 40% of electricity demand from renewable sources, with 10% renewables in transport and 12% in heat. Various schemes and initiatives are in place to incentivise the use of renewable energy:

- The REFIT schemes underpin the development of a range of renewable electricity technologies, including hydro, biomass combustion, biomass combined heat and power, landfill gas and onshore wind;

- Relatively large electricity customers, e.g. industrial users, may become autoproducers and install generation, including renewable generation, at their site to meet their needs and export any excess to the electricity grid;

- Part L of the Building Regulations supports the uptake of renewable heat and the recently

published Draft Bioenergy Plan recommends the introduction from 2016 of a Renewable Heat Incentive for larger heat users to change to heating solutions that produce heat from renewable biomass;

- Investment in renewable energy is supported through tax relief incentives such as the Employment Investment Incentive scheme and the Accelerated Capital Allowance scheme.

Finally, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) provides a range of supports to businesses covering energy management, training, and advice. Businesses wishing to develop renewable energy projects and improve their energy efficiency can also avail of grant support for investment in renewable energy installations as a component of a coordinated energy efficiency programme under the Better Energy Communities scheme.

### **Renewable Energy Feed in Tariff Scheme Implementation**

33. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide an update on the 30% co-firing target of biomass at the three State-owned peat power generation stations, a target set to be achieved by this year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10460/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** In the 2007 Energy White Paper 'Delivering A Sustainable Energy Future For Ireland', a target was set of 30% co-firing of biomass at the three peat power generation stations. Under the Renewable Energy Feed in Tariff (REFIT) schemes, which are the primary means through which electricity from renewable sources is supported in Ireland, a tariff was introduced in 2012 to incentivise co-firing at these plants. It is, however, a commercial decision for the companies involved whether or not they apply to participate in a REFIT scheme.

I understand that Bord na Móna is already co-firing its plant at Edenderry with biomass now accounting for 25% of the fuel mix. I also understand that ESB has completed biomass co-firing trials at West Offaly and Lough Ree power plants and that some significant commercial issues, including uncertainty regarding the biomass supply chain, need to be addressed before biomass co-firing could be a realistic option at these two plants. The Draft Bioenergy Plan, published in October 2014 and due to be subjected to Strategic Environmental and Appropriate Assessments during 2015, referenced certain supply side measures which may be helpful in this regard.

### **Renewable Energy Feed in Tariff Scheme Implementation**

34. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he has considered the co-firing with biomass of Moneypoint power station, County Clare.; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10464/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Renewable Energy Feed-in Tariff (REFIT) schemes are the primary means through which electricity from a range of renewable sources is supported, including electricity from biomass. The REFIT schemes are supported through the Public Service Obligation levy which is a levy on all electricity customers.

Various different technologies can be used to generate electricity. The choice of technolo-

gies used by generators are commercial decisions for the generators concerned. The choice of fuel used in the plant at Moneypoint is a matter for the operator and not one in which the Minister has a role or function.

### **National Broadband Plan Implementation**

35. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 8 and 14 of 23 October 2014 regarding the State-led investment aspect of the national broadband plan, the progress that has been made with the European Commission in obtaining state aid clearance for the programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10492/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Last November the Minister published a national high speed coverage map for 2016. This map is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). The areas marked BLUE represent those areas that will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016. The AMBER areas show the target areas for the State intervention. The map allows all members of the public, be they business or residential, to see whether their premises/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.

A public consultation on the map, which commenced in November, closed on the 12th February last. 29 submissions have been received to date and will be assessed over the coming weeks. This will help inform the key decisions that require to be taken in order to finalise our comprehensive Intervention Strategy which will be published for consultation in July next.

The proposed State intervention is subject to EU State Aid clearance from DG Competition. Formal notification will not be made until consultation on the Intervention Strategy is completed later this year. In the meantime, the Department continues to liaise closely with DG Competition on a range of issues related to the Plan and we hope to be in a position by this summer to be able to submit a pre-notification to the Commission. This is an informal and preliminary stage in the overall State Aid clearance process but can help in expediting the later formal notification stage.

### **Energy Prices**

36. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he is satisfied that the current regulatory framework empowers the Commission for Energy Regulation to ensure the best electricity price is delivered to households and businesses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10506/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) is Ireland's independent energy regulator. The CER was assigned responsibility for the regulation of the Irish electricity sector following the enactment of the Electricity Regulation Act, 1999 and subsequent legislation. It has a wide range of economic, customer protection and safety responsibilities in the energy sector.

Ireland's electricity and gas markets are commercial, liberalised and competitive, and operate within national and European regulatory regimes. Prices in the retail gas and electricity markets are fully deregulated for all consumers.



Under the regulatory framework, the CER is empowered to oversee the sustainable development of the retail market for the benefit of all electricity customers. To that end, the CER has a number of powers, including setting supplier licence conditions, and undertakes certain activities, such as the publication of the supplier handbook.

The CER was assigned the function of market monitoring in 2010 (S.I. 450 of 2010) and is charged with monitoring, *inter alia*, rates of customer switching, disconnection rates, customer complaints and whether the development and operation of competition in the supply of electricity is benefiting final customers.

As part of its market monitoring role, the CER periodically briefs the Minister in respect of the findings of its quarterly Electricity and Gas Retail Markets Report. The Minister is satisfied that the regulatory framework allows the CER to monitor the operation of competition in the electricity market, and, as it deems necessary, to take action under the Regulations to ensure that it is working to benefit households and businesses.

As with any competitive market, it is hugely important that consumers would shop around to ensure that they get the best price. I would encourage consumers to either switch supplier or to contact their current supplier to ensure that the best available deal is being provided.

The Green Paper on Energy in Ireland sought views on the conduct of a review of the entire regulatory framework for energy. The responses to that consultation are being considered and will be taken into account in developing future policy in this area.

### **National Broadband Plan Expenditure**

37. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 8 and 14 of 23 October 2014 regarding the State led investment aspect of the National Broadband Plan, the progress that has been made with regard to the further public consultation on a detailed intervention strategy to be launched in mid-2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10491/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Last November the Minister published a national high speed coverage map for 2016. This map is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). The areas marked BLUE represent those areas that will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016. The AMBER areas show the target areas for the State intervention under the National Broadband Plan (NBP). The map allows all members of the public, be they business or residential, to see whether their premises/home will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016 or whether they will be included in the Government's proposed intervention.

A public consultation on the map, which commenced in November, closed on 12 February last. 29 submissions have been received to date and will be assessed over the coming weeks. These included 13 responses from telecommunications operators, 2 responses from equipment vendors, 7 responses from Local Authorities and representative bodies and 7 responses from individual citizens.

There was a substantive response to the questions posed in the consultation document, in some cases with additional material and views in relation to the NBP and the importance of the State intervention as a whole. The Department is considering the responses to the consultation and the outcome will be incorporated in the assessment of operator coverage.

It is proposed to publish the non-confidential responses on the Department's website shortly.

This will help inform the key decisions that require to be taken in order to finalise our comprehensive Intervention Strategy which the Minister intends publishing for consultation in July next.

There will be engagement with industry, stakeholders and the general public to the greatest extent possible as the Intervention Strategy which will underpin this ambitious proposed investment evolves.

## Wind Energy Generation

38. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will publish the cost benefit analysis that would underpin the selection of wind energy as the primary renewable to be integrated into power generation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10334/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The objective of the five part All-Island Grid Study, published in 2008, was to assess the technical feasibility and the relative costs and benefits associated with various scenarios for increased shares of electricity sourced from renewable energy in the all island power system. The creation of the portfolios was informed by the resource available, the technological readiness of the various generation technologies and cost required per generated unit based on connection costs, construction costs and operating and maintenance costs. The mapping for the analysis also assessed the deployment potential based on where the resource was and an overview of environmentally designated areas.

It was following this study that it was decided to pursue 40% renewable electricity in Ireland by 2020. The study concluded that, based on assumptions set out in the Report, wind energy represented a cost effective source for electricity generation.

In Ireland, the abundant wind resource means that each unit of installed generation capacity generates more units of electricity and hence needs a lower rate per generated unit of electricity in order to recover the overall costs of the project.

Additionally, various reports and analyses have examined the effect of renewables on electricity prices. The ESRI, the Irish Wind Energy Association (IWEA), the SEAI and EirGrid have undertaken such studies. The ESRI and IWEA studies both looked at the 2020 position, while a joint SEAI and EirGrid study looked at the position in 2011. The SEAI and EirGrid study found that because wind reduces the cost of wholesale electricity when wind is available on the system, the effect of the PSO was cancelled out and the cost was effectively zero. While this is true for 2011, it is acknowledged that a significant amount of grid build and grid upgrading is required to achieve the 2020 target. The ESRI study found that wind is a hedge against high fossil fuel prices. In that regard wind also provides security of supply benefits along with climate and sustainability benefits.

An IWEA member survey in 2014 indicated that 3,400 people are employed in the sector in Ireland. A report published in 2014 by the ESRI and Trinity College Dublin, estimated direct and indirect employment under various realistic scenarios. The report, which estimates multiple thousands of jobs depending on the scenario, is available on the ESRI's website.

Renewable electricity generation in Ireland in 2012 is estimated by the SEAI to have saved 778 ktoe of fossil fuel, with an associated CO2 emissions reduction of 1.94 million tonnes. Of

this, wind generation was the largest contributor, with savings estimated at 586 ktoe of fossil-fuel and a CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reduction of 1.51 million tonnes. The value of the fossil fuels not consumed in Ireland in 2012 as a result of wind generation was estimated at €177 million, with the value of avoided CO<sub>2</sub> emissions being a further €11 million.

Analysis undertaken by the Department, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), EirGrid and the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) assessed the costs and value of choosing the path towards 40% renewable electricity generation in 2020, compared to a scenario where renewable electricity remained at 2013 levels. This analysis highlighted the cost effectiveness of wind as a renewable energy source and informed a report which will be published shortly.

### **Corrib Gas Field**

39. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when the Corrib project's gas supply will come online; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10509/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Construction and testing of the infrastructure for the Corrib gas field development is nearing completion, with first gas anticipated in mid 2015.

### **Seirbhísí Leathanbhanda**

40. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Cumarsáide, Fuinnimh agus Acmhainní Nádúrtha cén uair a bheidh seirbhís leathanbhanda ar luas ard ar fáil i gCill Chiaráin, i gCarna, ar an gCloch Bhreac agus i Seanadh Farracháin, Co. na Gaillimhe; cén íosteorainn leathanbhanda a bheidh ar fáil sna ceantair seo idir an dá linn; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [10238/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Is é is aidhm leis an bPlean Náisiúnta Leathanbhanda a chinntiú go bhfuil rochtain ar sheirbhís leathanbhanda ardluais d'ardchaighdeán ag gach saoránach agus ag gach gnó, is cuma cá háit a bhfuil siad lonnaithe. Bainfear an sprioc seo amach trí infheistíochtaí tráchtála mar aon le hidirghabháil faoi threoir an Stáit i gceantair nach mbeidh seirbhísí tráchtála ar fáil iontu.

Tá infheistíocht €2.5 billiún á déanamh ag an earnáil teileachumarsáide tráchtála i láthair na huair in uasghrádú líonraí agus i seirbhísí feabhsaithe; táthar ag tnúth go mbeidh rochtain ar sheirbhísí tráchtála leathanbhanda ardluais ag thart ar 1.6 milliún den 2.3 milliún áitreabh in Éirinn sa dá bhliain atá romhainn. Tá na hinfeistíochtaí thar a bheith suntasach agus beidh athrú ó bhonn ar chaighdeán na seirbhísí leathanbhanda atá ar fáil mar gheall orthu.

I mí na Samhna anuraidh, d'fhoilsigh an tAire léarscáil náisiúnta a léiríonn clúdach ardluais sa bhliain 2016. Is féidir teacht ar an léarscáil ar [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). Maidir leis na ceantair a bhfuil dath GORM orthu, beidh rochtain iontu ar sheirbhísí tráchtála leathanbhanda ardluais faoi dheireadh 2016.

Léiríonn na ceantair a bhfuil dath ÓMRACH orthu na sprioc-cheantair le haghaidh idirghabhála faoi threoir an Stáit, Cill Chiaráin, Carna, an Chloch Bhreac agus Seanadh Farracháin, Contae na Gaillimhe ina measc. Is féidir leis an bpobal, lucht gnó agus lucht cónaithe araon,

amharc ar an léarscáil lena fheiceáil an amhlaidh a bheidh rochtain san áitreabh/sa bhaile acu ar sheirbhísí tráchtála leathanbhanda ardluais faoi dheireadh 2016 nó an amhlaidh a bheidh siad san áireamh in idirghabháil bheartaithe an Rialtais.

Tháinig deireadh le tréimhse comhairliúcháin phoiblí, ar cuireadh tús leis i mí na Samhna, ar 12 Feabhra. Tá 29 aighneacht faighte go dtí seo agus déanfar breithniú orthu sna seachtainí atá romhainn; beidh siad san áireamh agus na mórchinntí a gcaithfear iad a dhéanamh lenár Straitéis Idirghabhála chuimsitheach a thabhairt i gcrích á ndéanamh. Tá sé i gceist an straitéis a fhoilsiú le haghaidh próiseas comhairliúcháin i mí Iúil.

Tabharfaidh an straitéis aghaidh ar réimse ceisteanna tábhachtacha a bhaineann leis an idirghabháil, ina measc an tsamhail soláthair is fearr, roghanna úinéireachta agus rialachais, ceisteanna maoinithe agus an tseirbhís do na húsáideoirí deiridh. Cuid den anailís atá idir lámha is ea breithniú ar phointí nasctha straitéiseacha a aithint agus a chur in ord tosaíochta; beidh áiteanna mar pháirceanna frontar, scoileanna agus pointí eile gníomhacha eacnamaíochta nó sóisialta i bpobail tuaithe i gceist.

Beidh an Idirghabháil bheartaithe faoi réir cead Státhabhrach ón gCoimisiún Eorpach freisin.

Nuair a bheidh comhairliúchán poiblí an tsamhraidh seo chugainn thart, rachfar i mbun próiseas sonrach soláthair, de réir rialacha soláthair AE agus na hÉireann, leis an rogha tairgeora nó tairgeoirí a roghnú. Ceapfaidh an Roinn tairiscint sa dóigh go n-uasmhéadófar éifeachtúlachtaí agus go gcoinneofar costas tógála an líonra chomh híseal agus is féidir. Táthar ag tnúth go nascfar an chéad bhabhta tithe agus gnóthaí in 2016 agus go leanfar le naisc a dhéanamh ina dhiaidh sin; tá sé i gceist gach áitreabh a nascadh taobh istigh de thréimhse 5 bliana.

Is tionscadal casta, uailmhianach é seo, agus is ardtosaíocht don Rialtas é. Is é is aidhm leis na dúshlán nascachta in Éirinn a shárú ar fad.

## Energy Efficiency

41. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the progress on the introduction of a pay-as-you-save system for financing energy efficient upgrades; the number of times the project teams established for this purpose has met and which Departments or departmental sectors are represented on the team. [10228/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The development of a Better Energy Finance (BEF) scheme arises from a Programme for Government commitment to transition from Exchequer funded grants for energy efficiency measures to a market orientated approach to delivering energy efficiency savings.

To achieve this, a BEF project team was established in December 2012 under the aegis of the Department. The team consisted of representatives seconded on a full time basis from energy suppliers, the finance community and the retrofit industry, with the objective of developing proposals on how a BEF scheme might operate. The team met on an ongoing basis from December 2012 to November 2013. The project was overseen by a Steering Committee which met 12 times during 2013. Following the completion by the project team of its work, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) was tasked with drawing up a detailed implementation plan for the design, development and execution of the scheme. In that context, meetings between the SEAI and the Department continued during 2014.

This year €2 million in Exchequer funding has been made available under the Better Energy Communities Scheme to pilot and evaluate innovative financing schemes in a community setting. The Better Energy Communities Scheme is application led, with a closing date of 20 March 2015. Applications will be evaluated and projects selected on a competitive basis. A further €1 million has been made available to fund other trials and measures on BEF. These trials are being administered by the SEAI.

The results of these trials will inform the final design of the BEF Scheme, as will evidence from some schemes in operation internationally. However, it is important to note that pay-as-you-save type schemes are relatively new in the countries where they exist. Other countries tend to have multiple financial incentives in place, predominantly grant based, to underpin residential retrofit programmes.

The work carried out to date in Ireland suggests that there is an understandable reluctance for households to take on additional debt and the success of a BEF Scheme would, therefore, require a compelling consumer proposition with accompanying incentives to capture consumer interest and drive action. It is likely that this would require a combination of some Exchequer funded grants and a consumer financing offering.

### **Hydraulic Fracturing Policy**

42. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the measures Department is considering in to prevent fracking here, in view of the recent US geological survey which found fracking waste to be the primary cause of a dramatic rise in earthquakes even in areas which previously did not experience earthquakes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10513/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** As has been outlined on a number of occasions, no decision will be made on any proposal for the use of hydraulic fracturing, as part of an unconventional gas exploration or extraction project, until there has been time to consider the outcome of a major research programme, directed at examining the potential environmental impacts of hydraulic fracturing, which was commissioned by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The key questions that this research programme, which is to be carried out over a minimum period of two years, needs to answer are:

- Can unconventional gas exploration and extraction projects and operations be carried out in the island of Ireland whilst also protecting the environment and human health? and
- What is 'best environmental practice' in relation to such projects and operations?

To this end this scientific research programme is based on the consideration of existing baseline data with respect to groundwater, air and seismicity and the potential implications and mitigations that are required to be considered in order to understand the possible environmental impacts of using this technology and whether or not it can be undertaken in an environmentally protective manner in accordance with the requirements of environmental law.

I can once again confirm that no decision will be made on any proposal for the use of hydraulic fracturing, as part of any unconventional gas exploration and extraction programme, until there has been time to consider the outcome of this EPA research.



## Hydraulic Fracturing Policy

43. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on the Shale Gas REC report published in early March by the European Commission, which revealed an alarming lack of consistency in regulation; and his further views to lobby within the EU for a European wide fracking ban. [10229/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** In January 2014, the European Commission adopted a Recommendation inviting Member States to follow minimum principles when applying or adapting their legislation applicable to hydrocarbons exploration or production using high volume hydraulic fracturing. At that time the Commission also issued a Communication outlining the potential new opportunities and challenges stemming from shale gas extraction in Europe, as well as an Impact Assessment that examined the socio-economic and environmental impacts of various policy options. Member States were invited to inform the Commission by the end of 2014 on measures that they had put in place in response to the Recommendation and the Commission has recently published the information provided by Member States. As expected, the information provided illustrates differing circumstances between Member States in terms of both the existence of unconventional hydrocarbon resources and where such resources exist, whether or not exploration is taking place.

While the Commission has not proposed a uniform approach to regulation in this area, it has confirmed that assessment of projects proposing the use of hydraulic fracturing in exploration for and production of shale gas, is subject to a number of EU Directives, including the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive and the Habitats Directive. In addition to the Recommendation and Communication mentioned already, the Commission has published a number of research documents into the potential impacts of unconventional exploration and extraction of gas including:

1. Unconventional Gas: Potential Energy Market Impacts in the EU;
2. Climate Impact of Potential Shale Gas Production in the EU;
3. Report on the identification of potential risks for the environment and human health arising from Unconventional Gas operations in Europe; and
4. Mitigation of Climate Impacts of Possible Future Shale Gas Extraction in the EU, Available Technologies best practices and options for policy makers.

Within the context of existing EU legislation and guidance provided, it is a matter for each Member State to determine its own approach to the exploitation of its hydrocarbon natural resources. As the Deputy will be aware, decision making in Ireland will be informed by the findings of a major programme of research that was commissioned last year by the EPA, with a report expected in 2016. I can once again confirm that no decision will be made on any proposal for the use of hydraulic fracturing, as part of any unconventional gas exploration and extraction programme in Ireland, until there has been time to consider the outcome of this EPA research.

## School Meals Programme

44. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide details of schools in County Kerry currently benefitting from school meals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10922/15]

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

The school meals programme provides funding towards the provision of food services to some 1,600 schools and organisations which benefits over 205,000 children through two schemes. The first is the statutory urban school meals scheme, operated by local authorities and part-financed by the Department. The second is the school meals local projects scheme through which funding is provided directly to participating schools and local and voluntary community groups who run their own school meals projects. Despite pressure on the social protection budget, the Government allocated an additional €2 million for the school meals programme in 2015, providing a total allocation of €39 million. The Department is currently considering options regarding the allocation of the additional funding

Details on the schools and organisations in county Kerry participating in the school meals local projects scheme are being compiled and will be forwarded directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Free Travel Scheme**

45. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the amount currently paid to bus operators nationally for the free travel pass; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10958/15]

75. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if payments to bus operators under the free travel scheme are reduced where those bus operators reduce the number of stops they make on the routes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10959/15]

76. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide clarification on aspects relating to the Free Travel Scheme (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10960/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 45, 75 and 76 together.

The free travel scheme permits free travel on most CIE public transport services, Luas and a range of services offered by some 80 private operators in various parts of the country for those eligible under the scheme. There are currently in excess of 810,000 customers with direct eligibility with an annual allocation of €77 million.

Approximately €61.3 million is paid to the CIÉ group in respect of free travel on Irish Rail, Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus, €11.2 million to other operators, €1.5 million for the Rural Transport Programme and the remainder is allocated for the cross-border and All-Ireland travel schemes.

Operators often make changes to their routes, including increasing and reducing the number and location of stops. This requires the approval of the licensing authority, which is the National Transport Authority. Where there are significant changes to the operation of a particular route, the funding for free travel may be reviewed by the Department.

As regards routes with PSO funding, including routes previously operated by CIÉ, it is my intention that private operators will be able to apply to participate in the free travel scheme.

In regard to the cap on funding imposed by the previous Government at a time of increasing free travel passenger numbers, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and I established

an interdepartmental working group to examine and report on the current operation and future development of the free travel scheme. The interdepartmental group has concluded its work and I expect to see a copy of its review shortly.

### **Social Welfare Benefits**

46. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection is she will support a matter (details supplied) in County Limerick regarding social welfare payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10755/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The correspondence enclosed with your question has been passed to a deciding officer for action in relation to the payment method of the person concerned.

*Question No. 47 withdrawn.*

### **Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals**

48. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an appeal for a domiciliary care allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly; and when that person will receive a decision. [10790/15]

**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.

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

49. **Deputy Barry Cowen** 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 Offaly; and when that person will receive a decision. [10796/15]

**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 5 November 2014. 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 have been received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 5 March 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.

*Questions Nos. 50 and 51 withdrawn.*

### **Disability Allowance Appeals**

52. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an appeal for a disability allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and when that person will receive a decision. [10802/15]

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

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

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

53. **Deputy Barry Cowen** 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 Offaly; and when that person will receive a decision. [10803/15]

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

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

### **Disability Allowance Appeals**

54. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an appeal for a disability allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly; and when that person will receive a decision. [10804/15]

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

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Pro-

tection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

### **Universal Retirement Savings Group**

55. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the role of the Universal Retirement Savings Group; and the timeframe and nature of the consultation process for the new supplementary workplace retirement saving scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10834/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** In line with the Statement of Government Priorities, the Government recently decided to proceed with work to develop a roadmap and timeline for the introduction of a new, universal, supplementary workplace retirement saving scheme.

The development of this roadmap for consideration by Government will be progressed by the Universal Retirement Savings Group (URSG). The broad role of the group is to consider the constituent factors involved in constructing an efficient and effective universal retirement savings system and to bring a recommendation to Government in the form of a roadmap and estimated timeline for introduction.

The URSG consists of senior officials from key Government departments and those public bodies with a particular responsibility and expertise in the area. Membership also includes international representatives from the UK's Department for Work and Pensions and the OECD who bring significant expertise in designing, delivering and assessing supplementary pension systems.

In undertaking specific or specialised areas of its work programme the group will consult with, and invite submissions from, pension's experts external to the group. This will include establishing reference groups to utilise expertise and facilitate input from various sectorial interests such as those from the pensions industry, representatives of employers, trade unions and consumer/interest groups. The consultation process will also include an open invitation for written submissions from any parties with an interest in this area.

The first meeting of the Universal Retirement savings Group took place on 25 February 2015. It is expected that the group will be in a position to present recommendations to the Government later this year.

### **Social Welfare Schemes**

56. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of a welfare payment who wish to undertake voluntary work and who have applied under the voluntary work 1 scheme in each year from 2012 to 2014; the number of these who have been successful; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10835/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** VW1 applications are not recorded on the Department's IT systems but are recorded manually and associated with the client's file on a Local Office/Intreo centre basis. Accordingly, the information requested by the Deputy is not available in my Department.



## **Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility**

57. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the social welfare entitlements of a person in receipt of jobseeker's allowance, or jobseeker's benefit, who wishes to undertake a European voluntary service placement under the auspices of the ERASMUS+ Programme in another European Union member state; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10836/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** Social welfare legislation provides that a person must satisfy the conditions of being available for and genuinely seeking work in order to be entitled to jobseeker's benefit or jobseeker's allowance. Any person who fails to satisfy these conditions is not entitled to a jobseeker's payment.

A student undergoing a full-time course of study, instruction or training is disqualified from receiving jobseekers allowance or benefit. This disqualification also extends to the holiday periods, including the summer holidays. In addition, a person volunteering abroad will not satisfy the criteria of being available for and genuinely seeking work and is therefore disqualified from receiving a jobseeker's payment.

The disqualification for receipt of jobseeker's benefit or allowance does not apply in the case of mature students during the period between two academic years. During this period a mature student can apply for jobseeker's benefit or allowance, subject to satisfying the standard qualifying conditions, including that of being available for full-time work.

More generally the social security rights of workers and their families moving within the EU are dealt with by EU regulations on the coordination of social security systems. These regulations deal with a wide range of issues including the jurisdiction in which people should pay social insurance, the aggregation of contributions made in other Member States, liability for payment of benefits and in the case of pensions, how those benefits are calculated. The competent Member State for insurance and benefits is decided on the basis of a priority list starting with employment and ending with residence.

In relation to jobseeker's benefit the regulations provide that eligibility for benefit is dependent on the person's most recent social insurance contributions being made in the competent Member State. Accordingly, a person must make their last contribution here before being eligible for benefit. They can, of course, count contributions made in other Member States towards qualification once their last contribution has been paid in this jurisdiction.

Any person who is involuntarily unemployed and fails to qualify for jobseeker's benefit may claim jobseeker's allowance which is subject, inter alia, to a means test and the habitual residence condition.

*Question No. 58 withdrawn.*

## **Social Welfare Offices**

59. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when an Intreo office will open in County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10843/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** An INTREO office is planned for Navan, Co. Meath in 2015. The INTREO service will be delivered over two sites: the site of the existing DSP office on Kennedy Road and a new office in Abbey Mall. Refur-

bishment work is required in both locations. Work will need to be completed in Abbey Mall before work starts in Kennedy Road.

The Department is keen to see the works proceed as soon as possible and is waiting to receive notification from OPW of a start date for works in Abbey Mall.

### Unemployment Data

60. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide the register figures for February 2014 to February 2015 from the Finglas office, which show the change in unemployment for Ashbourne, and Ratoath, County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10844/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The catchment area for the Finglas Intreo Centre includes Dublin 11 (excluding Ballymun), Ashbourne, Rathoath, St. Margaret's and Kilsallaghan. The number of persons on the live register in the Intreo Centre from February 2014 to February 2015 is detailed in the attached tabular statement.

Information relating to a claimant's address is not currently coded to the geographical location of the address. As such it is not possible at present to accurately report persons on the live register living in a particular geographical area.

#### Intreo Centre Finglas Live Register February 2014 to February 2015

Month	Live Register	Percentage Month on Month Variance
Feb-14	6,054	-
Mar-14	6,100	0.8%
Apr-14	6,118	0.3%
May-14	6,056	-1.0%
Jun-14	6,250	3.2%
Jul-14	6,406	2.5%
Aug-14	6,345	-1.0%
Sep-14	5,879	-7.3%
Oct-14	5,644	-4.0%
Nov-14	5,384	-4.6%
Dec-14	5,559	3.3%
Jan-15	5,652	1.7%
Feb-15	5,601	-0.9%
Variance in live register February 2015 Vs. February 2014		-7.5%

*Question No. 61 withdrawn.*

### Live Register Data

62. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she has sought the advice of the Attorney General as to whether the division of the unemployed population into the registered unemployed, who are on the live register, and the unregistered

unemployed, who are not on the live register, is constitutional or in breach of the European Convention of Human Rights; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10862/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** I have not sought such advice from the Attorney General.

The official measure of unemployment is sourced from the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS). Measures of unemployment from the QNHS are based on International Labour Office (ILO) definitions. To be 'ILO unemployed' a person must in the week before the survey be without work but available for work and have recently taken specific job-search steps. These classifications are based on self-declaration by the individual respondent, rather than his/her situation in respect of welfare payments.

The Live Register, which captures those registering for unemployment benefits (including those working part-time and in casual work who draw partial unemployment payments), is an administrative record. It is not the official measure of unemployment, but can give indicative trends.

There are no plans to change these measures, and I do not see any reason to seek advice from the Attorney General on this matter.

### **Jobseeker's Allowance Data**

63. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide, regarding jobseekers, benefit and allowance details for any recent period of the number of claimants; the number of claimants claiming for an adult dependant; if the status or category of adult dependant will be explained; if numbers or percentages of husband, wife, adult, child, sibling and other will be provided; if numbers are available for same-sex adult dependant or if such data are known or irrelevant and the relationships it could be taken to include; if the management and control of the same-sex adult dependant data could be expected to change following the referendum in May 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10864/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** At the end of February there were 553,003 beneficiaries of jobseeker's assistance (JA) or jobseeker's benefit (JB). A breakdown of this figure by scheme, recipient, qualified adult dependent and qualified child increase (full or half rate) is detailed in the attached tabular statement.

A claimant of either JA or JB can claim for the payment of a qualified adult dependent allowance in respect of a spouse, a civil partner, a common law partner or a person with whom they are cohabiting.

Data on the gender of qualified adult dependents in receipt of payment under these schemes is not readily available from Department systems therefore I am not in a position to provide a breakdown of the number of qualified adults by reference to whether or not they share the same gender as the primary claimant.

I do not anticipate any requirement to introduce a gender based categorisation of adult dependents for statistical purposes if the proposition being put before the people in the thirty fourth amendment to the Constitution is accepted by the people. However, as you are aware, the recording and provision of statistical information is kept under on-going review to ensure that it meets the requirements of organisations such as the CSO and EUROSTAT and that it provides appropriate insights in support of policy decisions. Accordingly a gender based categorisation may be introduced in the future.

With regard to control processes the department takes the relationship status of adults living

at a single address into consideration when assessing their eligibility for receipt of payments including eligibility for either individual or qualified adult dependent payments. In this regard the marriage status, irrespective of gender, is a factor that is and, will continue to be, considered when assessing and/or reviewing claims.

Recipients and beneficiaries of jobseeker's allowance and jobseeker's benefit at the end of February 2015

Scheme	Number of Recipients	Qualified Adults	Qualified Child Full Rate	Qualified Child Half Rate
Jobseeker's Allowance	262,469	65,549	121,581	39,528
Jobseeker's Benefit	46,285	4,729	6,660	6,232

*Question No. 64 withdrawn.*

### Farm Assist Scheme

65. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding reviews under the farm assist scheme which are taking place at present; if these reviews will take a person's expenditure and outgoings into consideration; if not, the reason why; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10880/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** Farm Assist is a means-tested income support scheme for farmers. To qualify for the payment, a customer must be a farmer, farming land in the State, aged between 18 and 66 and satisfy a means test

The means test for Farm Assist takes account of virtually every form of income but assesses it in different ways and disregards various amounts. Different rules apply to income from farming and other forms of self-employment, income from certain schemes such as the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme (REPS) and Agri-Environmental Options Scheme (AEOS), income from employment and income from property and capital.

The review form does not have space to outline farm outgoings as it would typically not be feasible for customers to list the entire farm operating costs for the previous 12 month period on the form. However, a customer can supply details of outgoings with the completed review form if they so wish.

An examination of farm outgoings is included in the assessment process and the Social Welfare Inspector takes a detailed account of all operating costs when interviewing the customer. This usually gives the customer a good opportunity to explain both the income generated and the operating costs associated with the farm directly with an Inspector.

*Question No. 66 withdrawn.*

### Exceptional Needs Payment Appeals

67. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection notwithstanding that €1,500 has already been paid, if she will again examine an application for an

exceptional needs payment in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10898/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The person concerned recently received an exceptional needs payment of €1500 towards the cost of funeral expenses. A review of this decision was conducted by the Designated Person and the decision has remained unchanged. It is open to the person concerned to seek a review of this decision by writing to the SWA Review Officer, Social Welfare Local Office, 9th Lock Road, Clondalkin, Dublin 22, who will conduct an independent examination of the circumstances of the case and the decision, and determine if any further assistance may be given. The contact information of the SWA Review Officer has also been forwarded by post to the person concerned.

### **Rent Supplement Scheme Eligibility**

68. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if partial rent support will be offered in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10900/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The client concerned is in receipt of Rent Supplement and all payments are up to date.

### **Personal Public Service Numbers**

69. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the procedure to facilitate an application for a personal public service number in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10901/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Personal Public Service (PPS) Number is the individual's unique reference number for all dealings with Government Departments and public bodies.

Before a PPS Number can be allocated, the person making the application must provide evidence of identity, and demonstrate the reason why s/he requires the allocation of a PPS Number. PPS Numbers are issued by the Department following checks on an individual's identity. In addition, acceptable evidence of address must be provided. The process of allocating a PPS Number includes the capture of a photograph and signature. Photographs captured are compared with other photographs previously captured in order to detect any possible duplicates.

The PPS Number allocation centre for Kildare is at the Department's Employment Services Office at Main Street, Newbridge, Co Kildare. Alternatively, the person concerned may wish to consider calling to the Dublin PPS Number allocation centre at King's Inns Street, Dublin 1 if this would be more convenient.

### **Back to Education Allowance**

70. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will review the current position whereby weekly deductions in respect of her back-to-education allowance are being made on foot of a previous alleged overpayment over which she had no control in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10903/15]



**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** Following correspondence submitted from the person concerned, this case has been reviewed and the overpayment deductions have been reduced to €10.00 weekly with effect from 19/03/2015.

### **Rent Supplement Scheme Payments**

71. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the fact that rent support has ceased in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10911/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** On foot of recent contact with the client by the relevant Rents Unit, payment is reinstated subject to the provision of medical information. Payment, including arrears, will issue to the client on 24th March 2015.

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

72. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the hardship caused by the cessation of a one-parent family allowance in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare, who has two dependent children and works on average three to four hours per week, and who does not qualify for family income supplement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10912/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The entitlement to one parent family payment (OPF) of the person concerned is currently under review and has been suspended. The person concerned has been requested to provide certain documentation in order to progress this review, however this documentation is currently outstanding. On receipt of the requested documentation, her entitlement OPF will be examined and the person concerned will be advised of the outcome. It is open to her to submit an application to her local Community Welfare Service in the interim if she is experiencing undue financial hardship.

### **Disability Allowance Appeals**

73. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a disability allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10931/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 25 February 2015, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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

*Question No. 74 withdrawn.*

*Questions Nos. 75 and 76 answered with Question No. 45.*

*Question No. 77 withdrawn.*

### **Rent Supplement Scheme Eligibility**

78. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a person who is eligible to receive rent supplement will obtain same in respect of accommodation which that person can rent from a sibling; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10991/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys):** The rent supplement scheme provides support to eligible people living in private rented accommodation whose means are insufficient to meet their accommodation costs and who do not have accommodation available to them from any other source. There are approximately 70,200 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €298 million for 2015.

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

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

If the Deputy is referring to a particular case they should refer them to the community welfare service for advice on this matter.

### **Social Insurance Refunds**

79. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the total figures for refunds currently due to public sector employees, where the statute of limitations will apply, for Pay Related Social Insurance S Class payments, which were incorrectly charged on their declared self-employment income, and which should have been excluded, on the basis that they had already paid Class B, C, or D Pay Related Social Insurance classes, as provided for under Part III of the First Schedule of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005; the number of employees affected; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11034/15]

80. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the total amount for PRSI class S contributions, which were incorrectly charged to the self-employment income of public sector workers who had paid classes B, C, D PRSI contributions on their State incomes for the period 1990 to 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11035/15]

81. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the rationale for disregarding class S PRSI contributions for public sector workers, when determining their eligibility for the State pension in the years in which they had paid classes B, C, or D PRSI contributions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11037/15]

82. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the length of time there has been a requirement to pay Class S Pay Related Social Insurance contri-

butions on self-employment income; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11038/15]

83. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her plans to automatically refund public sector workers, overcharged Pay Related Social Insurance, or build an awareness as to their availability; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11039/15]

84. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her plans to extend the period for public sector workers to claim refund of PRSI, in view of the lack of information surrounding such refunds and the sizeable overcharging that has occurred over a long period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11040/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 79 to 84, inclusive, together.

Permanent and pensionable employees in the civil and public service recruited before April, 1995, are liable to pay social insurance contributions at the lower modified rates applying to PRSI classes B, C and D. Class B covers civil servants, registered doctors and dentists employed in the civil service and Gardaí. Class C covers commissioned officers of the Defence Forces and members of the Army Nursing Service. Class D covers employees in the public service other than those mentioned in class B and C.

Subject to having the required number of PRSI contributions, employees who pay modified contributions have access to the following payments:

- (a) widow's/widower's (contributory) pension and surviving civil partner's (contributory) pension;
- (b) guardians payment (contributory) and;
- (c) carer's benefit.

The payment of PRSI on self-employed income was introduced in 1988 when self-employed workers were brought into social insurance for the first time. As modified rate contributors already benefit from an occupational pension which is funded by the State, they are excepted self-employed contributors in accordance with Schedule 1, Part 3, paragraph 5 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005.

The obligation to return income, including self-employed income, at the correct PRSI rate rests with the individual. In cases where PRSI was incorrectly paid, a refund, subject to the four year rule, may be claimed. I do not propose to automatically refund public sector workers who incorrectly paid PRSI or to extend the period for public sector workers to claim a refund of PRSI. The provision in relation to the four year limit on the return of PRSI contributions was introduced in the Social Welfare and Pensions (No. 2) Act 2009 and has been in effect since 1 January 2010. The time limit governing the refund of PRSI contributions is in line with the arrangements of the Revenue Commissioners governing the refund of tax.

It may not be possible to provide all the figures sought by the Deputy. My Department is currently compiling the figures that are available and will provide these to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Tax Credits**

85. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of providing a child tax credit, in respect of each child under 18 years of age, at a rate of €300 a year; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [10761/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the estimated cost to the Exchequer of providing a child tax credit at an annual rate of €300 is in the order of €240 million.

These figures are estimates from the Revenue tax forecasting model using latest actual data for the year 2012, adjusted as necessary for income, self-employment and employment trends in the interim. They are estimated by reference to 2015 incomes and are provisional and may be revised.

### **Tax Reliefs Cost**

86. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department has prepared costings in recent times in respect of tax relief for child care payments to a registered childminder; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10762/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** It is not possible to provide an accurate cost to the Deputy of the provision of tax relief in respect of childcare fees, as reliable figures are not available for the numbers of children in childcare, the costs incurred by their parents and the number of parents who are paying tax.

However, a tentative figure can be calculated by using the 2013 “Indecon Report on Support for Childcare for Working Families and Implications for Employment” and statistics provided by the Department of Social Protection in relation to children in receipt of child benefit.

The Indecon report concluded that the average cost of childcare per pre-school child per week was €133 or €6,916 per annum in 2013. According to DSP figures on the numbers and ages of children in receipt of child benefit in 2013, there were approximately 489,500 children under 6 and 385,600 between the ages of 6 and 12.

If tax relief at the standard rate of 20% was provided on the costs of childcare in respect of even half of these children, it would result in a cost to the Exchequer of in the region of €340 million per annum in respect of those aged under 6 and €290 million in respect of those aged between 6 and 12; a total of €630 million per annum. However, it must be borne in mind that these figures are extremely tentative and the real cost could be much higher.

It is worth noting that with a view to increasing childcare places available, an exemption from tax is already available on income of up to €15,000 per annum for individuals who mind up to three children in their own home. The cost of this relief in 2012, the most recent year for which figures are available, was €1 million and it was availed of by 560 individuals.

Any tax relief for childcare fees could be seen to unfairly discriminate against those individuals who decide to stay at home to care for their children. While wanting to encourage participation in the workforce, equally we cannot say to individuals who stay at home to care for their own children that they are making a less valuable contribution to society.

In addition, tax relief would only be of benefit to those in the tax net and it is estimated that in 2015, 38% of income earners will be exempt from income tax. I would also have concerns that, based on experience with similar tax reliefs designed to reduce the cost of demand led goods and services in the past, any tax relief for the costs of childcare could inevitably be capitalised into the price for childcare services, resulting in a net transfer to childcare providers and no cost reduction for working parents.

### **Tax Rebates**

87. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Finance if a person (details supplied) in County Kildare has paid all the income tax due for each of the past three years; if that person is entitled to arrears in regard to each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10767/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I have been advised by the Revenue Commissioners that refunds of tax for 2012 and 2013 were made to the person concerned in January this year. In relation to 2014, the person concerned was issued, in January of this year, with a tax return for completion. The completed return is awaited so that matters for 2014 can be finalised.

### **Tax Data**

88. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide the full Revenue Commissioners details in respect of a person (details supplied) in terms of the dates that person was employed, paid tax, the rate of tax and the employer. [10771/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that based on the information provided, they do not have employment details for the person in question for the years 2002 to date.

To enable Revenue to check their records for the years prior to 2002, it will be necessary for the person to provide Revenue with the names of his employers and the approximate dates of employment. The person concerned should contact Ms Jacinta Hunston, Dublin Regional Office, Dublin Castle, Dublin 2, telephone 01 8589268, who will assist him in the matter.

### **Tax Rebates**

89. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Finance if a person (details supplied) in County Kildare is entitled to a tax refund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10872/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I have been advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the person concerned was asked by them to provide her 2014 Form P60 on 6 February 2015.

When that form is received Revenue, they will review the tax liability of the person concerned and will then be in direct contact with her in the matter.

### **Mortgage Resolution Processes**

90. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when the mortgage arrears resolution targets for 2015 will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10879/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** The Central Bank has informed me that as part of its supervisory interaction with the banks, it will continue to engage on the banks' strategies, management, measurement and reporting of the resolution and restructuring of commercial and mortgage non-performing loans (NPLs). The Central Bank has also advised me that, working in conjunction with the ECB (as part of the Single Supervisory Mechanism), it



expects that the vast majority of distressed mortgage borrowers will be in a concluded sustainable solution by the end of 2015, that the terms of restructures are being met in line with the existing MART requirements and all institutions continue to comply with the Central Bank's statutory Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears.

### **Mortgage Resolution Processes**

91. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will call in Allied Irish Banks to question the lack of meaningful engagement with two mortgage holders (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10917/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** As the Deputy will be aware I have no direct function in the relationship between banks and their customers. Decisions taken by the bank are a matter for the board and management of the institution. Notwithstanding the fact that the State is a shareholder in some of the institutions operating in the State, I must ensure that these banks are run on a commercial, cost effective and independent basis to ensure the value of the bank as an asset to the State.

I have also been informed that for confidentiality reasons AIB is not in a position to discuss details of individual circumstances. However the bank assures me that they always wish to engage with mortgage customers in difficulty in an effort to find a viable restructuring.

### **IBRC Liquidation**

92. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the nature of the report he is expecting shortly from the special liquidator of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation; when the liquidation of the corporation will be completed; if he is expecting a surplus payment to the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10936/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** The Special Liquidators are preparing a progress update report on the liquidation of IBRC for the Minister for Finance following consultation with the Department of Finance and in response to a request for a detailed update report made under Section 17 (c) of the Ministerial Instructions issued on 7 February 2013.

Upon its release this Friday (13th March 2015), this progress update report will be sent to the Finance Committee, submitted to the Companies Registration Office, and it will also be available on the Department of Finance website.

It will be some time before the Special Liquidators will be in a position to a) Confirm the expected timeline for the completion of the Special Liquidation; and (b) Advise on the likely dividends payable to each class of creditor.

This is as a result of: a) The early stage in the creditor adjudication process (Irish and UK creditors have up to 31 March 2015 and US creditors have until 31 May 2015 to submit their claims); b) The other contingent creditor claims which may crystallise from litigation; and c) The level of future receipts from the sale of the remaining assets.

### **Tax Compliance**

93. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary

Question No. 92 of 5 March 2015, if he will provide a breakdown of the €19,199,325 between tax, late payment interest charges and penalties; if he will provide a breakdown of the 128 cases concluded between total amounts due of less than €50,000, between €50,000 and €150,000, between €150,001 and €250,000, between €250,001 and €300,000 and greater than €300,000; if he will confirm the largest amount collected in a single case and break it down between tax late payment interest charges and penalties; if he will confirm the status of the remaining 203 compliance interventions; if the Revenue Commissioners examined a greater number than the total of 331 cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10937/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that of the almost €19.2 million in settlements to date, some €16.4 million relates to tax, €1.7 million relates to interest and €1.1 million relates to penalties.

A key focus of the Revenue enquiries in relation to the tax affairs of medical consultants is the tax issues arising from the incorporation of medical consultants' businesses and in that context Revenue have confirmed that the 128 compliance interventions concluded to date include both medical consultants and their company businesses, as appropriate 95 individual medical consultants and 33 consultants' company businesses.

The settlements can be broken down as follows:

No of cases	Settlement Amount
53	< €50,000
29	>€50,00 and < €150,000
22	>€150,000 and < €250,000
8	>€250,000 and < €300,000
16	>€300,000

As regards the matter of the largest settlement concluded to date, because of their confidentiality obligations under section 851A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, the Revenue Commissioners are precluded from giving details of the settlement on grounds that such a disclosure might facilitate the identification of the person concerned at a future date.

Finally, Revenue have confirmed that the remaining 203 open cases are at various stages of consideration. Revenue's enquiries in the medical sector are ongoing, with further interventions likely to be opened in the course of 2015.

### **IBRC Mortgage Loan Book**

94. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of Irish Bank Resolution Corporation residential mortgages and, separately, buy-to-let mortgages sold to date by the special liquidator; the persons to whom they were sold to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10961/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** As the Deputy is aware, for operational reasons the loan assets of Irish Bank Resolution Corporation Limited (in Special Liquidation) ( IBRC ) were divided into eight portfolios: Evergreen, Rock, Salt, Sand/Pearl, Stone, Pebble, Quartz and Amber.

The Sand portfolio originally comprised 12,702 Irish originated residential mortgages with a par value of €1.8bn, most of which had transferred from Irish Nationwide Building Soci-

ety. Buy to let mortgages accounted for 17% of the original Sand portfolio sold in the Special Liquidation.

Having given due consideration to the representations made by residential mortgage holders of IBRC and professional advice received, 64% of the Sand portfolio was sold to two buyers, namely Lone Star and Oaktree Capital Management, L.P.

Subsequently, the remaining 36% of the unsold residential mortgages from Project Sand were sold as two further sales tranches, Project Pearl Tranche 1 and Project Pearl Tranche 2. The first of these tranches was sold to The Governor and Company of the Bank of Ireland and the second tranche was sold to Mars Capital No. 3 Limited and Mars Capital No. 4 Limited.

### **Mortgage Protection Policies**

95. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views that through the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Bill 2014, the new owner of the mortgage in the event of it being an unregulated entity would now have to come under the umbrella of Central Bank of Ireland regulation and the same rights and protections would, therefore, be afforded to all mortgage holders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10962/15]

96. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance in the event that mortgage holders whose mortgages are currently held by an unregulated entity believe that the entity is not complying with the code of conduct on mortgage arrears and the consumer protection code the steps open to mortgage holders and the State bodies they may approach to seek to ensure the statutory protections are enforced. [10963/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 95 and 96 together.

The Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Bill 2015 was published in January 2015 following a commitment by this Government to protect consumers whose loans are sold by regulated financial service providers to unregulated firms. The Bill protects borrowers by requiring the entities dealing with the borrower to be regulated. Dealing with the borrower is credit servicing and the definition of credit servicing is broad. New owners of loan books who deal directly with borrowers, that is, who are servicing their own loan books, will be regulated. Otherwise they can have the loan book serviced by a regulated credit servicing firm.

Where the purchaser of a loan book is not a regulated entity in Ireland, the purchaser may voluntarily apply the Central Bank codes when managing loan books and may have internal complaints procedures in place. In the case of homeowners whose loan is now owned by an unregulated entity, the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) may be applied in the same way that it would be by a regulated lender. The CCMA is designed to support co-operating borrowers and provides extensive protection to customers in difficulty. It specifies the concrete actions lenders must take in the fair treatment of their customers in order to deal with their mortgage arrears situation as part of a resolution (or MARP) process; it also specifies the series of steps which borrowers need to take in order to engage with their lender.

Of course, voluntary compliance is not enforceable and borrowers do not have access to the Financial Services Ombudsman or the Central Bank about complaints. This is why the Government committed in March 2014 to ensuring that the same protections are available for all consumers whose loans have been sold.

The Government's objective was broadly supported in the Dáil at second stage which was taken in the Dáil on 4th February. As I said during second stage any points raised during the course of the debate will be carefully considered. I also said at that time that, as is usual, the Government is likely to have some amendments of its own at Committee Stage. Since then, Department of Finance officials have been in contact with the Central Bank and with the Office of the Attorney General to further progress the legislation.

The date for Committee stage has not yet been set.

### **EU-IMF Programme of Support**

97. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance when the European Commission advised his Department on the necessity to have in place a relationship framework, and operational protocol, to govern interactions between him, as Minister, and the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation; if that advice indicated that a set figure would be advisable to trigger consultation, where a transaction would have an adverse impact on the capital of the Corporation; if so, the reason there was a delay in implementing this advice; if he will make available, copies of all correspondence between his Department and the European Commission, relating to this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10965/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** As part of Ireland's third review under the EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support, a report on which was published in September 2011 and is available on the Department of Finance website, there were a number of conditions/actions which Ireland committed to. One of which was to develop a framework to govern the exercise of the State's ownership rights in the banks resulting from the capital injections, including to put in place relationship frameworks with the banks to protect the commercial basis for the banks' operations while under government ownership.

This matter was again discussed during the fourth review under the EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support, the report on which is also available on the Department of Finance website. It was noted in this report that the recently formed banking division in the Department of Finance were "currently developing relationship frameworks with the banks, to ensure that their core businesses will be run on a commercial basis". The fifth review, the report to which was published in March 2012 noted that "The authorities are finalizing relationship frameworks with the covered banks consistent with their commitment that their core business will operate on a commercial basis".

The relationship framework's were in place with each of the banks under State ownership before the report on the sixth review under the EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support was published in June 2012. Between each of these aforementioned reviews, officials in my Department were progressing the introduction of relationship frameworks with each of the banks through ongoing discussions and negotiation. Each of the Relationship Frameworks were prepared following significant legal and competition law input from the State's legal advisors, which included, among other advice, the inclusion of financial thresholds which would trigger consultation with the Minister for Finance. Before the Relationship Frameworks for each of the banks were introduced, it was required that they be reviewed by the Directorate-General for Competition and the Irish Competition Authority.

On 30 March 2012, Relationship Frameworks were put in place by my Department with each of the banks in which the State acquired an interest in the context of the financial crisis to govern the relationship between the State, as shareholder, and each bank. They were designed to recognise the separation of each bank from the State, to ensure their businesses

would be run on a commercial, cost effective and independent basis to ensure the value of the banks as an asset to the State, and to limit the State's intervention to the extent necessary to protect the public interest.

Under the Relationship Frameworks each bank was to remain a separate economic unit with independent power of decision with its board of directors and management team retaining responsibility for determining the bank's strategies and commercial policies and conducting its day-to-day operations.

As the Deputy is aware, IBRC had a Relationship Framework in place from July 2009 pursuant to the Anglo Irish Bank Corporation Act 2009. My officials will review the files surrounding the implementation of this original Relationship Framework for Anglo Irish Bank Corporation and will revert to the Deputy on this matter.

A revised Relationship Framework with IBRC was published on March 30, 2012 in line with the introduction of similar agreements for each of the other banks. That followed considerable interaction with the management and Board of IBRC.

### **IBRC Operations**

98. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance relating to the sale of a company by the former Irish Bank Resolution Corporation (details supplied), if his attention was drawn, in advance of the sale, that a portion of the agreed sale price was to be diverted to shareholders of the entity being sold, which resulted in significant sums being accrued to several persons on the board of the entity; if the board of the Corporation similarly were aware of this information; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10967/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I refer to my response to Question No. 67 answered on 11 March 2015 from which I have drawn in responding to this question.

As set out in the reponse to Question No. 67 answered on 11 March 2015, under the then existing relationship framework the bank was not obligated to consult with me before approving the sale of the company referred to by the Deputy.

Upon the receipt of critical representations following the transaction in question, Department of Finance officials inquired about the transaction with IBRC management as part of their regular engagement. Following initial discussions, they agreed with IBRC's Chairman and CEO that they would review the transaction involving the company referred to in the question in greater detail to better understand the decisions taken and the impact these decisions had on the process and the final recovery for the bank.

As part of the review, senior management of IBRC made Department of Finance officials aware of the details of the transaction process and the sale in meetings held between both parties. This review raised concerns with the quality of some of the decisions taken in respect of this transaction, including, among others, that a payment had been paid to the shareholders of the company referred to in the question.

In light of these concerns, I subsequently met with IBRC's Chairman and CEO to discuss concerns regarding this transaction. The Chairman and CEO confirmed to me that the transaction process and its terms, including the shareholder payment, had been thoroughly assessed by the IBRC Board and that the transaction was managed in the best manner possible to achieve the best result for the State.



**Tax Yield**

99. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to the Exchequer in terms of revenue foregone if the standard rate of tax was decreased to 19% and the entry point to the higher rate was increased by €1,000 to €34,800 for a single person, and by a similar amount for one-parent families, married couples with one income and married couples with two incomes. [10968/15]

100. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to the Exchequer in terms of revenue foregone if the standard rate of tax was decreased to 18% and the entry point to the higher rate was increased by €1,000 to €34,800 for a single person and by a similar amount for one-parent families, married couples with one income and married couples with two incomes. [10969/15]

101. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to the Exchequer, in terms of revenue foregone if pay-as-you-earn workers, and self-employed persons were treated equally for tax purposes on incomes up to €15,000, €20,000, €25,000 and €30,000, all for a single person. [10970/15]

102. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to the Exchequer in terms of revenue foregone if pay-as-you-earn workers and self-employed persons were treated equally for tax purposes up to an income of €34,800, for a single person. [10971/15]

103. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to the Exchequer in terms of revenue foregone if 80,000 fewer persons were paying universal social charge at the lower rates. [10972/15]

104. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to the Exchequer in terms of revenue foregone if the top rate of universal social charge for self-employed persons was abolished. [10973/15]

105. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to the Exchequer in terms of revenue foregone if changes were introduced, that is, the standard rate of tax was decreased to 19% and the higher rate of tax was decreased to 39%; the entry point to the higher rate was increased by €1,000 to €34,800 for a single person and by a similar amount for one-parent families, married couples with one income and married couples with two incomes; the bottom 80,000 payers of universal social charge were removed from the charge; and income tax liabilities were calculated at the same rate for pay-as-you-earn and self-employed persons up to a value of €25,000 in terms of income earned. [10974/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I proposed to take Questions Nos. 99 to 105, inclusive, together.

In relation to the questions regarding the cost of reducing the standard rate of income tax and increasing the entry point to the higher rate, I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the estimated first and full year cost to the Exchequer of decreasing the standard rate of income tax to 19% and increasing the standard rate band by €1,000 is €493 million and €667 million respectively. The estimated first and full year cost to the Exchequer of decreasing the standard rate of income tax from 20% to 18% and increasing the standard rate band by €1,000 is €894 million and €1.2 billion respectively.

In relation to the questions on the cost of equalising the tax treatment of PAYE and self-employed taxpayers at certain specified income levels, I assume that the Deputy wishes to ascertain the cost of extending the equivalent of the PAYE Credit to single self-employed individu-

als. The estimated cost to the Exchequer of extending the PAYE credit to such individuals on incomes of up to €15,000, €20,000, €25,000, €30,000 and €34,800 is €3 million, €13.5 million, €26.5 million, €38 million and €48 million respectively. It is important to point out that these estimates assume that the Deputy's proposal specifically excludes the extension of the PAYE credit to self-assessed individuals that are married or civil partners.

The estimated first and full year cost of exempting 80,000 income earners from liability to the Universal Social Charge (USC) is €16 million and €22 million respectively. This is costed on the basis of removing the 80,000 cases with the lowest incomes currently paying USC from the charge.

The estimated first and full year cost to the Exchequer of removing the 3% USC surcharge on self-employed income in excess of €100,000 is €54 million and €125 million respectively.

In relation to the question regarding reducing both income tax rates by 1%, increasing the standard rate band by €1,000, removing a further 80,000 income earners from USC and extending the equivalent of the PAYE credit to self-employed persons with incomes up to €25,000, I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the first and full year cost to the Exchequer is estimated to be in the order of €695 million and €971 million respectively.

All figures above are estimates for 2015, using the actual data for the year 2012 (the latest year for which data are available) adjusted as necessary for income, self-employment and employment trends in the interim. They are provisional and may be revised. A married couple or civil partners who have elected or have been deemed to have elected for joint assessment are counted as one tax unit.

### **Insurance Industry**

106. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the losses being incurred by certain insurers in the non-life sector, particularly in motor insurance; the steps the Central Bank of Ireland is taking to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10977/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** In my role as Minister for Finance I have responsibility for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. The day to day responsibility for the supervision of the solvency of Irish authorised financial institutions is a matter for the Central Bank of Ireland which is statutorily independent in the exercise of its regulatory and supervisory functions. My officials meet regularly with the Central Bank and are in ongoing engagement regarding developments and recent trends in the insurance industry.

The Central Bank operates a risk-based supervision model, PRISM. As part of this model and through its engagement with insurers, supervisors assess the financial performance of non-life insurers and the risks those non-life insurers are facing. This includes the mitigating actions taken by insurers. Where appropriate, Central Bank supervisors require insurers to take further actions to mitigate the risks they are facing.

The Central Bank have advised that the 2014 financial performance was unfavourable for a number of non-life insurers in the Irish market due to a number of reasons, most notably the impact of adverse weather conditions in the first quarter of 2014, an increase in claims frequency and severity, and developments in the legal environment in Ireland. The increase in claims frequency may also be attributable to an increase in risk exposure generally reflecting the improved economic environment.

## NAMA Staff Data

107. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of employees who have left the National Asset Management Agency to date by way of a redundancy programme; the typical severance payments that apply for individual staff members; if he will provide aggregate details of any payments made to date; if he will confirm the agency's current staff headcount, and the number expected to take up redundancy in 2015 and 2016; the overall severance amounts that are expected to be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10978/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** To date no staff member assigned to NAMA has left due to redundancy. A communication to NAMA Officers in January 2015 presented an outline of a possible redundancy programme.

The total number of staff assigned to NAMA was 363 at the start of March 2015. Numbers assigned to NAMA are projected to reduce to 292 by end December 2015 and to 125 by end December 2016 subject to the achievement of NAMA disposal targets as agreed by the NAMA Board. This will be reviewed in line with progress on meeting targets in 2015 and 2016.

I am aware of the significant risk to the performance of NAMA posed by the possible early departure of staff before their objectives are reached. This has been highlighted in the Section 227 review and by the Board of NAMA to me. I understand this has also been brought to the attention of the Oireachtas by NAMA. I am currently in discussions with the Board of NAMA on the appropriate measures to put in place to protect the financial performance of NAMA. I expect to reach agreement shortly and that the overall costs of any redundancy scheme, including statutory redundancy, will be not more than €20million.

## IBRC Bond Issues

108. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he is ruling out the possibility of payments being made to junior bondholders in the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation as a result of the special liquidation process; if he is prepared to issue a direction order that they would not be paid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10981/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** The Special Liquidators continue to implement the orderly and efficient wind down of Irish Bank Resolution Corporation Limited (in Special Liquidation) in accordance with the provisions of the IBRC Act and the instructions issued by me under the IBRC Act. By February 2015, loans with a par value of €21.7bn had been prepared, brought to market and ultimately sold through a series of sales processes which have delivered a very positive result in maximising the return to the creditors of IBRC, including the State. A significant amount of work remains to complete the liquidation of IBRC including, among other tasks:

- migrating activities and servicing of sold assets to their new owners and servicers ;
  - managing and realising value for the remaining loan book with a par value of €3.6bn;
  - liquidating or selling the remaining subsidiary interests;
  - continuing to manage significant levels of ongoing litigation and new litigation as it arises;
- and
- managing the operational wind down of IBRC's infrastructure in line with the continued

liquidation.

Further detail regarding the progress of the liquidation and remaining tasks to completion will be provided as part of the Progress Update Report to be released by the Special liquidators on Friday 13 March 2015.

As the Special Liquidators maximise the proceeds of the liquidation, it is important that they have a comprehensive view of the creditors who ultimately may be entitled to these proceeds. To this end, the Special Liquidators have published advertisements and written to those known creditors in order to finalise their claims in the liquidation. Creditors in the UK and Ireland have until 31 March 2015 to submit their claims and those creditors in the US have until 31 May 2015. Once all claims have been submitted, they will be reviewed in detail and adjudicated on by the Special Liquidators. In order to finalise this process, further information may be sought from some creditors in order to validate their claim. The Special Liquidators are unable to comment at this stage both on the level of proceeds that will ultimately be generated from the liquidation and on the level of valid creditor claims that will ultimately be received in respect of the liquidation. It is the balance between the proceeds generated and level of valid claims that will ultimately determine the dividend to which each creditor may be entitled.

The ultimate level of dividend paid, if any, to each creditor cannot be known until such time as all loan assets are sold, the total level of adjudicated creditors is finalised and the other contingent creditor claims which may crystallise, including those from litigation, are known.

For the payment of proceeds from the liquidation, unsecured creditors will rank in priority to the holders of subordinated debt. The priority for the distribution of assets under the Companies Acts is generally:

1. Costs and expenses of the ongoing liquidation;
2. Preferential creditors, including certain taxes and employee and pension claims arising prior to the date of liquidation (these claims are certain to be paid in full);
3. Amounts owing to NAMA under the Facility Deed acquired from the Central Bank which were secured by a floating charge over the bank's assets (these claims have been fully repaid and the floating charge has been released)
4. Unsecured creditors, including:
  1. Debts owing to the Minister/NTMA under ELG and to DGS;
  2. Unguaranteed debt/depositors;
  3. Unknown, including:
    1. Local authority development bonds;
    2. Suppliers / other normal unsecured creditors;
    3. Employees that are not preferential creditors;
    4. Contingent creditors and other potential costs principally relating to litigation, etc.
  5. Subordinated creditors;
  6. Members of the company - the Minister currently holds 100% of all shares and preference shares in the company.

## Insurance Compensation Fund

109. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the progress that has been made in respect of the liquidation of Setanta Insurance; if those caught up in outstanding claims are facing any losses; the role of the Insurance Compensation Fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10982/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** Setanta Insurance Company Limited is a Maltese incorporated company. Setanta was formally placed into liquidation by the Maltese Financial Services Authority on 30th April 2014 when a Liquidator was appointed under the provisions of the Maltese Companies Acts 1995. The liquidation is proceeding according to Maltese law.

The liquidation of an insurance company is a legally complex and time consuming process. The Liquidator has advised that settlements and refunds of premiums can only be paid out after all of the Company's liabilities are quantified. Since it could some time for a particular case to be finalised and, under the Statute of Limitations, claimants are given two years following an accident to make an initial claim, it may take some years before the liquidation process is completed.

The Insurance Compensation Fund provides for payments to meet the liabilities of insolvent insurers in certain cases where it is unlikely that claims can be met otherwise than from the ICF. Management and administration of the ICF is under the control of the President of the High Court acting through the Office of the Accountant of the Courts of Justice. The approval of the President of the High Court is required before any payments from the ICF to policyholders can commence and the Accountant has advised that clarification has been sought on some legal matters before progressing further.

The Accountant of the Courts of Justice can only deal with claims which are submitted by the Liquidator, so the advice to all claimants continues to be that they should contact the Liquidator of Setanta.

## Mortgage Data

110. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of residential mortgages that are classified as sub-prime; the number of sub-prime lenders, currently operating in the market; the total value of sub-prime mortgages outstanding; the rate of arrears on these mortgages; the actions specific to the sub-prime sector, which are being taken to address arrears; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10984/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** It is important to note that there is no such regulated category as "sub-prime lender". However, Retail Credit Firms are authorised to provide credit, in the form of cash loans, directly to individuals (these firms are not licensed to accept deposits). Some firms authorised in this category are mortgage lenders. Retail Credit Firms have been subject to regulation by the Central Bank since 1 February 2008. A register of all Retail Credit Firms is available on the Central Bank website at the following link:

<http://registers.centralbank.ie/DownloadsPage.aspx>

In light of their activities, Retail Credit Firms are not subject to the same prudential supervisory regime as licensed credit institutions; however, the same consumer protection framework applies to Retail Credit Firms as to all other regulated lenders, i.e. Irish licensed banks or banks



providing services into Ireland on a cross border/branch basis, including the Central Bank's statutory Consumer Protection Code and the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears ('CCMA').

The CCMA sets out requirements for all mortgage lenders, including Retail Credit Firms, dealing with borrowers in arrears or pre-arrears on a mortgage loan which is secured by their primary residence (as defined). It provides a strong consumer protection framework to ensure that borrowers struggling to keep up mortgage repayments are treated in a fair and transparent manner by their lender and that long term resolution is sought by lenders with each of their borrowers.

The Central Bank engages with Retail Credit Firms in relation to their treatment of borrowers under the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process (MARP), as provided for in the CCMA. The MARP sets out the steps which lenders must follow:

- Step 1: Communicate with borrower;
- Step 2: Gather financial information;
- Step 3: Assess the borrowers circumstances; and
- Step 4: Propose a resolution.

The Central Bank conducted a review of lenders' implementation of the CCMA in 2013. This review covered all lenders, including Retail Credit Firms.

In 2014 the Central Bank commenced a themed inspection of compliance with the CCMA and this is currently on going. The Central Bank plans to publish the results in the first half of 2015. The themed inspection includes onsite inspections of a number of regulated mortgage lenders to examine the processes in place around certain provisions of the CCMA and the controls lenders have in place to ensure compliance with those processes and the CCMA. The Central Bank expects to see that mortgage lenders have taken the letter and spirit of the CCMA seriously and it will seek to ensure that they can demonstrate compliance with its provisions. Where the Central Bank finds evidence of instances of non-compliance, it will continue to hold regulated lenders to account for any deficiencies in their policies and practices in this regard.

Data published by the Central Banks shows that non-bank lenders accounted for 5.6 per cent of the total stock of residential mortgage accounts outstanding at end-December 2014 (6.3 per cent in value terms). A total of 19,937 mortgage accounts issued by these lenders were in arrears of more than 90 days at end-December this figure accounted for 18.5 per cent of total mortgages in arrears over 90 days. The outstanding balance on these accounts was €4.6 billion, equivalent to 54.5 per cent of the total outstanding balance on all mortgage accounts issued by non-bank lenders

### **Mortgage Data**

111. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of complaints that have been made against banks for non-compliance with the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears, since it was instituted; the number that have been upheld; the sanctions that have been imposed on banks, for cases of non-compliance; the maximum sanction that may be handed down; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10985/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am informed by the Central Bank that it does not publish statistics in relation to the number complaints against banks for non-

compliance with the CCMA.

The Central Bank monitors compliance with the statutory consumer protection requirements through its on-going engagement with firms; reviews and research; themed inspections; mystery shopping; and advertising monitoring. The Central Bank regularly conducts themed inspections to ensure compliance with all of its codes of conducts, including the CCMA.

Themed inspections examine issues across a sector. Where a specific compliance issue arises with an individual firm, this is addressed directly with the firm and where appropriate, supervisory action is taken.

To date the Central Bank has not imposed a sanction on a mortgage lender in relation to breaches of the CCMA. However, it is important to note that supervisory intervention is not limited to the use of administrative sanctions.

The Central Bank has conducted a number of themed inspections on the CCMA since its introduction in 2009. Details of these themes and the feedback issued can be found at the following link: <http://www.centralbank.ie/regulation/processes/consumer-protection-code/compliance-monitoring/Pages/themed-inspection.aspx>

In 2014 the Central Bank commenced a themed inspection of compliance with the CCMA and this is currently on going. The Central Bank plans to publish the results in the first half of this year.

The themed inspection includes onsite inspections of a number of regulated mortgage lenders to examine the processes in place around certain provisions of the CCMA and the controls lenders have in place to ensure compliance with those processes and the CCMA. The Central Bank expects to see that mortgage lenders have taken the letter and spirit of the CCMA seriously and it will seek to ensure that they can demonstrate compliance with its provisions. Where the Central Bank finds evidence of instances of non-compliance, it will continue to hold regulated lenders to account for any deficiencies in their policies and practices in this regard.

### **Promissory Notes**

112. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the value of Government bonds held by the Central Bank of Ireland, in respect of the arrangement entered into to replace the promissory notes; if he will provide details of the disposal, to date, of any of these bonds; the minimum disposal schedule agreed with the European Central Bank; if there have been any changes to this agreed minimum disposal schedule; the annual coupon / amount of interest being paid by the Government to the Central Bank of Ireland, in respect of the bonds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10986/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** As part of the liquidation of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation (IBRC) on 6 February 2013, the Central Bank of Ireland (CBI) acquired €25.034 billion of Floating Rate Notes (FRNs) and €3.461 billion of the fixed rate 5.40% Treasury Bond 2025. The table below sets out the details in respect of each of the eight FRNs and the fixed rate bond, including the applicable interest rates, maturity dates and the nominal amounts originally acquired by the CBI. Reported subsequent movements in the CBI's holdings are reflected in the notes below the table.

Full details of the FRNs and the fixed rate bond, including the offering circulars can be found on the website of the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) at <http://www.ntma.ie/business-areas/funding-and-debt-management/government-bonds/>

Note Type	Rate	Maturity	Nominal
Floating Rate Note	Euribor+268bps	06/18/53	5,034
Floating Rate Note	Euribor+267bps	06/18/51	5,000
Floating Rate Note	Euribor+265bps	06/18/49	3,000
Floating Rate Note	Euribor+262bps	06/18/47	3,000
Floating Rate Note	Euribor+260bps	06/18/45	3,000
Floating Rate Note	Euribor+257bps	06/18/43	2,000
Floating Rate Note	Euribor+253bps	06/18/41	2,000
Floating Rate Note	Euribor+250bps	06/18/38	2,000*
Fixed Rate	5.40%	03/13/25	3,461**

\* On 22 December 2014, the NTMA purchased from the CBI and subsequently cancelled €500 million of the FRN due to mature on 18 June 2038. Following the cancellation, the total nominal outstanding for this FRN declined from €2 billion to €1.5 billion and the overall total nominal outstanding for all of the FRNs from €25.034 billion to €24.534 billion

\*\* By end December 2013 the CBI had sold €350 million of the 5.40% Treasury Bond 2025. As of 9 March 2015, the total nominal outstanding of this bond was €11,745 million.

In its 2013 Annual Report the CBI stated that it intends to sell the combined portfolio of the FRNs and the fixed rate bond as soon as possible, provided conditions of financial stability permit. The CBI stated it will sell a minimum of these securities in accordance with the following schedule: to end 2014 (€0.5 billion), 2015-2018 (€0.5 billion per annum), 2019-2023 (€1 billion per annum), and 2024 on (€2 billion per annum until all bonds are sold). As part of these minimum sales, the CBI disclosed in its 2013 Annual Report that it had sold €350 million of the 5.40% Treasury Bond 2025 by end December 2013. There were no sales, purchases or transfers of FRNs in the year 2013.

The CBI has confirmed to officials in my Department that its approach to the disposal of these bonds remains unchanged: they will be sold as soon as possible, provided conditions of financial stability permit, with the minimum disposal schedule for future years, as already mentioned, being unchanged. I have been advised by the NTMA that total cash interest payable on the FRNs was €638 million in 2013 and €755 million in 2014. As noted above, the CBI sold €350 million of its holdings of the 5.40% Treasury Bond 2025 in 2013. However, as the CBI's bond holdings during 2014 have not been published, it is not possible to state the level of interest the CBI received on its holdings in 2014. The next CBI annual report will contain the updated overview of their holdings of these bonds as at YE2014 and is expected to be published in April 2015.

### Tax Credits

113. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the reason a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11 has had arrears deducted from a Department of Social Protection payment due to an incorrect allocation of tax credits; the reason for the incorrect allocation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11004/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners the information available to Revenue had indicated that the person concerned and her spouse were in receipt of separate pensions from the Department of Social Protection (DSP). On that basis the spouse of the person concerned would have been entitled to an additional PAYE Tax Credit or an additional Standard Rate Band in respect of the Qualified Adult portion

of his pension Subsequent information received by Revenue from the DSP, indicated that the person's spouse is in fact in receipt of an Old Age Pension with an increase in respect of a Qualified Adult. In the circumstances the person's spouse is entitled only to one PAYE Tax Credit.

In March 2015, following receipt of a health expenses claim for 2014, a review of the joint liability of the person concerned and her spouse was carried out by Revenue. An underpayment of tax arose due to the fact that they have no entitlement to an additional PAYE Tax Credit of €1,650 or the additional Standard Rate Band. The underpayment will be collected by reducing the tax credits of the person's spouse over a 3 year period commencing on 1 January 2016.

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

### **European Central Bank**

114. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the European Central Bank programme of quantitative easing €1.1 trillion is being used to create further debt, instead of providing deficit easing across Ireland, and Europe; and if this process of quantitative easing displays the complete subjugation of the European Union to the sick debt-based money system, where money is printed to create debt; if this is the case, the reason money is not being printed to resolve debt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11018/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** The European Central Bank's mandate is price stability, which it defines as an annual rate of inflation close to, but below, 2 per cent. Inflation in the euro area has been below levels consistent with price stability for some time and, in fact, became negative last December and remained negative in January and February. The fall in inflation, combined with the fact that inflationary expectations have begun to drift downwards, pose a risk to price stability.

As a result, and with policy rates effectively at zero per cent, the ECB, on 9 March, launched an expanded asset purchase programme to include bonds issued by euro area central governments, agencies and European institutions. Under this expanded programme, the combined monthly purchases of public and private sector debt securities will amount to €60 billion. These monthly purchases are intended to be carried out from March 2015 until end-September 2016 and will, in any case, be conducted until inflation moves onto a path consistent with price stability.

The ECB does not have a mandate to reduce existing debts or deficits of the private or public sectors. In addition, monetary financing by the ECB of the public sector is prohibited under the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. By purchasing debt in the secondary market, however, the ECB can affect the cost of financing in the economy more broadly, and this will help towards achieving price stability.

In this regard, the Irish economy should benefit from the monetary stimulus through a number of channels which will create employment and reduce unemployment. For example, the economy should benefit directly through improved financing conditions for households and firms. In addition, the euro area is Ireland's single largest export destination; therefore, by supporting real economic activity and raising inflation in the euro area this will underpin the growth of Irish exports. Monetary policy also works through the exchange rate channel the depreciation of the euro will provide a further boost to Irish exports.

So quantitative easing will be beneficial in terms of supporting economic recovery, thereby

generating employment in Ireland and in the wider euro area. Living standards of euro area citizens will benefit accordingly.

An inflation rate which is consistent with price stability, and which is supported by appropriate fiscal policies and the implementation of the necessary structural reforms by Member States across the euro area, will facilitate economic recovery and the associated repair of public and private sector balance sheets.

### **Property Tax Collection**

115. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding a local property tax payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11019/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by Revenue that there are eight different payment methods available to assist property owners in meeting their Local Property Tax (LPT) obligations in a way that best suits individual circumstances.

The payment methods include a number of phased options that facilitate payment of LPT in equal amounts over the course of the year rather than having to meet the liability in a single payment. These options are, Deduction at Source from salary or pension, monthly Direct Debits through banks and certain credit union accounts and weekly/monthly payments through four approved Payment Service Providers. The four approved Payment Service Providers are An Post, Payzone, Omnivend and PayPoint.

In regard to the specific case to which the Deputy refers, a reminder notification in respect of the 2015 LPT liability recently issued to the person in question because he did not pay the amount due or confirm his preferred payment method to Revenue by the required date.

However, Revenue subsequently had direct contact with the person and a member of the LPT team assisted him in setting up a suitable phased payment arrangement through one of the Payment Service Providers.

Revenue has assured me that because the person in question has now confirmed his payment preference in respect of his 2015 LPT obligations there will be no need for any further compliance action.

### **Tax Compliance**

116. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide an update on the initiative by the Revenue Commissioners to ensure tax compliance among pensioners in 2012, following on from the 150,000 letters issued by the Revenue Commissioners in early January 2012; the number of the 150,000 pensioners who had an additional tax liability; if the budget day estimate of an additional €45 million revenue in 2012 from the initiative was accurate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11023/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** The Deputy will be aware from my reply to Question No. 121 on 19 December 2013 that the Revenue Commissioners have previously confirmed that approximately €65 million in extra tax has been secured for the Exchequer from the taxpayers concerned for the year 2012.

By way of update, I am also advised by the Commissioners that as a result of their com-



pliance programme on taxpayers who had not previously declared their Department of Social Protection payments for the years prior to 2012, an additional liability of approximately €28.5 million in tax, interest and penalties has been secured from the highest risk cases.

### **Economic Data**

117. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the fall in construction activity, as highlighted by the February purchasing managers' index figures; his further views that this is related to the recent introduction of rules relating to mortgage lending; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11026/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am aware of the recently released Purchasers Managers Index (PMI) figures for February. The PMI for February 2015 reported a figure of 52.0 for total activity in the construction sector. As any reading in excess of 50 indicates expansion, the index points towards a slight increase in activity compared to January 2015. However, while the index indicates that the sector is expanding, the rate of expansion has slowed compared with previous monthly surveys.

The index is composed of three sub-sectors: housing; commercial; and civil engineering. While the three sub-sector indices were weaker than the previous month, only the civil engineering sub-sector contracted in February. As the Central Bank's macro prudential mortgage rules apply only to residential mortgage lending, this suggests that the weaker PMI figure for February is not being driven by the mortgage lending rules.

The PMI data should not be viewed in isolation. The underlying trend has been one of recovery in the construction sector. Indicators such as the most recent Quarterly National Household Survey from the Central Statistics Office show a year-on-year increase in construction sector employment of 13,000 in the final quarter of 2014.

As the Deputy will be aware, Construction 2020 is the whole-of-government strategy to address issues that might impede the proper functioning of the property market, and aims to support increased supply in the wider housing market. The Strategy involves ensuring that any critical bottlenecks that might prevent the sector in meeting residential and non-residential demand are addressed through 75 individual time-bound actions. For example, last week my Department organised a conference on financing options for construction and development to facilitate dialogue and mutual understanding between developers and debt and equity providers. This will assist in the development of a sustainable financing model for the sector, thereby contributing to enhanced supply over time.

### **Tax Yield**

118. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield from betting duty in each year from 2010 to 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11027/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that a wide range of statistical information is available on the Commissioners' new, enhanced, Statistics webpage: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/index.html>.

In relation to the Deputy's question, detailed information on Excise receipts by commodity can be found at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/net-receipts-by-commodity.pdf>. Data for 2014 will be published in due course, 2013 is the most recent for which detailed data are

available.

I am further informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the yield from betting duty in each year from 2010 to 2014 is shown in the table below.

Betting Receipts	€
2010	30,919,211
2011	27,096,522
2012	27,087,826
2013	25,421,396
2014 (Prov)	26,161,214

The figures shown for 2014 are provisional at this time and may be subject to revision.

### Mortgage Interest Rates

119. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will encourage lenders to allow borrowers who are moving home to be able to keep their tracker mortgage rate; the number of cases in which banks facilitated this in 2013 and 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11028/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** The decision to advance credit, and the terms on which such credit is advanced, is a commercial decision for individual lenders. In that regard, there are no particular requirements to allow or prevent banks from allowing borrowers who are moving to keep their tracker mortgage rate. I am informed by the Central Bank that a number of banks currently offer various tracker mover products but it does not have data on this.

### Mortgage Lending

120. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance in the case of each of the State-supported banks, the amount of capital it sets aside for losses in respect of residential mortgage lending and buy-to-let mortgages; the amount of this capital that has been used to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11029/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** All relevant disclosures in relation to each bank's residential mortgage portfolios are available in the risk management sections of their financial reports. For information the links to the financial reports are set out below with references to the relevant page numbers.

Bank of Ireland (pages 52 to 84)

<http://www.bankofireland.com/fs/doc/wysiwyg/boi-preliminary-statement-dec-2014.pdf>

AIB (pages 51 to 156)

[http://investorrelations.aib.ie/content/dam/aib/investorrelations/docs/resultscentre/annual-report/aib\\_afr\\_2014.pdf](http://investorrelations.aib.ie/content/dam/aib/investorrelations/docs/resultscentre/annual-report/aib_afr_2014.pdf)

Permanent TSB (Financial Risk note 33, pages 128 to 159)

<http://www.permanenttsbgroup.ie/~media/Files/I/Irish-Life-And-Permanent/Attachments/>

### **Financial Services Ombudsman Data**

121. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of complaints received by the Financial Services Ombudsman regarding the sale of whole-of-life insurance policies over the past five years; the number of complaints upheld; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11041/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** The Financial Services Ombudsman is independent in the carrying out of his duties to investigate, mediate and adjudicate complaints about the conduct of regulated financial service providers. I, as Minister for Finance, have no role in the day to day workings of the office of the Ombudsman or in the decisions which he takes.

A “Whole of Life” policy pays a specified amount on death provided that premiums are paid up until the death of the policyholder. In response to previous similar Parliamentary Questions, the Central Bank advised that premiums for such policies are not fixed and can increase over the duration of the policy.

The Office of the Financial Services Ombudsman has informed me that it does not have a product category on its Case Management System which refers to Whole of Life Insurance Policies only. The Ombudsman has advised that he collects data in relation to all Life policies and does not differentiate between them. For this reason, it is not possible to provide the numbers of complaints upheld in relation to this particular category of insurance. However, the Ombudsman does have limited information on Whole of Life policies and he was able to provide details on the number of new complaints received over the last five years:

2010 - 168

2011 - 152

2012 - 218

2013 - 193

2014 - 105

The Ombudsman has confirmed that no findings in relation to mis-sale of Whole of Life policies have been issued by his Office in the past five years.

### **Heritage Sites**

122. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the process for applying for a boat licence for a local boat owner to provide service to the Skellig visitor centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10774/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Office of Public Works (OPW) is currently preparing a competition process for a new Boat Permit at Skellig which will be publicly advertised this year.

The competition will be advertised extensively in the local press and on the OPW Website and any party who wishes can apply.

All applications will be afforded due consideration under the criteria as set out in the application process.

### **State Properties**

123. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Office of Public Works has been asked to compile a list of State-owned land and buildings to be used to provide child care facilities; when this will be completed and published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10759/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Commissioners of Public Works have not been requested to compile a list of State-owned land and buildings to be used to provide child care facilities.

### **Public Sector Staff Training**

124. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to ensure more staff within the public service are trained to use sign language; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11014/15]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin):** The Deputy may wish to note that the development of an overarching strategy for training across the civil service, including language training, is a key action under the Civil Service Renewal Plan and as such is a key priority for my Department. The Plan includes a commitment to establish a new shared model for delivering learning and development. As part of this action it is intended to develop a learning and development strategy based on future skill requirements and to establish a new shared model to deliver a suite of common learning and development programmes. The requirement for all language training including sign language training provided on a uniform basis across the civil service will be assessed in the course of this process. If the Deputy wishes to communicate any information that he may have available to him that could be of assistance in ascertaining the future requirement for sign language training in the civil service and should be factored into the shared service project for learning and development he should certainly communicate it to my Department.

### **Employment Rights**

125. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will request the National Employment Rights Authority to investigate the position of two company employees (details supplied) who have been owed wages by their employer since 2010; if it is considered that one employee has been constructively dismissed; if it is considered the other employee, who is on sick pay, is ill due to stress arising from non-payment of a regular wage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10854/15]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The details as supplied have been forwarded to the relevant Inspector of the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA) for investigation in relation to wages stated to be unpaid since 2010. If an employee believes that he or she has been constructively dismissed within the meaning of the Unfair Dismissals Acts it is for the Rights Commissioners Service and/or the Employment Appeals Tribunal to adjudicate upon the matter in circumstances where a complaint has been made

by an employee or their representative. The relevant form for the referral of a complaint under the Unfair Dismissals Acts can be found on the Workplace Relations website at [www.workplacerelations.ie](http://www.workplacerelations.ie). Complaints can be completed and submitted on-line.

Written notice of a complaint under the Unfair Dismissals Act must be made within six months of the date of the alleged dismissal which may be extended by a further six months if the Rights Commissioner or the Employment Appeals Tribunal is satisfied that the failure to present the complaint within the normal six month period was due to reasonable cause.

There is no statutory requirement for an employer to pay an employee while on sick leave. However conditions in relation to payment while on sick leave may have been agreed under a contract of employment. I am not in a position to comment on possible causes of illness.

### **Regional Aid**

126. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the impact of the extension of the regional aid map to include Athy, County Kildare; if this has led to direct State aid to new or existing companies in the area to date; the efforts that have been taken to advertise this incentive for the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10940/15]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Regional Aid Guidelines enable the State to grant State Aid, at enhanced rates, to businesses in order to support new investment and new employment in productive projects in Ireland's most disadvantaged regions. This helps the convergence of these regions with the more advantaged regions of the Union. Regional Aid is also provided under Schemes for tourism grants, marine tourism, urban and rural renewal and other tax-based development schemes. All such aid come from the exchequer, i.e. there is no EU or other external funding.

The 2014-2020 Regional Aid Guidelines entered into force on 1 July 2014. Areas accounting for 51.28% of Ireland's population are now eligible for assistance under the Regional Aid Guidelines. This represents a substantial increase from the 25% originally proposed by the Commission, and an increase from the 50% under the 2007-2013 Map.

Athy is included in the 2014-2020 Regional Aid Map for Ireland, with the exception of the Electoral District of Ballymore Eustace (population of 1,475). Ballymore Eustace was excluded from the designated map in order to ensure Ireland adhered to its overall allocated national coverage of 51.28% of population.

It is important to note that all of the Country, including those areas not entitled to Regional Aid, can qualify for other forms of State support e.g. Research & Development Aid, SME Investment Aid, Training Aid, and Aid for Environmental protection etc.

In respect of Athy, the Deputy is correct in acknowledging an improvement in the aid rate applicable for eligible projects. This specifically relates to the aid rates for Capital Employment support under the Regional Aid Guidelines of 10%, 20% and 30% for small medium and large companies for the period 2014-2020. All projects are subjects to assessment in terms of commercial, technical and market due diligence and should represent value for money in terms of the State's investment. Five companies in the Athy region were approved payments by Enterprise Ireland. Enterprise Ireland also organised a presentation for the Athy Chamber in September 2014 with reference to the changes in the Regional Aid Map. For reasons of confidentiality, Enterprise Ireland does not give details of individual grants approved to clients.



The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) in the Counties covered by the Regional Aid Programme, including Kildare, are fully apprised of the Guidelines. All LEOs provide a signposting and referral service for their clients to supports available from other State Agencies and this would encompass information on the Regional Aid Schemes operated by Agencies such as Enterprise Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta, etc.

In April 2014, IDA Ireland issued a press release welcoming the publication of the new Regional Aid Map and highlighting the new areas being encompassed, including Athy. Engagement with regional media followed, explaining how the scheme worked and its benefit as an added incentive. There was also engagement on the subject with a number of elected representatives in regions. It is to be expected that the change will take time to translate into direct State aid to either IDA client companies or to new companies in the new regions included. For reasons of confidentiality, IDA does not provide details of individual grants approved to companies. Grant aid has been provided to IDA client companies in County Kildare but not to date in Athy in the period since 1 July 2014.

### **IDA Portfolio**

127. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation his views on specific examples of the IDA actively marketing the former AT Cross building in Ballinasloe, County Galway; the potential for a circa 54,000 sq. ft. facility on the same site with existing planning permission and another circa 25,000 sq. ft. building in Ballinasloe; if the agency is following any leads in respect of any or all three; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11008/15]

128. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to a previous parliamentary question, if he will specify the other circa 25,000 square foot building in Ballinasloe, County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11009/15]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 127 and 128 together.

For reasons of client confidentiality and commercial sensitivity, IDA Ireland does not divulge the specific details of its marketing efforts in relation to any individual property other than to say that the property is being actively marketed by the Agency. Details of negotiations which the Agency may be engaged in or details relating to any prospective client are not released until such discussions have been successfully concluded and, even then, if the company involved does not wish for publicity then there is no publicity. Regarding the 25,000 sq. ft. building in Ballinasloe, which I mentioned in my response to Question Number 246 on 3 March. IDA Ireland has informed me that again for reasons of client confidentiality and commercial sensitivity it is precluded from giving any further information relating to the facility other than to say that is a high quality technology building, which would be suitable to facilitate potential projects from overseas investors should they require a property of this size and/or a facility Ballinasloe.

Competition for inward investment has never been as intense as it is today. IDA Ireland and its clients are very concerned lest information relating to a prospective investment gets into the public domain in advance of the conclusion of discussions with the Agency. Such premature disclosure could jeopardise negotiations on a project and could lead to the loss of a project even at an advanced stage in discussions. As the Deputy is aware not every investment won by IDA Ireland is publicly announced and many investments go ahead without being announced publicly. For example during 2014 IDA Ireland won a total of 197 new investments but there were only 66 investment announcements.

In the circumstances, I am sure the Deputy will appreciate that it would be inappropriate for me to comment further on this matter.

### **Job Losses**

129. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide an update on the job losses in the Cadbury plant, Rathmore, County Kerry, with regard to minimising the job losses; the efforts being made by Enterprise Ireland in providing alternative and substantial additional jobs in County Kerry; the support and assistance to be provided to the workers who may be departing the company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11011/15]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Firstly I should state that I fully understand the concerns of the workers and their families as they receive this very difficult news. All the supports of the State will be made available to support the workers, as and when needed, and for the creation of jobs in the area.

I should also point out that I had engaged with senior management of the company in question and urged them to reconsider the decision, and asked if there is anything the State or its agencies could do to mitigate its effects. However, due to a cost base which is significantly out of line with competitor countries, the company believed it had no alternative to a rationalisation at its Kerry plant. The company has pledged to support departing workers with placement services. The company have also said that they will be working closely with workers in an effort to ensure that the impact of its decision is minimised to the greatest extent possible and to discuss investment it will be making in Ireland in order to build a stronger business here for the long term.

In response to these developments, I have established an inter-agency group to coordinate the Government's response to the job losses at the company. The group will be led by Enterprise Ireland and will seek to secure alternative employment for the areas affected. It will also ensure that departing workers have access to supports they need from State agencies for retraining, access to social welfare supports and access to advice on employment rights. The group will comprise representatives from Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Local Authority, Local Enterprise Office, Department of Social Protection and Solas.

In an effort to coordinate constructive cross-party action to support workers affected, I invited TDs and Senators from the areas affected, including Kerry, to a briefing in my Department on the situation last week.

In addition to the above, Enterprise Ireland has had an ongoing intensive engagement with the company with a view to mitigating the job losses across the group in Ireland. On foot of the company's announcement of job losses in the company including its plant in Rathmore, Enterprise Ireland has met the management of the company and further meetings are scheduled in the coming days. In addition, Enterprise Ireland will continue to support entrepreneurs, enterprises and job creation in Kerry.

For workers who might consider starting their own business, the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are the first-stop-shop for support to anyone wishing to start or expand a business, focussing on the micro-enterprise sector (10 employees or less). The LEOs can provide information, advice and guidance on the range of State supports to enterprise and signpost customers to the appropriate contacts across the various agencies that provide them. For businesses in the manufacturing or internationally traded services sectors, the LEOs can provide direct financial

support to develop or implement a business idea. The LEOs can also provide access to loan finance through the Microfinance Ireland Scheme. For other sectors the LEO may be able to provide non-financial supports such as specific and tailored business training or mentoring to help a business to develop. Each LEO is also active in developing local networks and other activities and events that bring business people and entrepreneurs together as a means of supporting each other. Further information can be found on the LEO website at [www.localenterprise.ie](http://www.localenterprise.ie).

### **Single Payment Scheme Appeals**

130. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding a review under the single payment scheme 2013 in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10756/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** As detailed in my reply to the previous Parliamentary Question on this case, the persons named failed to co-operate with a Bovine IDR inspection under the 2013 Single Farm Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Areas' schemes. The inspection was arranged for 26 April 2013. On 25 April the person named contacted the inspecting officer to inform him that they would not allow the inspection to take place. In submitting an application under the Single Payment Scheme, applicants agree to permit officials of the Department to carry out farm inspection with or without prior notice. The person named was informed that failure to co-operate with the inspection would result in a nil payment. The person named continued to refuse to allow the inspection to be undertaken and as a result a 100% penalty was recorded against the relevant payments for 2013.

The persons named requested a review of this decision. The outcome of this review was to uphold the original decision and the persons named were informed of this decision on 29 May 2014.

The person named appealed this decision to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office. The outcome of this appeal, which was to uphold the Department's original decision, was notified to the applicant on 28 November 2014. The person named was also advised that if they considered that they had been treated unfairly by that office they could raise the matter with the Office of the Ombudsman.

I note from the outcome of the appeal notification that the medical evidence provided by the person named was considered as part of the appeal process. However it was determined that there were no grounds on which this evidence could be accepted as a mitigating factor in the case, as it identified that the person named was admitted and discharged from hospital some 18 days prior to the date the inspection was scheduled to take place. In addition, no further medical evidence was provided to indicate that the person named was not in a fit state to facilitate the inspection on the day it had been scheduled to take place.

### **Woodland Improvement Scheme**

131. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide the number of hectares planted and the total funding allocated under the native woodland scheme in each year from 2007 to 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10837/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The information requested for each of the years in respect of the Native Woodland (Establishment) Scheme

is as follows:

-	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Ha. planted	237.47	124.57	362.73	172.21	29.88	16.51	72.92
Expenditure€000	1,223.1	771.3	2,326.5	1,536.2	806.6	726.5	1,277.3

### Woodland Improvement Scheme

132. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of applicants who were successful in receiving grant aid under the native woodland scheme in the years 2007 to 2013; the total number of successful applicants who qualified for the farmer premia rate; the total number who qualified for the non-farmer premia rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10838/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The following is the information requested in respect of the Native Woodland (Establishment) Scheme for each year:

-	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
No. of Applicants	11	29	22	11	6	4	26
Farmer	10	20	18	7	5	4	18
Non-Farmer	1	9	4	4	1	—	8

### Woodland Improvement Scheme

133. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the budget allocated to support afforestation under the native woodland scheme in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10839/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The budget allocated in 2015 to support afforestation under the native woodland element of the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme (2014-2020) is €2,749,500.

### Felling Licences Applications

134. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an application for a felling licence will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; the reasons for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10842/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** An application for a General Felling Licence was received from the person named on 27 January 2015. Following an initial inspection of the application by the Department, the application was referred to National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) on 26 February 2015 for its observations. NPWS is allowed a 6-week period to respond with its comments; a response is therefore

required by 9 April 2015. A decision on this application will be given in a timely manner once a response is received from NPWS.

### **Single Payment Scheme Payments**

135. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding payments in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10856/15]

**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 28 April 2014. However, as the person named has not established entitlements under the Single Payment Scheme there is no payment due to the applicant under that Scheme. In order to be eligible for payment under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, applicants must meet the eligibility criteria of the Scheme including meeting the minimum stocking density requirement of 0.15 livestock units per hectare. As the person named did not meet the minimum stocking density requirement, he is not eligible for payment under the Scheme.

### **Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments**

136. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding a payment under the agri-environment options scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10882/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The person named was approved for participation in the 2011 Agri Environment Options Scheme (AEOS 2) with effect from 1 September 2011 and payment has issued in respect of the 2011, 2012 and 2013 Scheme years. Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. These checks have been successfully completed in respect of the 2014 Scheme year and 75% payment will issue shortly. The balancing 25% payment will follow thereafter.

### **Seirbhísi trí Ghaeilge**

137. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara an bhfuil sé i gceist aige cruinniú a eagrú i gConamara faoin Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environmental Scheme, agus faoin gcomhbheartas talmhaíochta; an bhfuil sé i gceist aige a chinntiú go mbeidh oifigigh i láthair ag cruinniú mar seo a bheidh in ann plé le muintir na Gaeltachta i nGaeilge; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [10885/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** D'fhógair mo roinn le déanaí go réachtálfar sraith imeachtaí eolais timpeall na tíre, agus beidh na hábhair seo a leanas faoi chaibidil: GLAS, an Scéim Íocaíochta Bhunúsach, an Anaclann Náisiúnta agus Glasú. Réachtálfar ceann de na cruinnithe sin in óstán Connemara Coast, Na Forbacha, Co. na Gaillimhe an 25 Márta. Tá sé beartaithe go bhfreastalófar ar phobal níos leithne, agus ní hamháin pobal na gcainteoirí Gaeilge; dá bharr sin, réachtálfar na himeachtaí trí mheán an Bhéarla. Beidh leaganacha Gaeilge de théarmaí agus coinníollacha na scéimeanna uile ar fáil ar shuíomh



12 March 2015

gréasáin na Roinne go luath, áfach. Ina theannta sin, beidh an Roinn sásta glacadh agus dul i ngleic le ceisteanna trí Ghaeilge tríd an líne chabhrach le haghaidh GLAS ar an suíomh gréasáin: [glas@agriculture.gov.ie](mailto:glas@agriculture.gov.ie).

### **Harbours and Piers Funding**

138. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his officials will engage with local community representatives, to discuss a capital project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10916/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Cromane is owned by Kerry County Council and responsibility for its development, repair and maintenance rests with the Local Authority. Therefore, I would direct the local community representatives to first contact the Local Authority in regard to this matter. Under the Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme my Department has, in previous years, provided funding to Local Authorities for the development and repair of their harbours, piers and slipways subject to the availability of exchequer funding. Any application submitted by Kerry County Council in respect of Cromane pier under a future Local Authority capital programme, will be given consideration in the context of the criteria set out, available Exchequer funding and overall national priorities.

### **Live Exports**

139. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department has received complaints or expressions of concern from persons involved in the greyhound industry regarding the operating implications of recent changes to rules governing greyhound export; if so, the common difficulties; if the matter will be tweaked; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10918/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** My Department is aware of the concerns expressed by persons involved in the commercial export of greyhounds about the implications arising from the implementation of EU legislation governing the commercial movement of greyhounds, notably Directive 2013/31/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 June 2013) and Regulation (EU) No 576/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 June 2013 which came into effect on 29 December 2014 and which have been transposed into Irish law under the Pet Passport (No 2) Regulations 2014. There have been a number of meetings between my officials and representatives of the greyhound industry including the Irish Greyhound Board in connection with this issue. These meetings and discussions have concentrated on finding mutually satisfactory solutions to the logistical difficulties that exporters are experiencing with regard to getting the necessary health certification which must accompany all dogs moving off the island for commercial purposes.

My Department has endeavoured to smooth this process as much as possible by having dedicated veterinary personnel on standby at the sales venues to prepare the health certificates for dogs sold there or for dogs that are sold privately and brought to the venue. In addition, my Department has invited the private veterinary practitioners and greyhounds transporters to be trained in processing the initial part of the certification to further streamline the process and to reduce the time taken for official certification.

I am confident that, with ongoing co-operation from all interested parties, the difficulties arising from the implementation of the new EU legislation can be resolved to the satisfaction

of all involved.

### **Agriculture Schemes Eligibility**

140. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the situation of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be reviewed to facilitate a more helpful approach to that person's farming efforts from his Department, in view of the fact that the person is currently being penalised for being a proactive young farmer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10926/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** In accordance with relevant EU Regulations, to be eligible under the Young Farmer priority category of the National Reserve and the Young Farmers Scheme an applicant must meet the following conditions:

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

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

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

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

In addition to the young farmer provision, the National Reserve also provides for a second priority category of 'new entrant'. In order to be eligible for the category of new entrant, an applicant must have commenced their present agricultural activity in the 2013 calendar year or any later year, and not have had any agricultural activity in his/her own name and at his/her own risk in the five years preceding the start of the present agricultural activity. Applicants must also meet the eligibility criteria in respect of participating in the Basic Payment Scheme in the year of application and educational qualifications that apply in respect of the young farmer category.

As the above named person commenced their agricultural activity in 2006 and actively farmed in 2010, it would appear that he falls outside the scope of the two priority categories of the National Reserve and also the Young Farmers Scheme. However, I have requested an official from my Department to contact the person named directly to discuss his position. The person named will receive a telephone call in the coming days.

### **GLAS Eligibility**

141. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if applicants under the green low-carbon agri-environmental scheme looking to stack entitlements or to share plans, for example, a father and son on the same scheme will not be delayed for payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10927/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** For the purposes of GLAS where the herd number is held in joint names, e.g. father and son, the GLAS application can be submitted and processed in the normal manner. The annual Basic Payment

Scheme (BPS) application is also the application for payment under the GLAS Scheme and once the areas declared for BPS are verified the necessary checks required for the GLAS payment can be completed.

### **GLAS Eligibility**

142. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to address issues on the online application system for the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme, which is that land parcels under the land parcel identification system cannot be split and used for more than one measure, that a farmer cannot split his area based measure into two parts in the one land parcel identification system parcel, and that new lands cannot be brought into the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme other than those lands declared in 2014; the reason for these problems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10929/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** It is a key requirement in the approval process of the Rural Development Plan that all proposed actions are verifiable and controllable and my Department's online system for GLAS has been designed with this very much in mind. The different combinations of actions which are permitted together on the one parcel are already built into the system, which should significantly reduce error rates later, and resulting penalties for the farmer.

However, it is not true to say that a farmer cannot split a parcel when applying for GLAS. On the contrary, the online system includes a facility to split a parcel to deliver up to three area-based actions. By way of example, a 12 hectare parcel could be split to deliver a combination of Traditional Hay Meadow, Low Input Permanent Pasture and Wild Bird Cover, generating an annual payment of just under €5,000. The adviser can do this, online, on behalf of his or her client. Where a parcel is not split, one area based action may be selected together with certain linear actions provided no issue of double payment arises.

The application system is based on parcels declared in 2014 Single Payment Application and subsequently verified by my Department. Parcels being declared by a farmer for the first time in 2015 must be verified and this cannot be completed before the closing date for receipt of applications, 30 April 2015. If farmers wish to deliver GLAS actions on newly acquired parcels in 2015 it is open to them to apply under the next application Tranche.

*Question No. 143 withdrawn.*

### **Agriculture Schemes Eligibility**

144. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps being taken by his Department to assist, and support, farmers in completing the basic payment scheme, and applications to the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme, ahead of 15 May 2015 deadline; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10988/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Information sessions on GLAS and the BPS Scheme, which commenced on Monday of this week, are being rolled out across the country to inform farmers of requirements under these schemes. These meetings are open to all to attend. Details of the venues and times have been published in the national and farming press and are available on the Department website. Feedback from the initial meetings is very positive. Department personnel are available at these meetings for question and answer sessions following the presentations. I would encourage farmers to attend

where possible. On a practical level both schemes have bespoke online application systems that streamline the application system.

In addition I have ensured that both schemes have dedicated e-mail addresses and Lo Call phone numbers to deal with farmer queries as they arise.

### **Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments**

145. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the 2014 agri-environment options scheme will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10993/15]

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

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. These checks are currently being finalised in respect of the 2014 Scheme year and once successfully completed, payment will issue at the earliest opportunity.

### **Departmental Staff Remuneration**

146. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence the correct pay level in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare, currently a civilian employee, previously a member of the Defence Forces, whose pay level was previously set at €30 per week above the level applicable to general operatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10907/15]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** As the Deputy is aware, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has responsibility for the development and implementation of public service pay policy throughout the Public Sector.

The employee referred to is employed with the Department of Defence as a civilian Storekeeper Clerk (SKC) Grade II, BFW Stores, in the Curragh Camp and is currently on the 2nd Long Service Increment (L.S.I. 2) of the SKC II pay scale. My Department is satisfied that this is the correct rate of pay in this particular case.

### **Environmental Policy**

147. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Defence his views on a proposal (details supplied) regarding the Curragh plains, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10989/15]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** As you may be aware, the management and protection of the Curragh plains, one of the most open and accessible areas in the Country, is an ongoing process which is the responsibility of the Department of Defence.

Officials from my Department have in the past met with various parties involved in the use and management of the Curragh. A wide range of issues are discussed at these meetings including the development and protection of the Curragh plains and how best to deal with the many day to day issues of illegal parking, dumping, etc. These meetings have been found to be of use in addressing these issues.

With regard to your proposals I have, in the first instance, requested my officials to invite a representative group of interested parties to a meeting to address the issues you have raised.

### **Immigration Status**

148. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current or potential residency status in the case of persons (details supplied) in Dublin 1 who has resided here for six years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10887/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** If the persons whose details were supplied have made applications for asylum or subsidiary protection, the Deputy will be aware that it is not the practice to comment on such applications for so long as they remain in the protection process. The position in this regard is in accordance with Section 19 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) which provides for the protection of the identity of asylum applicants.

Protection applicants are issued with a temporary residence permission pending a final decision on their application.

### **Garda Operations**

149. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the success of Operation Fiacla, within the north central division of the Dublin metropolitan region, including the numbers arrested, charged and subsequently before the courts, in respect of offences under this operation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10888/15]

155. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in respect of Operation Creeper within the north central division of the Dublin metropolitan region, including the numbers arrested, charged and subsequently before the courts, in respect of offences under this operation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10899/15]

157. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the success of Operation Acer within the north central Ddivision of the Dublin metropolitan region, including the numbers arrested, charged, and subsequently before the courts, in respect of offences under this operation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10904/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 149, 155 and 157 together.

I can advise the Deputy that Garda operations tackling burglary are currently co-ordinated under Operation Fiacla, which is the national operation targeting burglary crime. This operation is supported by regional operations, of which Operation Acer is in force throughout the Dublin area, including the North Central Division. Operation Creeper is a further and related operation, which assists in the surveillance of Acer targets by monitoring their movements.



In so far as the overall national operation, Operation Fiacla, is concerned, as of 28 February 2015, this has led to the arrest of 12,374 persons with charges being brought against 7,010 persons nationally. Within this total, and since Operation Acer commenced in early 2012, I am advised that there has been 5,389 arrests, 2,746 charges and 1,087 convictions for burglary in the Dublin area, up to 3 February 2015. In so far as the North Central Division is concerned, there have been 899 arrests and 511 charges to date.

I am further advised that under Operation Creeper 167 persons were arrested in 2014. These targets were selected from the list of Operation Acer targets as a result of high criminal activity and also as a result of patrolling in areas with high incidents of burglary. Of those arrested, 46 were arrested in the North Central Division, of which 42 were charged with offences.

I can also advise the Deputy that in addition to these policing responses, I am currently carrying out a broader and urgent review of the criminal justice system's response to the problem of burglaries. In this regard I am working closely with the Garda Commissioner and other relevant criminal justice agencies to ensure that an effective, whole of system response is in place in relation to burglary. This includes a focus on interagency measures in relation to the management of prolific offenders, visible policing, crime prevention support for communities and an examination of legislative issues. Burglary is a persistent and highly damaging crime, and I am committed to tackling it on a number of fronts, and through a partnership approach between criminal justice agencies and the community.

### **Residency Permits**

150. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if an application for residency status will be accepted in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Galway whose parent is an Irish citizen and who first came to this country as a minor in the company of their parents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10889/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned was registered in the State under Stamp 2 conditions valid until 15 August 2011. They should be advised to make an application to INIS for Stamp 4 conditions on the basis of family dependency of an Irish national arising from their parent's naturalisation.

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

### **Immigration Status**

151. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current or potential residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Meath; if the case is being considered under the Zambrano judgement; if it is recognised that the person has a child with special needs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10890/15]

**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 applied for a right of residency in the State, accompanied by a right to work, based on their parentage of an Irish citizen child, and based also on the principles of the Zambrano Judgment. This application is under consideration at present. All information submitted in support of the application will be fully considered.

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.

### **Naturalisation Applications**

152. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if an application for naturalisation is in progress in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin whose spouse is an Irish citizen; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10891/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a valid application for a certificate of naturalisation was received from the person referred to by the Deputy. My predecessor decided to defer a final decision on this application until December 2014. The person concerned was notified of this decision and the reasons for it in a letter issued on 09 December, 2013.

Further evaluation of the case is well advanced and the file will be re-submitted to me for final decision as expeditiously as possible.

The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and I know the Deputy will appreciate that it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

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

### **Immigration Status**

153. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the existing or potential residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 22; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10892/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** If the person whose details were supplied has made an application for asylum or subsidiary protection, the Deputy will be aware that it is not the practice to comment on such applications until such time as they have fully completed the protection process.

Protection applicants are issued with a temporary residence permission pending a final deci-

sion on their application.

In the event that an applicant is finally determined not to be in need of Protection then consideration is given to whether the person should be given leave to remain in the State on humanitarian grounds.

### **Garda Operations**

154. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in respect of Operation Kerb within the north central division of the Dublin metropolitan region, including the number of individuals who were arrested, charged and brought before the courts in respect of offences under this operation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10897/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the matters referred to by the Deputy. I will contact the Deputy directly as soon as the report is to hand.

*Question No. 155 answered with Question No. 149.*

### **Garda Operations**

156. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her future plans to tackle the problem of drug dealing and the increase in the sale and supply of drugs in residential areas within Dublin's north inner city, particularly in the context of the success of Operation Spire, which has led to the level of drug dealing in O'Connell Street and its environs falling sharply; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10902/15]

159. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on the implementation and operation of the small areas policing initiative within the north central division of the Dublin metropolitan region; when will a similar initiative be rolled out across all Garda divisions in the region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10906/15]

162. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality about the success of Operation Spire within the north central division of the Dublin metropolitan region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10914/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 156, 159 and 162 together.

I can assure the Deputy that I am in ongoing contact with the Garda Commissioner in relation to the policing measures which are being taken to deal with crime, drug dealing and public safety in the city centre area. The Deputy will appreciate, however, that the specific policing responses to the issues he has outlined are a matter for the Commissioner in the first instance.

A range of operations and other measures are in place in relation to tackling crime and anti-social behaviour, including drug dealing, in the North Inner City. These include Operation Spire, which provides for a high visibility policing presence specifically on O'Connell Street at critical times to address anti-social behaviour, drug dealing and related crime. The operation is designed as a preventative measure and the area is patrolled by uniform patrols supplemented as required by Crime Prevention Unit and Divisional Crime Task Force personnel. Additional resources are deployed on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights.

Provisional Garda figures for 2014 show that in the North Inner City there were 16,338

12 March 2015

searches under the Misuse of Drugs Act and that there were 871 detections for possession of drugs for personal use (an increase of 68% on 2013) and 830 detections for possession of drugs for sale and supply (an increase of 116% on 2013). Early figures for the present year indicate continuing Garda success in detecting drugs offences.

In relation to the displacement of drug related activity to other parts of the North City I am advised that local Garda management has increased the number of personnel attached to the divisional drug unit to counteract this recent trend. I am assured that Gardaí will continue to provide a pro-active response to drug dealing in residential areas.

The Small Areas Policing Initiative which has been piloted initially in the North Inner City adds further to the local policing response. The approach taken under this initiative involves assigning responsibility to nominated Community Gardaí for a specific Community Policing Area of 50 - 200 dwellings, aligned to the applicable Small Area as defined by the CSO. The Deputy will appreciate that, as with any question of detailed Garda deployment and resource management, it is a matter for the Garda Commissioner to evaluate the scheme and consider its benefits as compared to other community policing models as well as its potential for implementation in other areas. I expect to receive further updates in this regard on an ongoing basis.

Finally, the Deputy will be aware that the Garda response to the specific issues raised by him form part of overall and ongoing implementation of the Dublin City Centre Policing Plan. This involves a high-visibility uniformed presence on key thoroughfares, as well as the use of undercover Gardaí as appropriate. In addition a new multi-agency street outreach approach is being used to work with vulnerable and high-risk individuals and an offender management programme is being piloted to address repeat offending in the Dublin City area. These measures, combined with the Government's initiatives to tackle homelessness, are helping to address the broader aspects of the problems referred to by the Deputy.

*Question No. 157 answered with Question No. 149.*

### **Immigration Status**

158. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if, further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 127 of 6 November 2014 and 27 of 25 November 2014, the replies to which failed to provide the information requested in respect of the case of a person (details supplied) in County Laois, it is possible to ascertain the precise current position regarding residency status or, in lieu thereof, if a freedom of information request will illicit the information, which has previously been made available in numerous similar circumstances by way of replies to parliamentary questions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10905/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** My reply to Parliamentary Question No. 134 of 17 December, 2014 in the case of the person whose details were supplied explained my Department's policy with regard to the provision of information in respect of individual applications for asylum or subsidiary protection. This policy has been reiterated on numerous occasions in replies to similar parliamentary questions concerning protection applicants. It was also explained in some detail in my letter to the Deputy dated 31 May, 2014 which was also referred to in my December 2014 reply. There is nothing further I can add on the issue.

*Question No. 159 answered with Question No. 156.*

**Garda Strength**

160. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the total Garda strength within the Dublin metropolitan region north central division; if she will provide a breakdown, per rank, of the number of officers assigned to each district within that division; if she will indicate the strength of the divisional drugs unit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10908/15]

**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 however been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the personnel strength of the DMR North Central Garda Division on 31 January 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was as set out in the table below. There are also 71 Garda Reserves and 27 Civilians attached to the DMR North Central Division. The personnel strength of the DMR North Central Divisional Drugs Unit on the same date was 20.

Division	District	Station	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	Total
D.M.R. NORTH CENTRAL	BRIDE-WELL	BRIDE-WELL	125	38	6			169
	FITZGIBBON STREET	MOUNTJOY	164	19	4	1		188
	STORE STREET	IMMIGRATION D/DOCKS	3					3
		STORE STREET	201	33	4	2	1	241
	STORE STREET-Total		204	33	4	2	1	244
D.M.R. NORTH CENTRAL Total			493	90	14	3	1	601

**Immigration Status**

161. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current, or potential, residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 22, and that person's two children, both born here; if they require stamp 4 status, updated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10909/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** If the person whose details were supplied has made an application for asylum or subsidiary protection, the Deputy will be aware that it is not the practice to comment on such applications until such time as they have fully completed the protection process.

Protection applicants are issued with a temporary residence permission pending a final decision on their application.

In the event that an applicant is finally determined not to be in need of Protection then consideration is given to whether the person should be given leave to remain in the State on



humanitarian grounds.

*Question No. 162 answered with Question No.156.*

### **Naturalisation Applications**

163. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding an application for naturalisation in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10932/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a valid application for a certificate of naturalisation has been received from the person referred to by the Deputy.

Processing of the application is ongoing and a letter was issued to the person concerned on 9 March 2015 requesting certain information. Upon receipt of the requested information the case will be finalised and submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

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

### **Personal Debt**

164. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on the proposal to reduce the discharge period from bankruptcy from three years to one year; if she will provide details of any examination carried out by her Department or by anyone on her behalf on the impact of such a move; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10934/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy is aware, I am considering the outcome of a review of the insolvency legislation, following the Statement of Government Priorities 2014-2016, with specific attention to ensuring that the legislation can work effectively to support those who are struggling with unsustainable debt. This is a priority for me and for the Government.

As the Deputy will recall, a very substantial change was made in 2012 when the bankruptcy discharge period was reduced from 12 years to three years. As the Deputy will also know, our near neighbour has reduced this period down to 1 year. The Deputy will also be aware that there has been much recent public discourse about the possibility of further reduction of the period in Ireland.

I have already informed the Dail that I am currently engaging with my colleague the Minister for Finance regarding the recent review on this matter, and that I intend to bring proposals to Government to address the range of issues which arise. The Taoiseach has already stated that announcements on proposals will be made in the near future.

I am anxious to ensure that any steps which are to be taken now following the recent review will be ones which will directly assist those in extreme debt and mortgage difficulty and which will service the very fundamental principle that loss of ownership of a family home through repossession should be a last resort. This is basic to our consideration and evaluation of those op-

tions, legislative and otherwise and including the bankruptcy period, which are available to us.

### **Courts Service**

165. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide for each Circuit Court in the country the number of ejectment civil cases that came before it, and the ejectment civil orders granted by the court separately in 2013, 2014 and to date in 2015; if she will provide a breakdown of the aggregate data by financial institution taking the case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10935/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The Deputy will be aware that, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service and I have no role in the matter. Section 4(3) of the 1998 Act provides that the Courts Service is independent in the performance of its functions, which includes the provision of information on the courts system.

However, I have asked the Courts Service for the information in the detailed format sought by the Deputy and I will write to him directly as soon as it is to hand.

### **Garda Deployment**

166. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will request the Garda Commissioner to appoint a garda at Tallaght Garda station, Dublin 24, to deal specifically with racial abuse and attacks; if she will appreciate the view of the local community that such an appointment should be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10938/15]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the personnel strength of Tallaght Garda Station on 31 January 2014, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 169. There are also 11 Garda Reserves and 12 civilians attached to Tallaght Garda Station.

All members of An Garda Síochána are trained to deal with incidents of racial abuse and attacks which occur within the district and to treat each incident in a compassionate and professional way.

In 2002, the Garda Commissioner authorised the appointment of Garda Ethnic Liaison Officers (ELO). Their role is to liaise with representatives of the various minority communities in their division, and to establish communication links with each of these communities. They also inform and assure the ethnic communities of Garda services. It is important to note that all members of An Garda Síochána and not just ELOs can deal with racist incidents that are reported to them.

There are seven ELOs attached to Tallaght District.

### **Legislative Measures**

167. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to introduce

legislation to deal specifically with racial attacks on the migrant community. [10939/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** Where criminal offences such as assault, criminal damage, or public order offences are committed with a racist motive, they are prosecuted as generic offences through the wider criminal law. The trial judge can take any aggravating factors, including racist motivation, into account at sentencing.

In addition to the wider criminal law, the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989 creates offences of incitement to hatred on account of race, religion, nationality, ethnic origin or sexual orientation.

Essentially, it is an offence to use words or behave in a manner which is threatening, abusive or insulting and are intended, or, having regard to all the circumstances, are likely to stir up hatred. "Hatred" is defined as "hatred against a group of persons in the State or elsewhere on account of their race, colour, nationality, religion, ethnic or national origins, membership of the travelling community or sexual orientation".

Any person convicted, on indictment, of an offence under the Act is liable to imprisonment for up to 2 years and/or a fine of up to €25,400. A summary offence attracts a penalty of imprisonment for up to 6 months and/or a class C fine (not exceeding €2,500).

A cross-Departmental review of Ireland's Integration Strategy, including measures to address racism, is currently being led by the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration which is part of my Department.

The Cross-Departmental Group has held a number of thematic meetings focussing on key policy areas relevant to the integration of migrants, including education, employment, access to public services and social inclusion, and the promotion of intercultural awareness and combating racism. Work on the development of the updated Integration Strategy is ongoing and a draft Strategy will be sent to key stakeholders for their observations before the Summer with a view to the Strategy being published as soon as possible thereafter.

In addition, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality is also doing work on integration, multiculturalism and combating racism.

The law to combat racism will be considered in the context of the outcome of the review of the Oireachtas Committee and following publication of the Integration Strategy.

### **Visa Applications**

168. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will expedite a visa application in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11007/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the visa application referred to by the Deputy was received in the Dublin visa office on 8 January 2015. Whilst a preliminary assessment of the application has been completed, the application is awaiting a comprehensive examination.

The business target of 6 months for long term 'join family' applications was established following the publication of the Policy Document on non-EEA Family Reunification. The visa office endeavours to have such applications processed earlier than this target.

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

### **Departmental Funding**

169. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will support the vital and excellent service of the Don Bosco Care Group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10996/15]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly):** I am advised by Tusla that there will be no reduction in funding for Don Bosco in 2015 and the funding provided will remain at the 2014 level.

### **Early Child Care Education**

170. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the current status of plans for a second early childhood care and education year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10763/15]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly):** The Early Childhood Care and Education programme provides one free pre-school year to all eligible children before commencing primary school. This programme represents an annual investment of €175 million in pre-school services.

The introduction of a second pre-school year would require considerable additional funding, broadly in line with the cost of the current provision. 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 pre-school provision, which is key to good outcomes for children, should be the priority. 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 childcare provision.

*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. The Government is committed to the introduction of a second free pre-school year within the lifetime of the Framework once the required quality standards are achieved and subject to the availability of resources.

### **Youth Work Projects Funding**

171. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the funding for youth work services provided by his Department in the years 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and to date in 2015; if he will provide a breakdown of current and capital funding for each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10829/15]

**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. Some 30 national and major regional youth services receive funding under the Youth Services Grants Scheme. 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 Scheme. Funding is also provided to Léargas – The Exchange Bureau, Gaisce – the President’s Award, the National Youth Health Programme and the National Youth Arts Programme. 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, an allocation of €49.9m has been provided to my Department to support the provision of youth services. There has been no reduction in the overall allocation for youth services in 2015 which was a key priority for youth organisations. In 2014, €49.78m was allocated and in 2013, 2012 and 2011 the allocations were €51.74m, €56.8m and €60.154m respectively.

In some recent years capital funding has been allocated by my Department for capital projects in the youth services as follows:

- 2012 - Youth Café funding of €500,000 was provided to support 8 Youth Cafes.
- 2013 - An amount of €1.5m was provided for a Youth Café Scheme and 30 new Youth Café projects throughout the country were approved for development.
- 2014 - An amount 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.
- 2015 - An allocation of €500,000 is available to fund small capital projects in the youth services. The closing date for applications under the 2015 Scheme was 27 February. The applications received are undergoing an assessment process at present and my Department anticipates that it will be in a position to announce details of the successful projects in early May.

## Youth Services

172. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the implications of the European Union directive on public procurement, which will be transposed by 2016, on youth work services; if his Department has had discussions with the youth work sector on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10830/15]

**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 €49.93m has been provided to my Department for these schemes.

The Deputy will be aware that three of the targeted funding schemes, the Special Projects for Youth scheme, the Young People’s Facilities and Services Fund, and Local Drug Task Force projects scheme, were the subject of a recently completed *Value for Money and Policy Review*. The review covered the period 2010 to 2012. In 2012, expenditure on the schemes amounted to €39.7m. The review involved an in-depth scrutiny of a complex area to do with the impact



youth service provision has in young people's lives.

Overall, the review found that the youth programmes can provide a significant contribution to improving outcomes for young people, and should be considered for on-going public funding.

The review makes a number of recommendations for the future operation of the youth schemes and their development in the years ahead. It recommends that the three existing schemes be replaced with a single, targeted, evidence-based and outcomes focused scheme designed to secure the optimal outcomes for young people and their communities. The findings and recommendations of the review are being discussed by stakeholders in the consultations on the new proposed new National Youth Strategy. I intend that the reforms recommended in the review will be progressed in the context of the new Strategy.

The work on the development of a new funding scheme has been prioritised by my Department together with the development of the data management systems that will support good performance oversight of the youth programmes and provide assurance about efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of services that secure optimal outcomes for young people.

My Department is examining the implications of the EU Directive on Public Procurement. Any implications the new Directive may have for the provision of services by my Department, including support for the provision of youth services by the voluntary youth sector, will be considered in full consultation with the youth sector in the context of the National Youth Strategy 2015 - 2020.

### **Voluntary Work Option**

173. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of participants from Ireland who have undertaken European voluntary service in another European Union member state; and the number of persons from other European Union member states who have undertaken European voluntary service here in the years 2012, 2013 and 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10831/15]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly):** The European Voluntary Service gives young people, in the age group 17-30 years, the opportunity to express their personal commitment through full-time voluntary service, living and working in communities in a foreign country within or outside the EU.

The European Voluntary Service aims to develop solidarity, mutual understanding and tolerance among young people, while contributing to strengthening social cohesion and promoting active citizenship. Placements can last between 2 and 12 months, but young people with fewer opportunities can be supported to carry out voluntary service on a short-term basis from 2 weeks upwards. The programme was funded under the EU Youth In Action programme up to 2013 and is currently funded under the EU ERASMUS+ programme ( 2014-2020 ). The programme is administered on behalf of my Department by Léargas- the Exchange Bureau.

I am advised by Léargas that in 2012, Ireland hosted 94 volunteers from the EU partner countries and 45 young volunteers from Ireland were hosted by communities and projects across Europe. In 2013, Ireland hosted 129 volunteers and 59 volunteers travelled abroad and in 2014, the figures were 124 and 25 respectively.

### **Adoption Data**

174. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the process currently in place for couples and persons applying for approval as suitable adoptive parents;

the time the procedure is currently taking; the number of social workers and other staff working on same; if he will provide statistics for the most recent period available to include the number of applications in the system; the number at each stage; the number and percentage which eventually get approval; the available analysis of reasons for refusal; the number and percentage which eventually successfully adopt at home or abroad; the period for which an approval is valid; the number of valid approvals in circulation with potential parents seeding a child; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10866/15]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly):** The Adoption Authority of Ireland has provided the following table of Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability granted over the past ten years. The Authority advises that it is not possible to say how many of these led to an adoption as some prospective adopters will have withdrawn from the process for a variety of reasons. I would point out that a Declaration remains valid for 3 years, therefore the numbers below may include applicants who reapplied, following expiration of an earlier Declaration that was granted.

#### Applications for Declaration of Eligibility and Suitability

-	Couples	Female Applicant only	Male Applicant only	Total
2004	478	23	0	501
2005	378	22	0	400
2006	442	25	0	467
2007	473	21	0	494
2008	462	47	0	509
2009	368	38	1	407
2010	335	46	0	381
2011	223	9	0	232
2012	203	0	1	204
2013	236	1	0	237

The other questions raised by the Deputy are a matter for the Child and Family Agency and I have asked the Agency to respond to the Deputy directly on these matters.

#### Child Care Costs

175. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the ongoing efforts to address the cost and provision of child care to further support parents who are working, and incurring very significant child care costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10948/15]

**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 childcare programmes which assist parents in accessing quality and affordable childcare. 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 childcare 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 each

year from the free pre-school provision. The standard weekly capitation payment for each eligible child enrolled is €62.50 with a higher capitation of €73 paid for eligible children enrolled in services where staff hold higher childcare qualifications.

The Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) programme provides funding to community childcare 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 benefit each year from the CCS programme.

Further childcare 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. These include the Childcare Education and Training Supports (CETS) programme providing €145 per week for full day care where parents are availing of training and education course provided by Solas or the Education Training Board (ETB). The After-School Child Care (ASCC) programme provides €40 per week for after-school care, or €80 per week where a pick up service is available, with €105 per week for full day childcare during the holiday period. A Community Employment Childcare (CEC) programme has also been introduced and provides up to €80 a week to support qualifying parents who are participating in Community Employment (CE) schemes.

The funding to support the childcare programmes has been maintained despite the difficult budgetary position. I am now looking at the question of appropriate supports for child care in a wider context. 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. It is crucial that we develop a coherent whole-of-Government approach to investment in childcare services and 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.

### **Prescription Charges**

176. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in payment being reimbursed in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal who holds long-term illness eligibility, and paid prescription charges for medicines dispensed in respect of that person's long-term illness conditions, in the period October 2010 to December 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10766/15]

**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, 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.

*Question No. 177 withdrawn.*

### **Medical Card Appeals**

178. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an appeal for a medical card in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10776/15]

**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 Expenditure**

179. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health the amount spent by his Department and the Health Service Executive on homeless services from 2010 to 2014. [10778/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my private office and they will follow up the matter.

### **Long-Term Illness Scheme Expenditure**

180. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in payment being issued in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal who holds long-term illness eligibility and paid prescription charges for medicines dispensed in respect of that person's long-term illness conditions in the period October 2010 to December 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10781/15]

**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, 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.

### **Disease Incidence**

181. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide, in tabular form, by county, the instance of a disease (details supplied), for each of the past ten years; if there are any discernible trends in respect of the disease, that would give rise to concerns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10784/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** As the information sought is not readily available in my Department I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact

my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

### **Medical Card Applications**

182. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly; and when they will receive a decision on their case. [10808/15]

**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**

183. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly; and when they will receive a decision on their case. [10809/15]

**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**

184. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly; and when they will receive a decision on their case. [10810/15]

**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 in-



12 March 2015

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.

### **Medical Card Applications**

185. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for a medical card in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Offaly; and when they will receive a decision on their case. [10811/15]

**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**

186. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for a medical card in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Offaly; and when they will receive a decision on their case. [10812/15]

**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**

187. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and when

they will receive a decision on their case. [10813/15]

**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**

188. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9, and when that person will receive a decision. [10814/15]

**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**

189. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly; and when that person will receive a decision. [10815/15]

**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**

190. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly; and when that person will receive a decision. [10816/15]

**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**

191. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly; and when that person will receive a decision. [10817/15]

**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 Aids and Appliances Provision**

192. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will examine a referral by an occupational therapist for a powered wheelchair in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10819/15]

**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.

### **Respite Care Services**

193. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if additional respite beds will be provided at a Health Service Executive facility (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10820/15]

206. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if additional beds will be provided at a Health Service Executive facility (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10925/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 193 and 206 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.

### **Ambulance Service Provision**

194. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health his views on the fact that discussions were not held regarding changes to the emergency ambulance calls service (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10821/15]

195. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that no Dublin Fire Brigade ambulance services are taken out of service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10822/15]

197. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health his assessment of the announcement this week by Dublin City Council that Dublin Fire Brigade's ambulance service call and dispatch function will be controlled by the Health Service Executive from later this year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10824/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 194, 195 and 197 together.

HIQA, in its report of December last year, identified serious patient safety concerns over the lack of coordination between the Dublin Fire Brigade ambulance service and the National Ambulance Service. The urgent need to address these issues was stressed, particularly for 999/112 call-taking and ambulance dispatch, as well as overall clinical governance.

Following discussions, the HSE and Dublin City Council have agreed in principle to address the identified weaknesses, through the provision of a single point of contact for all emergency calls in Dublin. Under this agreement, all 999/112 ambulance calls for the Dublin region will be routed through the National Emergency Operations Centre in Tallaght and all ambulances, whether DFB or NAS, will be dispatched from Tallaght. In addition, clinical governance of Dublin ambulance services will become the responsibility of the NAS medical director.

The new arrangements will mean that the people of Dublin will get a better ambulance service. Currently, where DFB do not have an ambulance available, they may or may not pass the call to the NAS. Passing calls between call centres is not without risks. Calls may be delayed or worse, be missed. Under the new arrangements, the dispatcher will be able to see every available ambulance in the region. The nearest available ambulance, whether NAS or DFB, will be sent to the incident.

Agreement in principle has now been reached with Dublin Fire Brigade unions on the integration of emergency ambulance call taking and dispatch. It has also been agreed that DFB will continue to be fully involved in emergency ambulance service delivery and there will be no diminution of such services.

Staff in Dublin Fire Brigade will be fully consulted before the proposed changes are implemented. A Joint Forum within Dublin City Council, which will include Management and Union representatives, will be established to address issues regarding the control centre reconfiguration. This is a very welcome development which will, I believe, ensure that the people of Dublin get the safer ambulance service they deserve.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy and that it explains the situation fully.

### **Ambulance Service Provision**

196. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if the number of Dublin

12 March 2015

Fire Brigade ambulances will increase this year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10823/15]

**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.

*Question No. 197 answered with Question No. 194.*

### **Long-Term Illness Scheme Applications**

198. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Health when an application for a long-term illness payment will be finalised in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10851/15]

**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, 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.

### **Medicinal Products Availability**

199. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5 is being denied access to the multiple sclerosis drug treatment, Lemtrada. [10852/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicinal products under the community drug schemes in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to you.

If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

200. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will receive an appointment for surgery in Cork University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10858/15]

**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.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

201. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No 211 of 5 March 2015, when it is envisaged that a patient (details supplied) in County Clare, will undergo a procedure, in view of the fact that the person has been classified as an urgent clinical priority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10869/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I refer the Deputy to my answer of 5 March. In relation to your further query in this matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

### **Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications**

202. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Cork will receive funding under the nursing home support scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10875/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

### **Hospital Appointment Status**

203. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a hospital appointment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10883/15]

**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 should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, 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.

### **Ambulance Service Provision**

204. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the grounds for transferring Dublin City Fire Brigade ambulance services to the Health Service Executive, in view of the

excellent record established by the service through the Dublin fire services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10894/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** In a report published last December, HIQA identified serious patient safety concerns over the lack of coordination between Dublin Fire Brigade (DFB) and the National Ambulance Service (NAS). Following discussions, the HSE and Dublin City Council have agreed in principle to address the identified weaknesses, through the provision of a single point of contact for all emergency calls in Dublin. Under this agreement, all 999/112 ambulance calls for the Dublin region will be routed through the National Emergency Operations Centre in Tallaght, and all ambulances, whether DFB or NAS, will be dispatched from Tallaght. In addition, clinical governance of Dublin ambulance services will become the responsibility of the NAS Medical Director. The new arrangements will mean that the people of Dublin will get an improved ambulance service.

Staff in DFB will, of course, be fully consulted before any changes are implemented. In that regard a Joint Forum will be established under an independent chair, Mr Stephen Brady, former Dublin Chief Fire Officer, to address issues regarding the reconfiguration of the control centre. The Forum will include Dublin City Council Management and Union representatives.

DFB has, I believe, provided very well for the emergency ambulance needs of Dublin for a very long time. I can assure the Deputy that there is no suggestion that NAS will take over the role of DFB in Dublin. I am happy to confirm that DFB will continue to be fully involved in emergency ambulance service delivery and there will be no diminution of such services.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy and that it explains the situation fully.

### **Medical Card Applications**

205. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the reason a full medical card is not applicable in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10896/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

*Question No. 206 answered with Question No. 193*

### **Abortion Services**

207. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the number of terminations of pregnancy that have been carried out to date under the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013; the hospitals they were carried out in; the dates they were carried out on; the number that resulted in the death of the baby; if any of these terminations have led to an enquiry into their circumstance or whether there is any consideration being provided by the Health Service

Executive to investigating the circumstances of any of these terminations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10928/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The Deputy may wish to note that I am obliged to prepare and lay before the Houses of the Oireachtas an annual report on the terminations of pregnancy that have taken place in accordance with the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act by 30 June this year. I will not be releasing any information on the operation of the Act before then. I am not aware of any inquiries or investigations currently taking place or under consideration arising from the operation of the Act.

### **Hospital Mortality Rates**

208. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health in view of the publication of the countywide hospitalisation rates for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma and diabetes, if he will provide the countywide mortality rates for acute myocardial infarction, haemorrhagic stroke, and ischaemic stroke; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10930/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The first annual report of the National Healthcare Quality Reporting System (NHQRS) was published on 5 March 2015.

This is the first time that the Department of Health has published a report that focuses solely on the quality and safety of health services. The selection, analysis and presentation of the indicators in the report used readily available information and were approved by the NHQRS governance committee.

The report, using Hospital In-Patient Enquiry (HIPE) data, presented at national and hospital level, in-hospital mortality rates following admission with an acute myocardial infarction or haemorrhagic or ischaemic stroke. This analysis allows for comparison with other countries and for comparison of individual hospitals. The analysis showed at national level in-hospital mortality following admission with a heart attack or an ischaemic stroke decreased between 2004 and 2013. It also showed a variation for in-hospital mortalities between individual hospitals that requires further exploration and explanation to support improvements in the quality of health services.

The Central Statistics Office is responsible for compiling mortality rates including at county level for the conditions enquired about.

For future NHQRS annual reports, the range of indicators presented will continue to evolve to reflect the breadth of health services provided in Ireland.

### **Hospital Appointment Status**

209. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an appointment in South Infirmity Victoria University Hospital, County Cork, in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10933/15]

**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 should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, 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.

### **Primary Care Centre Provision**

210. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on progress made on the delivery of a primary care centre (details supplied) in County Kildare [10945/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** In November 2014, this location was one of 73 locations advertised for delivery of primary care infrastructure by means of the operational lease mechanism. The closing date for receipt of Expressions of Interest was mid-January 2015. Currently, the HSE is reviewing all Expressions of Interest received to determine which are suitable for more detailed consideration and progression to the next stage of the process.

### **Primary Care Centre Provision**

211. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on progress made on the delivery of a primary care centre (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10946/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** The construction of this primary care centre is underway. Subject to progress being maintained construction is expected to be completed by Q3 2015. It would be expected to be operational by Q4-2015.

### **Primary Care Centre Provision**

212. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on progress made on the delivery of a primary care centre (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10947/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** The construction of this primary care centre is underway. Subject to progress being maintained construction is expected to be completed by year end. It would be expected to be operational by Q1-2016.

### **Health Services Provision**

213. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the expected timeframe for delivery and the cost of a project (details supplied) in County Kildare; the contingency plans in place for the operation of the facility during construction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10949/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

### **Health Services Staff Recruitment**

214. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on

progress made in filling the additional nursing posts at Naas General Hospital, County Kildare, in view of the significant overcrowding taking place there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10950/15]

**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 Services**

215. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken to address the contributing factors to ongoing overcrowding in Naas General Hospital, County Kildare; if consideration is being given to providing space for additional wards as part of the endoscopy unit development in Naas due to the demographics of a growing population and increased ongoing demand on the existing facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10990/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

### **Health Services**

216. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide support for a cystic fibrosis 20-room adult unit at Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9 in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10995/15]

**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.

### **Air Ambulance Service Provision**

217. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Health the number of missions to date the Emergency Aeromedical Service has carried out since its launch; the number of those missions that were in Counties Roscommon, Leitrim, and Galway; when the Service will be made permanent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11010/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I am currently considering the report of the emergency aeromedical support service establishment group, which sets out a number of options to place the EAS on a permanent basis. With regard to the statistical information sought by the Deputy, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

### **Health Insurance Data**

218. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the proportion of the population aged 18 to 35 years and 25 to 35 years, who hold private medical insurance; and if he will



make a statement on the matter. [11030/15]

219. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the proportion of all persons who hold private medical insurance who are 35 years of age or younger; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11031/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 218 and 219 together.

The Health Insurance Authority, the independent statutory regulator of the private health insurance market in Ireland, provides my Department with information returns on a twice-yearly basis showing the numbers insured with in-patient health insurance plans, in the age categories outlined in the table below. This data is compiled in respect of the commercial health insurers and excludes people serving waiting periods and members of restricted membership undertakings (which provide insurance to people who are members of a particular group, normally a vocational group or employees of a particular organisation). While the data is not collected or available in the specific manner sought, the breakdown will be of interest as an indication of market trends.

Age Group	Membership for the Market as of 31 December 2014
Aged 17 and under	453,873
Aged 18 to age 29	203,077
Aged 30 to age 39	281,282
Aged 40 to age 49	293,155
Aged 50 to age 59	261,365
Aged 60 to age 69	217,455
Aged 70 to age 79	125,118
Aged 80 and over	51,880
Total	1,887,205

### Health Insurance

220. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his views on any conflict of interests for his Department in promoting that more people take out private medical insurance as a result of the recent change to lifetime community rating; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11032/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The Health Act 1970 (as amended) provides for two categories of eligibility for all persons ordinarily resident in the country, i.e. full eligibility or limited eligibility for health services. Persons with full eligibility (medical card holders) are entitled to a range of services including general practitioner services, prescribed drugs and medicines, all in-patient public hospital services in public wards including consultant services, all out-patient public hospital services including consultant services, dental, ophthalmic and aural services and appliances and maternity and infant care services. People with limited eligibility (non-medical card holders) 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 consultant services.

Separate to the public health system, my Department oversees the maintenance of a competitive and sustainable private health insurance market, under the provisions of the Health Insurance Acts 1994 to 2014, and monitors developments on an ongoing basis to ensure that

the market is regulated appropriately. As the purchase of private health insurance is optional, I do not consider there to be any conflict of interest, particularly as choosing to purchase health insurance does not impinge on a person's eligibility for public health services.

In the context of private health insurance, community-rated markets depend on a continuing entry of younger people. Younger people claim less on average and, accordingly, continuing participation of younger people keeps premiums down for everybody. Lifetime Community Rating is being introduced to encourage people to take out private health insurance at a younger age, thereby helping to spread the costs of older and less healthy people across the market, helping to support affordable premiums for all.

### Universal Health Insurance

221. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the way lifetime community rating will impact on plans to introduce universal health insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11033/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The *White Paper on Universal Health Insurance*, which was published on 2 April 2014, outlines the UHI model for Ireland. Under UHI, everyone will be insured for a standard package of health services and will have their choice of health insurer from a mix of private health insurers and a publicly owned health insurer.

In paving the way for UHI, it is important that we lay a solid foundation for the future health system. Having a healthy, vibrant private health insurance market is a key building block for facilitating the transition to the system of UHI as envisaged in the White Paper.

Lifetime Community Rating is being introduced to encourage people to take out private health insurance at a younger age. Encouraging more people to join the market at younger ages helps spread the costs of older and less healthy people across the market, helping to support affordable premiums for all. Lifetime Community Rating relates only to the current voluntary private health insurance market and will not apply when we move to UHI. However, it is important to note that any loading that applies when a person purchases private health insurance after 1 May 2015 will continue to apply in all subsequent years, until such time as UHI is in place. Under UHI, everyone will be charged the same premium for the same policy regardless of age or risk profile, i.e. community rating will apply.

### Middle East Issues

222. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding the preparation of guidelines for the labelling of products from Israeli settlements, taking into account that the former Minister for Foreign Affairs in January 2014 stated that if progress was not made at European Union level in respect of the preparation of guidelines then the development of such guidelines would be pursued at national level; if urgent consideration will be given to this issue taking into account that settlement construction has advanced rapidly; his plans to introduce such guidelines on labelling at a national level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10999/15]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I have consistently highlighted the Government's concern at the continued expansion of Israeli settlements, which are actively undermining the prospects for a comprehensive peace agreement to end the conflict. In my recent visit to the West Bank, I saw at first-hand the impact of settlements, including on the daily life of Palestinians. When I met with Foreign Minister Liberman, I raised the issue of settlements and the fact that their continued expansion is a threat to the viability of a

two-State solution.

On 3 July 2014, my Department published advice to Irish citizens and business on financial and economic activities in Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The advice is intended to provide advice to the general public, investors and companies on the potential legal, reputational and economic risks arising from conducting economic activity in the settlements which are illegal under international law.

Ireland has consistently pressed the European Union to focus on settlements as a key element to be addressed. I will continue to highlight this issue in discussions with EU colleagues and others on the Middle East Peace Process. The EU has already decided that EU funding grants may not be spent in the settlements.

I expect the April Foreign Affairs Council to discuss the Middle East Peace Process, following the Israeli election on 17 March. I welcome High Representative Mogherini's indications that she intends to enhance EU engagement in the Middle East Peace Process. I will actively be contributing to our discussions on role of the EU and I will work to ensure that the question of settlements is to the forefront of EU thinking on these issues. The question of whether it would be timely to resume work on EU guidelines for labelling of settlement products will be considered in that context. While we remain prepared to look at national guidelines, the impact would clearly be better if we were to act collectively at EU level.

### **Human Rights Issues**

223. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans, through Ireland's participation on the United Nations Human Rights Council, to seek accountability for potential war crimes committed by all participants in the conflict between Israeli, and Palestinian factions, in summer 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11000/15]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Any breaches of international law committed during the 2014 Gaza conflict should be investigated.

In July last year, the UN Human Rights Council, meeting in a special session, established a Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza Conflict. As I have previously stated, Ireland fully supports this Commission in fulfilling its mandate.

On Monday of this week, the Commissioners requested a deferral of the presentation of their report to the Human Rights Council, which had been due on 23 March, until June 2015. The Commissioners said in their statement: *'these are complex issues – weighing the facts and considering the legal questions that arise is something that should not be rushed under any circumstances'*.

I look forward to reading the report of the Commission whenever it is published and to considering how best we can respond to any findings it makes.

### **Overseas Development Aid**

224. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the criteria used to decide on the recent reductions in Irish Aid funding, for Irish non-governmental organisations; the criteria used in respect of the Irish Aid budget for the European Development Fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11016/15]

225. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the greater demands on the Irish Aid budget, for emergencies such as the Ebola crisis, the ongoing Syrian crisis and the growing number of natural disasters, is impacting on the level of funding made to Irish non-governmental organisations; if there is a specific arrangement with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in regard to the provision of additional funding when such crises happen, and Irish Aid wish to assist in the international response to such humanitarian disasters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11017/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Sean Sherlock):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 224 and 225 together.

Over the past four years, the Government has stabilised Ireland's aid budget and, for this year, has provided a total of just over €600 million for Official Development Assistance (ODA). This represents the first small increase in overall ODA in six years. Of this, €476 million is administered under Vote 27 of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which manages the Irish Aid programme. In deciding on the allocation of the budget, some small reductions were necessary across budget lines, because of prioritisation of commitments, the scale of humanitarian crises across the world and the rise in Ireland's assessed contribution to the European Development Fund (EDF). These are all areas which are funded annually under Vote 27 in line with standard budgetary procedures.

European Union Member States' contributions to the EDF are on an assessed basis. Ireland's contribution key under the 11th EDF is set at 0.94% of the total funds comprising the EDF, and accordingly we will make a total contribution of €32.76 million to the Fund in 2015, an increase of some €9 million on our contribution in 2014. Decisions on the allocation of EDF funds are made by an EDF Committee of representatives of all EU Member States, including Ireland.

Ireland is recognised internationally for its support for the NGO sector, and consistently channels the largest proportion of our ODA through NGOs of any major donor. Around one third of the Irish Aid budget is channelled through NGOs, for humanitarian and development programs and projects. The Programme Grant scheme for our largest NGO partners constitutes the main individual funding stream, which supports long term development work. The budget for the Programme Grant is €61.34 million in 2015, a reduction of 2.28% on 2014. This is in line with budgetary reductions across the Irish Aid programme, including in our key partner countries.

The past year has witnessed a serious deterioration in the global humanitarian situation, as a result of conflicts in the Middle East and Africa and the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. The needs are set to increase in 2015, with the situation becoming more complex and posing different demands.

Included in Ireland's overall ODA budget is a specific provision to enable Irish Aid to respond to emergencies and natural disasters when they arise. We have increased this dedicated Emergency Humanitarian Assistance budget line from €57.5 million in 2014 to €58.5 million in 2015. In addition, last year, there was an increase in the humanitarian funding made available by Irish Aid to Irish NGOs from €16 million in 2013 to €23 million in 2014. We provide humanitarian funding to trusted NGO partners here in Ireland, as well as to key UN partners and the Red Cross/Red Crescent, agencies capable of delivering assistance to large numbers of beneficiaries. We will continue to work with and support these trusted partners throughout 2015.

Ireland's overseas development programme has benefited significantly from our NGO partners' commitment to helping poor and vulnerable communities. The OECD Development Assistance Committee's positive peer review of the effectiveness of the programme last year gave

strong recognition to Ireland's NGO partnerships. The peer review also recognised the Government's strategic management of the aid budget during challenging economic times.

### **School Curriculum**

226. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on using the transition year in post-primary schools for the delivery of further education and training awards council level 5 older care course on an optional basis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10757/15]

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

The precise content of any transition year programme is decided by each school. Their programmes typically include elements designed to provide students with opportunities to experience new ways of learning, to enhance their skills for further studies, for work and for life. This is achieved by providing students with access to work experience - some of which may be in an elder care environment, if chosen by a student, to project work, enterprise education and interventions such as Young Social Innovators.

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

### **After-School Support Services**

227. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the insurance, security, permission, and other issues which need to be considered, if primary schools are to be used on a widespread basis to provide after school child care; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10760/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** The vast majority of primary school buildings are in private ownership and I fully acknowledge the need for Trustees and Boards to prioritise the interests of the principal school users and to protect their own interests. Guidance on the sharing of school facilities was set out in Departmental circular 16/05 to all Boards of Management. These guidelines specify that the Trustees and Boards would need to ensure that, inter alia 1. There is a licence agreement between the Board and the group using the school premises

2. The agreement with users of school facilities should be underwritten by a contract. This contract should be reviewed regularly

3. Any agreement should be in conformity with the lease for the building.

4. There is an arrangement in place to cover additional costs for insurance, heating lighting, cleaning and maintenance of the areas used by the groups

5. All external groups using the school have public liability cover and adequate insurance. Insurance certificates should be presented to the Board of Management annually.

6. Health and safety issues are addressed



7. Child Protection Guidelines are followed.

### Third Level Admissions Entry Requirements

228. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason there is no late application process under the disability access route to education scheme (details supplied). [10780/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) is a college and university admissions scheme which offers places on reduced points to school leavers with disabilities.

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.

The Deputy may wish to contact the Irish Universities Association in this instance. Further details in relation to the DARE scheme are also available at [www.accesscollege.ie](http://www.accesscollege.ie).

### Student Universal Support Ireland Administration

229. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application for a student grant in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly; and when that person will receive a decision. [10818/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** As part of a comprehensive customer service and communications strategy provided by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), to ensure that all necessary avenues are open to applicants to receive the information they need, a dedicated email and phone line service is provided by SUSI for Oireachtas members. This was established to meet an identified need for applicants who choose to engage the assistance of their public representatives in making enquiries about their grant applications.

This service compliments the established channels provided by SUSI which include online application tracking, a dedicated website, a telephone helpdesk, email and social media, including Facebook and Twitter.

Enquiries may be emailed direct to SUSI at [oireachtas@susi.ie](mailto:oireachtas@susi.ie). SUSI is responding to email queries within a matter of days.

### Schools Building Projects Applications

230. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a school (details supplied) in County Tipperary that has applied for major capital funding; the timeframe for completion of works; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10849/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** As the Deputy will be aware, the school to which he refers has made an application to my Department for large scale capital funding for an extension.

The current status of all projects on the school building programme, including the school in question, may be viewed on my Department’s website at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

In view of the financial constraints imposed by the need, as outlined in the Five Year Plan, to prioritise available funding for the provision of essential additional school places to meet demographic demand, the Deputy will appreciate that it is not possible to indicate at this point when a major project for the school will be progressed.

However, it is open to the school, should additional teaching posts be allocated, to apply to my Department for additional accommodation to meet its immediate accommodation needs.

In recent years, my Department has provided funding of just over €56,500 to the school to undertake various improvement works, including asbestos removal, mechanical upgrade, new boiler, upgrade of the heating system and roof works.

### **Special Educational Needs Staffing**

231. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the delay in approving a special needs assistant for a school (details supplied) in County Roscommon; her views that it is acceptable that the whole school has been disrupted to accommodate the pupil in question since the beginning of the school year; when a decision will be made on this application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10871/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, 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.

Details of the SNA allocations which have been made to each school for 2014/15 are available on the NCSE website *www.ncse.ie*. The deployment of SNAs within schools is a matter for the individual Principal/Board of Management. SNAs should be deployed by the school in a manner which best meets the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school for whom SNA support has been allocated. It is a matter for schools to allocate support as required, and on the basis of individual need, which allows schools flexibility in how the SNA support is utilised. 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*.

### **Student Grant Scheme Eligibility**

232. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a married 41 year old mother of two who has returned with her husband and children to live with her mother due to financial hardship is being assessed for a mature student grant on the basis of her

mother's income; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10881/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** Under the terms of the student grant scheme, grant assistance is awarded to students who meet the prescribed conditions of funding, including those relating to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment and means. The Deputy will appreciate that, in the absence of all of the relevant details that would be contained in an individual's application form and supporting documentation, it is not possible to say whether or not a particular student would qualify for a grant. For student grants purposes, students are categorised according to their circumstances either as students dependent on parents or a legal guardian, or as independent mature students. A student may be assessed as an independent mature student if he or she has attained the age of 23 on the 1st of January of the year of first entry to an approved course or of re-entry following a break in studies of at least three years and is not ordinarily resident with his/her parents from the previous October. Otherwise he or she would continue to be assessed on the basis of parental income. The eligibility of the individual to which the Deputy refers is a matter for SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland) to determine; upon receipt of the relevant application form and supporting documentation.

### **School Accommodation**

233. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide an update on an application from a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10941/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department is currently considering an application for additional accommodation from the school to which he refers. A decision on the application will be conveyed to the school management as soon as this process has been completed.

### **School Accommodation**

234. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide an update on an application from a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10942/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** I can confirm for the Deputy that my Department is currently assessing the schools' accommodation needs and expects to be in a position to share its proposals with both schools shortly. My officials have been in contact with the schools and they are aware of the current position.

### **School Enrolments**

235. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide details of the review taking place on the demand for and provision of primary and secondary school places in an area (details supplied) in County Kildare; when the results of this review are expected; if it is envisaged that a new school build will be required to meet demand; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10943/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** The process of analysing demographic data at primary level has been completed. This resulted in the announcement last month that seven new primary schools are to be established in the next two years to meet demo-

graphic needs in different areas of the country. This announcement did not include a new school for the area to which the Deputy refers. Where the demographic exercise identified areas for the expansion of existing schools, this will be addressed through the Five Year School Capital Investment Plan. The demographic analysis to determine where additional post-primary accommodation may be needed from 2016 is a significant exercise and is still ongoing. When the exercise has been completed arrangements will be made to make additional accommodation available where it is needed.

### **Student Grant Scheme Reform**

236. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide details of any proposals that have been considered by her Department to introduce a State-funded education or maintenance loan system for third level students from 1 March 2011 to the present date; the content of any expert advice that has been received by her Department on this issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10976/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** Following discussions with my Department, with support and advice from the National Treasury Management Agency, a specific loan initiative was introduced by Bank of Ireland in 2012 to provide finance for fees and living costs for postgraduate students. While developed in conjunction with the Department of Education and Skills, it is a Bank of Ireland product and further information on the terms and conditions of the loan is available from the bank. The Deputy will also be aware that an Expert Group is currently examining future funding options for higher education. The objective is to identify a range of approaches that, combined, will achieve a sustainable funding base to address the continual expansion of the sector while protecting the quality of education. I understand that the Group intends to undertake a series of stakeholder consultations during the course of its work. As an interim report, the Group published a discussion paper on the role, value and scale of higher education last month and this is informing the first set of consultations. The paper is available on my Department’s website at <http://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Higher-Education>. I expect to receive the Group’s report before the end of 2015.

### **School Funding**

237. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if grant aid is available for small-sized primary schools to provide assembly areas, general practitioner rooms and physical education facilities, where there are very limited or no sporting and recreational facilities available at present; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11002/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The Deputy will be aware of the challenge that we have in ensuring that our school system is in a position to cope with increasing pupil numbers and the need to ensure that every child will have access to a physical school place. To meet this challenge, almost €2 billion in funding is being invested by the Department under the current 5 Year capital plan, announced in 2012. Due to the competing demands on my Department’s capital budget imposed by the need to prioritise available funding for the provision of essential school classroom accommodation, it is not possible, at this point, to consider applications for the facilities referred to by the Deputy.

### **School Staffing**

238. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will ensure there will be no reduction of the staffing complement of a school (details supplied) in County

Cavan; if she will further ensure that all the relevant issues outlined in recent correspondence from the school to her Department pertaining to the distance of this school to the next nearest primary school and the remote location of the school are taken into account in any decisions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11003/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The staffing arrangements for primary schools for the 2015/16 school year are set out in Department Circular 0005/2015 which is available on my Department’s website at [www.education.gov.ie](http://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. An appeals process is also available to small schools. Details of the appeals criteria are set out in the published staffing arrangements. The first meeting of the Primary Staffing Appeals Board will be held later this month. Schools which have submitted an appeal will be informed of the decision of the Board by the end of March, 2015. The Primary Staffing Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

### **Residential Institutions**

239. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the redress board and proposed legislation in respect of confidentiality of records of abuse being kept (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11020/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** Following Government approval I have published the draft General Scheme for a Retention of Records Bill, 2015, and have referred it to the Joint Oireachtas Committee of Education and Social Protection for Pre-Legislative Scrutiny. The draft General Scheme proposals relate to the records of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, the Residential Institutions Redress Board and the Residential Institutions Redress Review Committee. It proposes that on the dissolution of the bodies, their records will be deposited with the National Archives where they will be preserved and sealed for a period of 75 years. In keeping with the Motion adopted by this House following the publication of the Ryan Report, these proposals will allow the documentation received by the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse to be preserved for posterity and not destroyed. It is also proposed to preserve the documentation of the Residential Institutions Redress Board and Review Committee. I believe that it is very important that these records are not destroyed. However I am also very conscious that these records are highly sensitive. Accordingly, it is proposed that the records will be sealed for 75 years and that their release thereafter will be subject to appropriate safeguards.

### **Third Level Funding**

240. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total funding for higher education; and the total number of students enrolled in higher education in each year from 2011 to 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11024/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** Details on the total funding for higher education and the total number of students enrolled in higher education are set out in the tables.



Year	Student Numbers (full-time)	Student Numbers (part-time)
2010/11	160,972	32,208
2011/12	162,786	33,512
2012/13	164,498	34,257
2013/14	168,986	35,147
2014/15 (provisional)	169,402	28,468

The above numbers include undergraduate and postgraduate students. The 2014/15 figures are provisional.

#### HIGHER EDUCATION EXPENDITURE 2010 -2015

€000s

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015 (Provisional)
Current	€1,771.4	€1,688.1	€1,595.0	€1,537.5	€1,471.8	€1,380.0
Capital	€164.2	€79.0	€56.2	€69.1	€79.1	€83.7
TOTAL	€1,935.6	€1,767.1	€1,651.2	€1,606.6	€1,550.9	€1,463.7

The current expenditure figures above include recurrent funding (core grant and free fees), funding provided under the Student Grant Scheme, higher education research funding and other higher education funding.

#### Water Charges Administration

241. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding water charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10770/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** The overall package of measures on Irish Water financing announced by Government last November is designed to make water charges more affordable for customers. The charges structure was revised with a view to making it simpler and fairer, providing more clarity and certainty to households. The overall cost for those who register with Irish Water, net of the €100 water conservation grant, is either €1.15 a week for single adult households or €3 a week for all others. Water supply will not be reduced under any circumstance. When it comes to payment, a range of easy pay options will be in place, including direct debits, electronic funds transfer, payment by cash at any retail outlet with a paypoint or payzone sign or a post office where a bill can be paid in full or part payments of a minimum of €5 can be made. Irish Water also intends participating in the Household Budget scheme. This facility, operated by An Post on behalf of the Department of Social Protection, provides customers with a facility to have their household utility bills and social housing rents deducted directly from their weekly social welfare payment.

#### An Bord Pleanála Appeals

242. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if discussions undertaken by An Bord Pleanála in assessing an appeal are minuted;

and if such minutes are subject to Freedom Of Information access; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10867/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey):** An Bord Pleanála is required by section 34(10) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, to state the main reasons and considerations on which its decisions on planning appeals are based, including reasons for the imposition of any conditions. An Bord Pleanála is required to also indicate the main reasons for not accepting any recommendation to grant/refuse permission by an inspector engaged by it to report on a planning case. An Bord Pleanála has advised my Department that the main reasons and considerations, referred to above, are stated on the face of the Board decision order in each case and also on the Board direction sheet which precedes the making and signing of the formal Board order and records the outcome of the Board meeting at which the relevant case was discussed/decided. These documents are publicly available for inspection on the website of An Bord Pleanála and at its offices within 3 days following the making of the Board decision.

No record of the discussions of An Bord Pleanála at a meeting at which cases are decided, other than the above Direction sheet and Decision Order, are made. An Bord Pleanála does however produce a minuted record of the attendees and the cases discussed at each of its meetings and in relation to each case so discussed this minute also records the nature of the substantive decision made in relation to each case discussed at that meeting. This minute is made available by An Bord Pleanála on request.

### **Wind Energy Guidelines**

243. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when guidelines in respect of windfarms will become applicable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11047/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** In December 2013, my Department published proposed “draft” revisions to the noise, setback distance and shadow flicker aspects of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines. These draft revisions proposed:

- The setting of a more stringent day and night noise limit of 40 decibels for future wind energy developments,
- A mandatory minimum setback of 500 metres between a wind turbine and the nearest dwelling for amenity considerations, and
- The complete elimination of shadow flicker between wind turbines and neighbouring dwellings.

A public consultation process was initiated on these proposed draft revisions to the Guidelines, which ran until 21 February 2014. My Department received submissions from 7,500 organisations and members of the public during this period. It is intended that the revisions to the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines will be finalised as soon as possible. In this regard, account has to be taken of the extensive response to the public consultation in framing the final guidelines. Further work is also advancing to develop technical appendices to assist planning authorities with the practical application of the noise measurement aspects of the Wind Guidelines.

The revisions to the Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2006, when finalised, will be is-

sued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. In the interim, the 2006 Guidelines continue to apply to existing planning applications. Planning authorities, and, where applicable, An Bord Pleanála must have regard to guidelines issued under Section 28 in the performance of their functions under the Planning Acts.

### **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

244. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which he expects to be in a position to meet carbon reduction targets now and in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11055/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** I refer to the replies to Questions Nos. 128 and 131 of 28 January 2015 which sets out the position in this matter.

### **Seniors Alert Scheme**

245. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if there has been consultation with community councils, regarding proposed changes to the Senior Alert Scheme; if not, the reason; if he will endeavour to ensure proper consultation with all stakeholders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10754/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan):** Following the review of the Community Support for Older People (CSOP - the forerunner for the Seniors Alert Scheme) in 2009, which involved extensive consultation with all stakeholders, one of the key recommendations was that a centralised procurement process would simplify the scheme. By decreasing the level of administration for groups, this would allow them to spend more time on the key aim of the scheme, which is more and better interaction with older persons. The operational handover of the Seniors Alert Scheme between my Department and Pobal should be completed by mid-year. In the meantime, Community and Voluntary Groups wishing to participate and draw down grant support under the Seniors Alert Scheme should continue to apply to my Department in the usual way.

My Department has written to over 900 community and voluntary groups registered with the Scheme on several occasions to keep them apprised of developments. The most recent correspondence, which issued on 6 March 2015, advised the groups that Pobal will be holding regional meetings over the coming period to assist the groups in the transition to the new arrangements. These sessions will give local groups an opportunity to engage with Pobal and to address any concerns they may have.

### **Departmental Funding**

246. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when Clare County Council will receive its 2015 budget for housing grants for older people and people with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10765/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** Exchequer funding of over €37 million was provided by my Department to local authorities in 2014 for the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability. Com-

bined with an additional 20% contribution by individual local authorities, there was an overall spend last year of €46.3 million in this area. I am pleased to confirm that the 2015 amount will increase by some 10% to give a combined spend of €50.5 million. Individual allocations to local authorities will be made shortly.

### Local Authority Expenditure

247. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide, in tabular form, the amount spent by local authorities on outsourced services, per local authority, in the past five years; and if he will provide, in tabular form, the amount paid by local authorities, to third parties, for maintenance on local authority vehicles, and machinery. [10773/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** The information requested is not available in my Department.

### Homeless Accommodation Funding

248. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount spent by his Department and local authorities on homeless services from 2010 to 2014. [10777/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** My Department does not fund any homeless services directly but provides funding to housing authorities towards the operational costs of homeless accommodation and related services under Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988. Under Section 10 funding arrangements, housing authorities must provide at least 10% of the cost of such services from their own resources. Furthermore, housing authorities may also incur additional expenditure on homeless related services outside of the Section 10 funding arrangements. Therefore, the exact amounts spent by housing authorities on homeless services are a matter for those authorities. My Department provides Section 10 funding to lead housing authorities on a regional basis and a breakdown of such funding for the years 2010 to 2014 are set out in the following table.

#### Funding Provided under Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988

Region	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Dublin	€40,521,375	€35,732,525	€32,398,290	€31,322,223	€35,322,223
Mid-East	€906,842	€697,665	€839,146	€811,275	€928,489
Midlands	€666,344	€624,897	€672,027	€649,707	€649,707
Mid-West	€3,435,607	€2,905,457	€3,516,119	€3,399,336	€3,405,060
North-East	€1,037,617	€912,250	€910,194	€879,963	€879,963
North-West	€423,355	€406,335	€360,865	€348,879	€348,879
South-East	€1,742,886	€2,110,476	€1,848,877	€1,787,469	€1,818,969
South-West	€4,270,143	€3,505,749	€4,418,967	€4,272,197	€4,307,772
West	€1,699,288	€1,227,696	€1,581,478	€1,528,951	€1,544,712
Total	€54,703,457	€48,123,050	€46,545,963	€45,000,000	€49,205,774

### Irish Water Administration

249. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government for his views on a matter (details provided) regarding funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10825/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. They may be contacted via email at [oireachtasmembers@water.ie](mailto:oireachtasmembers@water.ie) or by telephone on 1890 578 578.

### **Leader Programmes Expenditure**

250. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if groups contributing more than 50% of the cost of a Leader project will have to advertise tenders on e-tenders or if they will be allowed to proceed on the basis of receiving five tenders for a project, in view of the extra cost e-tendering puts on project promoters under the Leader programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10826/15]

251. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if under the new Leader programme community groups will receive a grant for preliminary costs such as project design fees, feasibility studies, business plans and preparation of documentation for e-tendering even if a project does not proceed, in view of the very excessive costs involved in these processes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10827/15]

252. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the maximum grant under the new Leader programme for non-commercial projects; his plans to retain the €500,000 limit grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10828/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 250 to 252, inclusive, together.

Public Procurement Guidelines require that contracts awarded by any private entity, which are subsidised 50% or more by a public body, must be subject to public procurement and where the value exceeds certain thresholds, [www.etenders.gov.ie](http://www.etenders.gov.ie) must be used. Projects subsidised less than 50% are not subject to full public procurement; however, the European Regulations governing the Leader elements of the Rural Development Programme require an assessment of the reasonableness of costs and accordingly some level of public procurement will be required, depending on the value of the contract.

My Department is currently developing the management systems and operating rules that will be required to ensure the most effective implementation of the 2014-2020 Programme. These will include determining eligible costs, rates of aid and maximum grant levels such as those described by the Deputy. Full details will be available before Local Development Strategies become operational in Autumn 2015.

### **Leader Programmes Applications**

253. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and



Local Government the position regarding the appeal of a decision by his Department to revoke an application which was approved by Mayo North East Leader Partnership by an organisation (details supplied) and deemed ineligible for funding. [10855/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan):** In line with the ‘bottom-up’ approach to rural development under the Leader elements of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013, Local Action Groups (LAGs), in this case Mayo North East Leader Partnership, are the principal decision-makers in relation to the allocation of project funding. Such decisions are made in the context of the LAG’s local development strategy and in line with Programme’s Operating Rules and EU regulations.

The EU Regulations governing the Programme require that a certain percentage of claims are subject to Department inspection/audit. The project referred to in the details supplied was subject to such an inspection and was deemed ineligible for funding by my Department. This decision was subject to the full appeals procedure including my Department’s Appeal Panel, which upheld the finding of ineligibility. It is a matter for the project in question to appeal this decision to the Office of the Ombudsman, if they so wish.

### **Private Rented Accommodation Costs and Controls**

254. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the expert advice he has received on the introduction of rent controls or rent stabilisation measures in the private rental market; the information he has received on the potential costs of these measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10859/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey):** The Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) published two major reports on the private rented sector in 2014, entitled Future of the Private Rented Sector and Rent Stability in the Private Rented Sector. Both reports are available on the PRTB website at <http://www.prtb.ie/docs/default-source/pdf-manuals/future-of-the-private-rented-sector.pdf?sfvrsn=0> and <http://www.prtb.ie/docs/default-source/pdf-manuals/rent-stability-in-the-private-rented-sector.pdf?sfvrsn=0>.

The rent stability report includes an examination of rent regulation regimes in other countries and puts forward a series of policy options in relation to rent stability for consideration. These range from options in relation to rent control at one end of the spectrum through to measures aimed at increasing awareness of tenant rights under the existing legislation at the other. The report provides indicative costs for the range of rent stability options proposed, where applicable.

The Social Housing Strategy 2020 provides the basis for a concerted and coordinated approach to social housing provision and contains an action plan with detailed objectives and timelines. It includes a commitment to developing a national policy on the private rented sector aimed at increasing investment in and supporting the supply of good quality, secure and affordable accommodation in the sector. Both reports referred to above, together with a forthcoming National Economic and Social Council (NESC) report on the development of the private rented sector, will be important inputs to the process of considering possible further policy and legislative initiatives.

I recognise that the time-lag in terms of ramping up supply to match demand is fuelling a marked increase in rents, especially in Dublin and the other major cities, leading to difficulties,

particularly for lower-income households. The Government is monitoring the rental market closely and is considering policy options in relation to achieving greater rent certainty. My overriding objective in relation to rents is to achieve stability and sustainability in the market for the benefit of tenants, landlords and society as a whole.

### **Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists**

255. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 18 of 4 March 2015, if he will instruct local authorities to direct a designated amount of funding to home improvements and extensions of tenants’ homes, in view of the lack of funding for this which is contributing to lengthy waiting lists; and his views that by directing this funding to extensions and home improvements, he will contribute to alleviating the lengthy local authority housing waiting lists. [10861/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** I refer to the reply to Question No. 18 of 4 March 2015 which sets out the position in this matter.

### **Development Contributions**

256. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding development levies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10863/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** The charging of development contributions is intended to allow local authorities to recoup some of the costs to public funds of servicing land for private development. Without such contributions, this servicing would not proceed or the full cost would have to be borne by the taxpayer. Income from development levies must be ring-fenced to pay for facilities servicing new development, for example, for roads, footpaths, public lighting and open spaces.

Development contributions are levied on the basis of a development contribution scheme approved by the elected members which sets out how contributions are to be applied in their respective functional areas. The level of contribution and the types of development to which development contributions should apply, is therefore determined at local authority level in accordance with the powers vested in elected members in this connection.

The type of development contribution scheme referred to in the Question relates to a supplementary development contribution scheme, drawn up under Section 49 of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2014, which is designed to facilitate a particular public infrastructure service or project, in this case the Metro North, which was adopted by Dublin City Council in 2013. This scheme will run until 31 December 2015 unless extended by Council resolution and with the agreement of the National Transport Authority. The scheme runs concurrently to Dublin City Council’s Development Contribution Scheme 2013-2015.

### **Departmental Correspondence**

257. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his Department will confirm receipt of e-mail correspondence from a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11; if he will reply to the points raised as a matter of urgency; and

if he will make a statement on the matter. [10870/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** I can confirm that my Department received the e-mail correspondence referred to by the Deputy; however the matters raised in the e-mail are not within the remit or function of my Department.

### **Departmental Functions**

258. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his Department and agencies, organisations and authorities under the remit of his Department have a role or function in respect of public health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10876/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** My Department has an important role in relation to policy and legislation which impacts on public health, including in relation to water and air quality. In addition, local authorities, as well as some agencies under the remit of my Department such as the Environmental Protection Agency, have a role in respect of public health. Their activities include the discharge of both statutory functions as well as the promotion of health in communities .

### **Planning Issues**

259. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government regarding the planning and development regulations, the definition of a “pond”; when such a definition came into effect; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10878/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey):** Pond is not defined in the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended.

Class 6 of Part 1 of Schedule 2, Part 1 (Exempted development – General) of the Regulations includes an exemption from the requirement to obtain planning permission for the construction of any path, drain or pond or the carrying out of any landscaping works within the curtilage of a house. The condition attached to this exemption is that the level of the ground shall not be altered by more than 1 metre above or below the level of the adjoining ground.

Works relating to the construction or maintenance of any gully, drain, pond, trough, pit or culvert, the widening or deepening of watercourses, the removal of obstructions from watercourses and the making or repairing of embankments in connection with any of the foregoing works is also exempted development under Class 3, Schedule 2, Part 3 (Exempted development – Rural) of the Regulations.

### **Social and Affordable Housing Provision**

260. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans on issuing an instruction to Dublin City Council that 20% of all housing units under the docklands strategic development zone are to be designated as social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10886/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey):** Provision of housing within Dublin's docklands is a key part of its continuing development with the population of the area expected to increase by almost 6,000 in the coming years. Specific objectives have been included under Chapter 4 of the North Lotts and Grand Canal Dock Strategic Development Zone Planning Scheme to ensure that future housing provision meets the needs of the area, and is in line with the overall Dublin City Council Housing Strategy.

I am committed to the principle of a social housing gain from private development and I believe that the Part V mechanism under the Planning and Development Acts has the potential to be a significant contributor to achieving the targets set out in the Government's Social Housing Strategy 2020 – Support, Supply and Reform in the context of a recovering housing market.

Under the existing Part V provisions of the Planning and Development Acts, developers are required to ensure that up to 20% of land zoned for residential, and other uses, shall be reserved for social or affordable housing. However, with the substantial fall off in private construction, very little social housing is currently being provided under Part V.

Informed by a recent review of the Part V provisions, which included a public consultation process, my Department has incorporated the required legislative changes into the General Scheme of the Planning and Development (No 1) Bill which was published in November 2014 and is available on my Department's website at:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/PublicationsDocuments/FileDownload,39512,en.pdf>

The General Scheme of the Bill was the subject of pre-legislative scrutiny by the Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht. The Bill is currently being drafted in consultation with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel with a view to publication in the coming weeks and enactment before the summer recess.

The General Scheme provides that, in future, the focus of Part V will be on the delivery of social housing, with a requirement for up to 10% social housing in developments in excess of 9 units. In the operation of these revised Part V arrangements, the priority will be to secure social housing units on-site; the making of cash payments in lieu of social housing is to be discontinued.

Under the revised Part V provisions, which will apply to permissions granted under SDZ planning schemes, it is estimated that in the region of 4,000 additional social housing units will be delivered by 2020. My Department has written to local authorities recently highlighting the importance of ensuring that Part V agreements are discharged in ways that maximise the potential for the immediate delivery of social housing units.

### **Fire Service**

261. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his Department has been apprised of the decision to transfer the Dublin City fire brigade ambulance services to the Health Service Executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10895/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services, including the National Ambulance Service, is a matter for the Health Service Executive, which is under the aegis of my colleague, the Minister for Health.

Dublin City Council's Fire Brigade provides an emergency medical service on behalf of the Health Service Executive for a large part of the Dublin area. Emergency calls from the public for both fire and ambulance assistance are received currently in the Regional Communications Centre (RCC) operated by Dublin Fire Brigade in Townsend Street. My Department has been briefed by the City Council in relation to the implementation of recommendations for service improvement contained in the recently published Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) report on Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Services. In that context, while changes are proposed in the call-taking arrangements to deal with the HIQA recommendation, there are no proposals to change or remove the provision of the emergency ambulance service from Dublin Fire Brigade.

I understand that structures are being put in place to assist with implementation of the proposals. An inter-service implementation group is being established involving Dublin City Council and the HSE, and an internal Forum is to be convened within Dublin City Council, inclusive of DCC Management and SIPTU and IMPACT representatives, to address matters arising under proposals for the handling of emergency calls.

### **Housing Inspections**

262. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to provide additional funding to Dublin City Council, for the continuation of the intensive inspection programme of pre-1963 rental properties, in view of the significant success of the programme to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10910/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey):** Minimum standards for rental accommodation are prescribed in the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2008, made under section 18 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992. These Regulations were updated by the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2009. All landlords have a legal obligation to ensure that their rented properties comply with these regulations. Responsibility for enforcing the regulations rests with the relevant local authority, supported by a dedicated stream of funding allocated by my Department. This funding is provided from 20% of Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) tenancy registration fee income. My Department has allocated almost €29m to housing authorities since 2005 for the purpose of carrying out their functions under the Housing Acts in relation to rented accommodation. Additional funding was provided in 2010 for once-off strategically-planned programmes of inspection known as "Intensified Inspection Projects". Funding for Intensified Inspection Projects was awarded where housing authorities agreed to undertake additional, targeted inspection activity, over and above what they would conduct as part of their usual inspection programme.

A total of 20 applications were received and Dublin City Council was awarded €1,099,135 for their Intensified Inspection Programme which involved a commitment to carry out in excess of 8,500 inspections over a three year period. A recent report from Dublin City Council found that the majority of dwellings selected for inspection (which were pre-1963 multi-unit buildings and more likely to be in this category of accommodation) were non-compliant with the regulations on initial inspection. This programme of inspections has been extremely successful. According to the most recent data available, 70% of the non-compliant properties have already been brought into compliance. Enforcement action continues on the remainder, including legal action in certain cases. Dublin City Council commenced its intensified inspection programme in February 2012 and it is due to run until end March 2015.



The allocation of funding for Private Rented Inspections is reviewed annually and the allocation for 2015 will be approved shortly. In 2014, €2.5 million was allocated to local authorities to carry out their functions under the Housing Acts in relation to private rented accommodation and arrangements are being made for the payment of this funding in the coming months. The payments are based on actual inspection performance reported for the 12 months up to 31 December 2014. Funding in the amount of €300,000 was also allocated in 2014 to defray the cost of legal enforcement incurred by local authorities.

My Department is currently collating 2014 inspection data and will publish those online in due course. Data for previous years are available at <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/StatisticsandRegularPublications/HousingStatistics> .

### **Homeless Accommodation Provision**

263. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his Department has received information from Dublin City Council regarding the level of works that would be required to refurbish units at O'Devaney Gardens, and Croke Villas within the north inner city to house homeless families, as considered under the Government's action plan to tackle homelessness; if he has made a decision on issuing a direction to Dublin City Council to undertake such works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10913/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** Last month, approval issued from my Department to Dublin City Council for the refurbishment of a number of units in O'Devaney Gardens and Croke Villas to deliver short term accommodation for homeless persons.

It is a matter for the City Council to advance the planning of these works within the appropriate budgets.

### **Planning Issues**

264. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on a matter (details supplied) which is the subject of an inquiry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10915/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** MacCabe Durney Barnes Consultants were appointed in February 2014 to carry out an independent planning review on the performance of planning functions in six selected planning authorities (Carlow, Cork, Galway and Meath County Councils and Cork and Dublin City Councils) in accordance with section 255 of the Planning and Development Act 2000.

The planning review is being informed by the consideration of planning matters referred to the Minister by a number of stakeholder groups and individuals including the planning issue referred to by the Deputy in the Question.

I expect to receive the final report from the consultants shortly and I subsequently intend to publish it having considered its contents.

### **Wastewater Treatment**

265. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and

Local Government if he will provide an outline of the many different types of waste water treatment systems in use that are approved by local authorities, to meet current waste water standards, nationwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10919/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** The Building Regulations set out the legal requirements for the design and construction of buildings, including dwellings. Compliance with the Regulations is the responsibility of the owner or builder of a building or works.

Part H of the Second Schedule to the Building Regulations 1997 to 2014 sets out the requirements for the disposal of foul and surface water. The related Technical Guidance Document (TGD H 2010) provides guidance on how these requirements can be achieved in practice.

In relation to the use of septic tanks, in particular, TGD H states that “Septic Tanks must conform to I.S. EN 12566 Part 1 or 4 including their national annexes and comply with the EPA Code of Practice - Section 7”. The relevant national annexes are published by the National Standards Authority of Ireland and set out clearly the performance requirements for septic tanks when used in Ireland. TGD H also states that the design, installation and commissioning of wastewater treatment systems should be carried out and/or supervised by a suitably qualified person.

Public procurement and competition law preclude public bodies from advising or promoting the use of specific branded products or systems. Building Regulations and product standards, in this case I.S.EN 12566, typically set out the requirements in terms of performance standards which can be satisfied typically by a range of products or systems. The suitably qualified person required to oversee the design, installation and commissioning of wastewater systems will be best placed to advise on the most appropriate solution in a given set of circumstances.

### **Building Regulations Amendments**

266. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the consideration that has been given to amending the building regulations for one-off houses, as opposed to multiple developments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10953/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey):** I refer to the reply given in the Topical Issues Debate on this matter on 25 February 2015 which sets out the up-to-date position.

### **Wind Energy Guidelines**

267. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when the review of set-back distance for wind turbines is to be finalised and published, in view of the urgency for such a decision and in view of impending planning applications for new wind farms. [10954/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** My Department is currently conducting a targeted review of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines focusing on noise, setback and shadow flicker. Following an extensive public consultation, it is my intention that the revisions to the Guidelines will be finalised as soon as possible, taking into account the large number of submissions received during the pub-

lic consultation on draft proposals last year. The revisions to the Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2006, when finalised, will be issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. In the interim, the 2006 Guidelines continue to apply to existing planning applications. Planning authorities, and, where applicable, An Bord Pleanála must have regard to guidelines issued under Section 28 in the performance of their functions under the Planning Acts.

### **Water Services Provision**

268. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if this attention has been drawn to the lacuna in the law relating to the maintenance of sewage systems serving private residences, where a blockage occurs but not all residents on the group system agree to share the cost of repair; if Irish Water is empowered to issue legal notices to residents in this situation regarding their responsibilities and, if not, if he will undertake to legislate to provide Irish Water with such powers or alternatively to restore powers to environmental health officers to act on behalf of Irish Water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10966/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** Section 62 of the Water Services Act 2007 enables a water services authority to inspect a sewer or drain, and either direct the owner to carry out any necessary remedial works, or carry them out itself and recover its costs. The functions under section 62 were transferred to Irish Water under the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013.

In relation to private wastewater treatment systems the position is that Section 91 of the Water Services Act 2007 provides a water services authority with the power to intervene where a private waste water system is being operated or managed in such manner as to cause, or be likely to cause, a risk to human health or the environment. The functions under section 91 were transferred to Irish Water under the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013.

My Department, as part of a wider overhaul of the taking in charge process, is seeking to determine the number of residential developments with developer provided stand-alone wastewater treatment plants and/or water treatment systems that are not connected to public water and waste water networks. Many of the developments in question have not yet been taken in charge by the relevant local authority because they are unfinished. In some cases the developments may be completed but not to the standards required under the planning permissions granted. My Department has commenced a pilot project focussing on the situation in a number of local authority areas in order to get a clear overview of the nature of the problems which exist in the developments in question, and identifying possible solutions and associated costs required to alleviate those problems. The information garnered from the pilot project will subsequently be used by my Department to inform the development of a co-ordinated approach to the taking-in charge by local authorities of developments with developer provided water services infrastructure and, where appropriate, the transfer of such infrastructure to Irish Water.

### **Mortgage to Rent Scheme Administration**

269. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding an individual mortgage-to-rent case in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Cork; the next steps in the process; the estimated timeframe for its completion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10980/15]

274. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and

Local Government the number of mortgage-to-rent transactions that have been fully completed to date; the number currently at an advanced stage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11021/15]

275. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on raising the maximum house values attaching to the mortgage-to-rent schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11022/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 269, 274 and 275 together.

There are currently two mortgage-to-rent schemes in operation through my Department.

A scheme exists whereby a local authority (LA) can acquire ownership of properties with unsustainable local authority mortgages, thus enabling the household to remain in their home as a social housing tenant (LA-mortgage-to-rent). The other scheme provides for an Approved Housing Body (AHB) to acquire ownership of a property with an unsustainable private mortgage, which also enables the household to remain in their home as a social housing tenant (AHB-mortgage-to-rent). Both schemes are designed to assist families with income difficulties whose mortgages are now unsustainable, and where there is little or no prospect of a significant change in circumstances in the foreseeable future.

To be eligible for the AHB-mortgage-to-rent scheme a household must have had their mortgage position deemed unsustainable under the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process, agree to the voluntary surrender of their home, be in negative equity, and be deemed eligible for social housing in accordance with section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2009.

In order for a property to be considered under the AHB-mortgage to rent scheme it must be purchased by an Approved Housing Body for less than €220,000 (per property) in the Greater Dublin Area and €180,000 (per property) in the rest of the country. These limits were determined by a working group which took account of available market data and the current social housing acquisition limits. These limits are considered to be reasonable in respect of the income bracket that is targeted by the scheme.

A total of 2,748 cases had been submitted by the end of March 2015 under the AHB-mortgage-to-rent scheme. Of these 1, 866 were deemed ineligible or terminated during the process, of which 277 cases were not progressed because the household in question was deemed to be over or under accommodated. Agreement on the sale could not be agreed on a further 42 cases.

Of the remaining 840 cases submitted, 85 have been completed, 176 are currently with the lenders and the remaining 579 are being actively progressed. My Department has issued funding approval in respect of 117 cases.

The Local Authority Mortgage to Rent scheme, which was rolled out nationally in February 2014, allows local authorities to offer the mortgage to rent scheme to local authority mortgage holders with unsustainable mortgages. To date, 81 households in distress with local authority mortgage arrears have been assisted through the scheme. My Department has invited the submission of the first tranche of 2015 LAMTR claims from local authorities by 30 April 2015.

As regards the individual case referred to, I refer to the reply to Question No 555 of 27 January 2015 in which I outlined that an application for provisional approval was received by my Department on 9 June 2014 and that this provisional approval was granted the following day. I understand from the Housing Agency that lender's consent has since been received and the case has now been issued to the panel of Approved Housing Bodies to seek a purchaser.

## Local Authority Funding

270. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that his Department set aside an allocation of €1 million in additional funding for Sligo County Council in 2014, conditional on a financial plan being agreed between his Department and the council by the end of February 2014; that the draft financial plan was submitted by the council to his Department on 24 November 2014, with a further draft being submitted in December 2014; that his Department would not release the additional €1 million to the council in 2014 because of the failure of the council management to submit a sustainable financial plan within the timeframe allowed by his Department, and that his Department therefore decided to release only €250,000 additional funding to the council in 2014; if he will provide the council with the balance of €750,000 for 2014 when a plan is agreed; if an additional allocation of €1 million funding will be set aside for 2015 to assist the council move to a more sustainable financial position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10992/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** It is a matter for each local authority, including Sligo County Council, to determine its own spending priorities in the context of the annual budgetary process having regard to both locally identified needs and available resources. The elected members of a local authority have direct responsibility in law for all reserved functions of the authority, which include adopting the annual budget and authorising borrowing, and are democratically accountable for all expenditure by the local authority.

The continued deterioration of Sligo County Council's financial position is of serious concern to me. While it is a matter for individual local authorities to manage their own day-to-day finances in a prudent and sustainable manner, my Department is in regular consultation with the Council in relation to its financial position, including in relation to the agreement of a long term financial plan; this process is ongoing.

€1m of the general purpose grant allocation to Sligo County Council for 2014 was conditional on a realistic and achievable plan which charts a path to long-term financial sustainability being agreed between my Department and the Council. Following a meeting with my Department on 27 March 2014, wherein a draft financial plan was submitted, it was decided to provide Sligo County Council with €250,000 of this €1m. In the absence of a detailed plan being finally agreed before the end of 2014 no further payment was made to Sligo.

A similar amount of €1m has been included in the 2015 Local Property Tax allocation to Sligo County Council. Payment of this remains conditional on the plan being agreed and discussions with the Council, in this context, are ongoing.

## Waste Management Regulations

271. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide support in respect of a food manufacturing business (details supplied) at risk of losing jobs due to waste dumping near a site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10994/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** Issues concerning the enforcement of waste management legislation are a matter for the appropriate regulatory authority and should therefore be pursued with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or the relevant local authority, as appropriate.



The Office of Environmental Enforcement within the EPA has a mandate to deliver enhanced environmental compliance, both through enforcement of Agency licences issued to waste, industrial and other activities, and also through the supervisory role which it exercises in respect of the environmental protection activities of local authorities.

It is a matter for local authorities to set and attach specific conditions to a waste facility permit, or certificate of registration and for the Environmental Protection Agency to set and attach such conditions as may be necessary in relation to a waste licence. I have no function in relation either to the setting of operating conditions or their enforcement and under section 60(3) of the Waste Management Act 1996, as Minister, I am precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to the performance by the Environmental Protection Agency or a local authority, in particular circumstances, of a statutory function vested in it.

### **Fire Service**

272. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update regarding his Department's review of Dublin Fire Brigade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11013/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** My Department has not undertaken any review of Dublin Fire Brigade.

The Department's National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management maintains routine contact with Dublin City Council's Fire Brigade, which provides fire services on behalf of the four Dublin local authorities. The role of the National Directorate is to develop and support the provision of consistent and effective fire services in Ireland; in that context, the policy document Keeping Communities Safe, (KCS) was published in February 2013.

KCS has introduced national norms and standards for fire services for the first time in Ireland. The approach set out is in line with international best practice and local authority fire service provision can now be benchmarked against these national norms and standards. As a first step, each fire service has undertaken an 'Area Risk Categorisation' (ARC) process as recommended in KCS. This is based on analysis of relevant data-sets for each fire station area, with areas being graded across five bands from very high to very low risk categories in accordance with the evidence. Fire services are using a risk management approach, which includes fire prevention and fire protection in buildings as well as response in terms of numbers of fire appliances and fire crews in an area, to manage the identified fire risk.

An external validation of the ARC process has been undertaken by the National Directorate to ensure that it is carried out consistently by all fire services. This validation process involves a one-day review of the draft ARC prepared by each authority. The ARC process for the Dublin area has been undertaken by the management of Dublin Fire Brigade area and the process has been validated by the National Directorate. The conclusions reached through the ARC process are as determined by Dublin Fire Brigade management.

The National Directorate's involvement is a validation process and is not a review of Dublin Fire Brigade. I am confident however that the process is contributing to the development of high quality and effective fire services for the people of the Dublin area.

### **Priory Hall Development**

273. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update regarding the redevelopment of Priory Hall,

Dublin 13; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11015/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey):** The first three phases of the remediation works for Priory Hall are ongoing and planning of the subsequent phases is advancing. I understand from Dublin City Council that marketing agents have been appointed to advise on a marketing strategy for the overall complex.

*Questions Nos. 274 and 275 answered with Question No. 269.*

### **Renewable Energy Generation**

276. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if European funding will be made available to semi-State companies for the development of renewable energy here. [10731/15]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White):** There are a number of sources of European Union funding that could be available for renewable energy projects led by commercial sector developers, including commercial semi-State companies. These sources include the Connecting Europe Facility, European Structural and Investment Funds, and the recently announced European Fund for Strategic Investment. These funds are available to major infrastructure projects including “Projects of Common Interest” considered to be important to the development of the EU Internal Energy Market. Additionally, renewable energy research and innovation is an area which is eligible for funding through the EU’s Horizon 2020 programme. It is a matter for individual companies to pursue these funding options.

### **Internet Safety**

277. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the Government policy on the principle of net neutrality and the regulation of Internet infrastructure pertaining to the bandwidth provided by Internet providers to consumers; if he has examined potential benefits of net neutrality to business start-ups; his views on the recent decision by European Union member states on net neutrality provisions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10768/15]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White):** As Minister for Communications, I fully support an open Internet that ensures equal access to all content and applications, free from discriminatory practices based on price. At present there is currently no legal impediment to operators blocking access to internet content. However, this, however, is being addressed at EU level, where net neutrality provisions form part of the proposed Regulation on “*laying down measures concerning the European single market for electronic communications and to achieve a Connected Continent*”. Ireland supports the current approach taken by the Latvian Presidency at Council to address net neutrality by way of a principles based approach. I am hopeful that the Latvian Presidency will be able to progress this matter sufficiently to allow agreement be reached with the European Parliament in the coming months.

### **Telecommunications Infrastructure**

278. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the Government policy on investment in 4G mobile telecommunications technology and the potential, as a lever, to connect Irish households and businesses who currently

do have high-speed broadband provision; if he has examined the potential of investing in the latest 5G infrastructure via public private partnerships with the technology industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10769/15]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White):** Investment in telecommunications technology is primarily a matter for industry, which operates in a liberalised market. The provision of mobile telephony services, is subject to a requirement to secure access to the required radio spectrum by way of licence. The management of the radio spectrum is a statutory function of the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) under the Communications Regulation Act, 2002 as amended. Licences issued by ComReg apply terms and conditions on Mobile Network Operators, such as quality of service and minimum population coverage obligations.

As Minister for Communications, one of my key objectives is to ensure that Ireland is best placed to avail of the emerging opportunities provided by the commercial telecommunications sector through the promotion of investment in state of the art infrastructure and the provision of a supportive legislative and regulatory environment.

The commercial telecommunications sector is currently investing approximately €2.5bn in upgrading and modernising networks which support the provision of high speed broadband services, and are facilitating the rollout of 3G and 4G mobile services. All of the mobile operators are continuing to invest in the deployment of 4G services and the enhancement of 3G services. These enhanced mobile data services are now expected to extend significantly beyond the footprint of 70--85% population coverage which was envisaged by industry when the National Broadband Plan (NBP) was agreed in 2012. One operator states that it already has 90% population coverage of 4G. Investment in 5G technologies is not envisaged in the short term as this technology is still at the conceptual stage; commercial rollout is not, therefore, anticipated.

Investment by the State can only occur where there are proven instances of market failure. As you will be aware, my Department is currently developing a detailed intervention strategy as part of the National Broadband Plan to ensure that every home, school and business, regardless of location has access to a high quality, high speed broadband service. This State-led intervention will focus on areas where commercial services will not be provided.

It is anticipated that speeds of at least 30Mbps will also be delivered through the Government's intervention and the network will be designed to cater for future increased demand from consumers and businesses. In terms of technologies to deliver these speeds, we must observe a policy of technology neutrality so as to comply with the European Commission's State Aid guidelines.

### **Renewable Energy Feed in Tariff Scheme Implementation**

279. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the feed-in tariffs available for renewable energy producers; if a new policy is being formed regarding the photovoltaic sector, with particular regard for less than 6 kW-hour producers and, second, less than 11 kW-hour producers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10877/15]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White):** The Renewable Electricity Feed-in Tariff (REFIT) schemes are the principal means of supporting renewable electricity generators for renewable energy exported to the grid. These schemes support electricity generated from a range of renewable sources, including small scale hydro, biomass and wind. Based around Power Purchase Agreements between generators and electricity suppliers, REFIT schemes assure a minimum price for each unit of electricity exported to

the grid over a 15 year period. Small scale renewable generation is eligible to apply for support under the REFIT schemes.

Furthermore, the SEAI provides a range of supports to businesses and homeowners in relation to the deployment of renewable energy technologies including training and advice. Businesses and homeowners wishing to develop renewable energy projects can also avail of grant support for investment in renewable energy installations under the Better Energy Communities and Better Energy Homes schemes respectively.

Microgeneration is the general term used by ESB Networks to refer to generation that is less than 11kW. My Department is considering the optimal fuel mix, including the role of microgeneration, for Ireland. Analysis of the potential of microgeneration technologies such as small scale wind, solar (including photovoltaic) and small scale hydro, has been carried out by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). The SEAI's findings, along with responses to the recent consultation on the Green Paper on Energy Policy in Ireland, will inform future policy on the provision of any market support for microgeneration. The views will be taken into consideration in preparation of the White Paper on Energy which will be finalised in September this year.

Given the emerging policy context and the requirements of the EU target market for electricity, my Department is beginning the process of developing a new support scheme for electricity, to be available from 2016 onwards. A key component of this will be consideration of the available technologies, their cost effectiveness and the level of support required. The scheme will be subject to State Aid clearance and the initial public consultation on the new scheme will commence shortly.

### **Broadband Service Provision**

280. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the position regarding broadband availability and roll-out plans in a location (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10924/15]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White):** The National Broadband Plan aims to ensure that every citizen and business, regardless of location, has access to a high quality, high speed broadband service. This will be achieved through a combination of commercial investments and a State led intervention in areas where commercial services will not be provided.

The commercial telecommunications sector is currently investing approximately €2.5 billion in network upgrades and enhanced services with approximately 1.6 million of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland 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.

Last November I published a national high speed coverage map for 2016. This map is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). The areas marked BLUE represent those areas that will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016.

The AMBER areas show the target areas for the State intervention and includes Brosna, Co Kerry. The map allows all members of the public, be they business or residential, to see whether their premises / home will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016 or whether they will be included in the Government's proposed intervention.

A public consultation on the map, which commenced in November, closed on the 12th February last. 29 submissions have been received to date and will be assessed over the coming weeks. This will help inform the key decisions that require to be taken in order to finalise our comprehensive Intervention Strategy which I intend publishing for consultation in July next.

The strategy will address a range of important issues in relation to the intervention including the optimum procurement model, ownership and governance options, funding issues and levels of service for end-users. Part of the analysis being undertaken involves consideration of identifying and prioritising strategic connection points such as enterprise parks, schools and other points of economic or social activity within rural communities.

The proposed Intervention will also be subject to State Aid clearance from the European Commission.

Following the public consultation this summer, a detailed procurement process, in line with EU and Irish procurement rules, will be undertaken in order to select a preferred bidder or bidders. The Department will design the 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**

281. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide an update on the progress being made on plans for a State investment in rural broadband in County Kildare; when work will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10951/15]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White):** The National Broadband Plan aims to ensure that every citizen and business, regardless of location, has access to a high quality, high speed broadband service. This will be achieved through a combination of commercial investments and a State led intervention in areas where commercial services will not be provided.

The commercial telecommunications sector is currently investing approximately €2.5 billion in network upgrades and enhanced services with approximately 1.6 million of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland 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.

Last November I published a national high speed coverage map for 2016. This map is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). The areas marked BLUE represent those areas that will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016. The AMBER areas show the target areas for the State intervention. The map allows all members of the public, be they business or residential, to see whether their premises / 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. The intervention area includes over 20,500 premises in Kildare.

A public consultation on the map, which commenced in November, closed on 12 February last. 29 submissions have been received to date and will be assessed over the coming weeks.



This will help inform the key decisions that require to be taken in order to finalise our comprehensive Intervention Strategy which I intend publishing for consultation in July next.

The strategy will address a range of important issues in relation to the intervention including the optimum procurement model, ownership and governance options, funding issues and levels of service for end-users. Part of the analysis being undertaken involves consideration of identifying and prioritising strategic connection points such as enterprise parks, schools and other points of economic or social activity within rural communities.

The proposed Intervention will also be subject to State Aid clearance from the European Commission.

Following the public consultation this summer, a detailed procurement process, in line with EU and Irish procurement rules, will be undertaken in order to select a preferred bidder or bidders. The Department will design the 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.

### **Renewable Energy Generation**

282. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the extent to which alternative non-fossil fuel resources continue to be developed in line with the need to meet European Union and international targets; if it is expected to achieve the levels required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11042/15]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White):** The overarching objective of Ireland's energy policy is to ensure secure, sustainable supplies of competitively priced energy to all consumers. As a State we have ambitious targets for 16% of our energy from renewable sources by 2020 through meeting 40% of electricity demand from renewable sources, with 10% renewables in transport and 12% in heat. In 2013, 7.8% of Ireland's overall energy requirement was met by renewable energy.

Policies and schemes are in place to incentivise the use of renewable energy. The REFIT schemes underpin the development of a range of renewable electricity technologies, including hydro, biomass combustion, biomass combined heat and power, landfill gas and onshore wind. To date wind energy has been the largest driver of growth in renewable electricity. The total amount of renewable generation connected to the grid is 2,500 MW of which approximately 2,200 MW is wind. It is estimated that between 3,500 and 4,500 MW of onshore renewable generation capacity will be required to allow Ireland to meet its 40% renewable electricity target.

Additionally, Part L of the Building Regulations support the uptake of renewable heat. The Draft Bioenergy Plan, which was published last year, recommends the introduction of a Renewable Heat Incentive for larger heat users to change to heating solutions that produce heat from renewable sources. In terms of renewable transport, the Biofuels Obligation Scheme and grant support for the purchase of electric vehicles underpin the deployment of renewable energy in the transport sector.

### **Broadband Service Provision**

283. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when high speed, high quality broadband will become available in all regions of

the country without exception; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11043/15]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White):**

The National Broadband Plan aims to ensure that every citizen and business, regardless of location, has access to a high quality, high speed broadband service. This will be achieved through a combination of commercial investments and a State led intervention in areas where commercial services will not be provided.

The commercial telecommunications sector is currently investing approximately €2.5 billion in network upgrades and enhanced services with approximately 1.6 million of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland 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.

Last November I published a national high speed coverage map for 2016. This map is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). The areas marked BLUE represent those areas that will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016.

The AMBER areas show the target areas for the State intervention. The map allows all members of the public, be they business or residential, to see whether their premises / 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.

A public consultation on the map, which commenced in November, closed on the 12th February last. 29 submissions have been received to date and will be assessed over the coming weeks. This will help inform the key decisions that require to be taken in order to finalise our comprehensive Intervention Strategy which I intend publishing for consultation in July next.

The strategy will address a range of important issues in relation to the intervention including the optimum procurement model, ownership and governance options, funding issues and levels of service for end-users. Part of the analysis being undertaken involves consideration of identifying and prioritising strategic connection points such as enterprise parks, schools and other points of economic or social activity within rural communities.

The proposed Intervention will also be subject to State Aid clearance from the European Commission.

Following the public consultation this summer, a detailed procurement process, in line with EU and Irish procurement rules, will be undertaken in order to select a preferred bidder or bidders. The Department will design the 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.

### **Telecommunications Services Provision**

284. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if his Department has a function in the development of mobile phone network quality and coverage, notwithstanding the role being played by the regulator; if Government has a role to play in ensuring the adequacy of high quality mobile telephony in line with best

practice in other European countries; if in view of the fact that the quality here is not keeping pace with our competitors throughout Europe, an initiative will be considered to improve matters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11044/15]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White):** The management of the radio spectrum is a statutory function of the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) under the Communications Regulation Act, 2002 as amended. Licences issued by ComReg apply terms and conditions on Mobile Network Operators, such as quality of service and minimum population coverage obligations.

As Minister for Communications, one of my key objectives is to promote timely investment in state of the art telecommunications infrastructure and the provision of a supportive legislative and regulatory environment.

The commercial telecommunications sector is currently investing approximately €2.5bn in upgrading and modernising networks. These investments are improving the coverage and quality of fixed and mobile voice and data services throughout the country.

While investment in communications infrastructure and services is primarily a matter for the private sector, the National Broadband Plan commits to a range of actions that will facilitate the more efficient commercial investment in the rollout of communications infrastructure.

Since publication of the Plan in 2012, a working group has been established to address infrastructure issues which were identified by industry as creating barriers to deployment of services. The group is chaired by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and includes representatives from my Department, the Local Government Management Agency, the National Roads Authority (NRA) and Local Authorities.

The Group has reviewed issues relating to the location of telecommunications infrastructure on public roads, particularly motorways, with a view to reducing blackspots and enhancing services and will shortly be in a position to publish a report which will give guidance on the potential location of overground telecommunications infrastructure on public roads.

The Group is now addressing issues in relation to road openings and deploying infrastructure underground. Local Authorities have an important role in assisting the rollout of telecommunications infrastructure, as does the the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, whose planning process must be complied with in advance of infrastructure deployment.

My Department is also in the process of reviewing national spectrum policy and is currently considering the outcome of a recent public consultation on spectrum policy. An important element of this review is to ensure that our legal and regulatory environment supports continued investment in mobile telecommunication infrastructure, which is dependent on access to radio spectrum. It is expected that a draft policy statement will be published later this year.

## **Energy Production**

285. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the extent to which natural energy resources continue to be developed and made available to the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11045/15]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White):** The overarching objective of the Government's energy policy is to ensure secure and sustain-

able supplies of competitively priced energy to all consumers.

The Government's strategy for the exploitation of the State's natural hydrocarbon resources aims to maximise the level of exploration activity and increase the level of production activity, while ensuring a fair return to the State from these activities. My Department continues to promote exploration and development opportunities to the international oil and gas industry. As at 28 February 2015 there were 3 Petroleum leases, 30 Exploration Licences and 16 Licensing Options active in the Irish Offshore.

Exploration activity levels in the Irish offshore has ebbed and flowed over the past four decades. However, Ireland currently has the highest number of exploration authorisations in place since offshore exploration began in the early 1960's. To date, exploration has yielded four commercial gas fields but no commercial oil fields.

In terms of the energy system, in 2013 peat represented 5.4% of energy use with electricity generation from peat being supported at three plants. Furthermore, in 2013 approximately 4% of our gas needs was met from Irish sources.

Our natural resources, including wind, biomass, hydro, solar and geothermal play a role in increasing the renewable energy we use and, in 2013, 7.8% of Ireland's overall energy requirement was met from renewable sources. This is set to increase in the context of meeting our renewable energy target of 16% by 2020. In this regard policies are in place to incentivise the increased use of renewable energy including the REFIT schemes and the Biofuels Obligation Scheme, both of which can provide a route to market for indigenous resources.

Although wind energy has been the largest driver of growth in renewable electricity in Ireland, there is potential to diversify our renewable electricity generation portfolio. To that end, the 2014 Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan identifies the sustainable economic opportunity for Ireland of realising the potential of our indigenous offshore wind, wave and tidal energy resources.

Furthermore, the recently published Draft Bioenergy Plan recommends the introduction, from 2016, of a Renewable Heat Incentive for larger heat users to change to heating solutions that produce heat from renewable sources. The draft Bioenergy Plan recognises that meeting the demand for biomass from indigenous sources could deliver significant benefits. Consequently, the draft Plan contains measures to stimulate and support the supply of Irish biomass.

### **Corrib Gas Field**

286. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when gas supplies from the Corrib Gas field will become available on the national grid; the extent to which various towns and villages throughout the country are likely to benefit from this source in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11046/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Completion of the Corrib gas field development works, by the developer, is the principal factor that will determine the date for first gas. Construction and testing of the infrastructure will be completed shortly, with first gas anticipated in mid 2015. It is estimated that the project will have an operating life span of between 15 to 20 years and gas production will on average meet 42% of all island gas demand over the first 2 years of operation declining thereafter. I understand that the bulk of the gas produced from the Corrib field will be supplied to the national grid via the 149km pipeline constructed by Bord Gáis Networks

(now Gas Networks Ireland) and which runs from the Gas terminal in Bellanaboy Co Mayo to Ballymoneen outside of Galway.

### **Renewable Energy Generation**

287. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the various non-fossil fuel alternatives currently available or likely to become available in respect of home heating; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11048/15]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White):** The 2009 EU Renewable Energy Directive set Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy requirements from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland is committed to meeting 40% of electricity demand from renewable sources, with 10% for transport and 12% for heat. In 2013, 5.7% of heat demand was met by energy from renewable sources. There are a number of renewable heat technologies available in the domestic heat sector, including biomass boilers, electric heaters, air and ground source heat pumps and solar heating.

The most significant support for domestic heating is Part L of the Building Regulations which introduce requirements regarding conservation of fuel and energy for new dwellings. Planned reviews of these regulations, for buildings other than dwellings, to achieve Nearly Zero Energy Buildings status, are also expected to result in increasing the uptake of renewable heat from a range of sources. In addition, the Better Energy Homes scheme, operated by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), provides supports to homeowners for energy efficiency measures including the installation of solar heating.

Furthermore, the European Union (Energy Efficiency) Regulations, 2014 set out a range of requirements for the promotion of energy efficiency, including a requirement for the SEAI to undertake an assessment of the potential for the application of cost beneficial district heating and Combined Heat and Power in Ireland. The development of biomass-fuelled CHP and district heating, as well as improving energy efficiency, has the potential to contribute to our renewable energy targets. The comprehensive assessment is expected to be completed this year.

### **Electricity Generation**

288. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will express, as a percentage of daily electricity requirements, the volume of electricity now being generated from oil, gas, wind, biomass or other alternatives, including those likely to become available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11049/15]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White):** The information sought by the Deputy is available in the public domain.

The EirGrid Smart Grid Dashboard (publicly available on EirGrid's smart grid dashboard website at <http://smartgriddashboard.eirgrid.com/> ) sets out the System Generation fuel mix and net imports across the power system in the all-island wholesale electricity market (SEM). It shows the average fuel mix for the last 24 hours, the last week and the last month, on an all-island, Ireland and Northern Ireland basis.

Under Regulation 25 of S.I. No. 60 of 2005, the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) is required to ensure that all electricity suppliers provide reliable information on bills and promotional materials sent to customers regarding the contribution of each energy source to the



overall fuel mix of the supplier concerned. To this end, the CER publishes an annual Information Paper on Disclosure of Fuel Mix and CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions which sets out the fuel mixes and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions factors for suppliers licensed in Ireland and operating in the Single Electricity Market (SEM), as calculated in accordance with the SEM-11-095 Decision Paper on Fuel Mix Disclosure in the Single Electricity Market: Calculation Methodology. The most recent Fuel Mix Disclosure and CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions publication is for 2013 and is available at [http://www.cer.ie/docs/000414/CER14297%20CER%20Fuel%20Mix%20Disclosure%202013%20Information%20Document%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.cer.ie/docs/000414/CER14297%20CER%20Fuel%20Mix%20Disclosure%202013%20Information%20Document%20(1).pdf)

Among the relevant SEAI publications, in the public domain, containing relevant data on electricity generation fuel mixes in Ireland, are (a) Renewable Energy in Ireland 2013 and (b) Energy in Ireland 1990-2013 Report, both of which are publicly available on the SEAI website at <http://www.seai.ie/>.

### Energy Prices

289. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the extent to which he and his European Union colleagues have discussed the issue of energy costs here and throughout the European Union, with particular reference to the need for oil companies to pass on oil price reductions to the consumer, including the motorist, domestic households and commercial users; the extent to which the economic benefit continues to be assessed in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11050/15]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White):** The fall in oil and gas prices on international markets, although referenced at recent meetings between energy ministers, has not been a specific topic of discussion. One of the main ways that competitiveness is addressed at a European level is through ensuring that the EU has well-functioning, liberalised energy markets. This is seen as the most effective means to deliver energy to consumers at lowest cost. This was emphasised at last week's Council of Energy Ministers at which the Energy Union Package was discussed in detail. The Irish oil sector is completely privatised, liberalised and deregulated and there is free entry to the market. It is government policy to promote competition and consumer choice.

Oil is primarily consumed in two sectors of the economy - in transport and heating. The amount of oil used in the electricity sector is negligible at less than 1%. In terms of gasoline and diesel prices at the pump and home heating prices, the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (under the aegis of the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation) has a role in ensuring that the market is functioning correctly and that consumers are not being disadvantaged. Previous investigations and surveys, available at [www.ccpc.ie](http://www.ccpc.ie), into oil prices, including home heating oil, indicates that the price paid by consumers is largely determined by taxation levels, the internationally traded price of crude oil and the consequent price at which refined product is traded in Europe, along with the level of competition in the retail market.

The European Commission maintains a Statistics and Market Observatory, which presents consumer prices and net prices of petroleum products in EU Member States (known as the Oil Bulletin) on a weekly basis. The Oil Bulletin is designed to improve the transparency of oil prices and to strengthen the internal market. The relevant link is:

[http://ec.europa.eu/energy/observatory/oil/bulletin\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/energy/observatory/oil/bulletin_en.htm).

### Exploration Licences Data

290. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and

Natural Resources the extent to which oil, gas or other exploration licences issued in the past 15 years have been activated or are in process thereof; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11051/15]

292. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the extent of any gold, silver, oil, gas or other minerals discovered on-shore or off-shore on foot of licences offered or issued over the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11053/15]

293. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the uptake of exploration licences in each year from 2007 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11054/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 290, 292 and 293 together.

Details of all authorisations granted by the Department are published in the six monthly reports to the Oireachtas, which I am obliged to lay before the Houses under the Minerals Development Acts, 1940 to 1999 and the Petroleum and Other Minerals Development Act, 1960, respectively. The last such reports were in respect of the period ending 31 December, 2014. These details and reports are also available on my Department's website at [www.dcenr.gov.ie](http://www.dcenr.gov.ie). All authorisations for oil and gas exploration issued by my Department are granted subject to the carrying out of a work programme agreed with the Department. The delivery of such work programmes is monitored by the Department during the course of the authorisation.

While there have been no commercial discoveries of oil or gas within the territory of the State in the last fifteen years there has been a positive upswing in the level of petroleum exploration activity in recent years, in particular acquisition of new seismic data. We need to see this translate into an increased level of exploration drilling in the coming years, if Ireland's true petroleum potential is to be realised.

In a similar manner, while the number of active minerals prospecting licences indicate the buoyant state of mineral exploration in Ireland, no new commercially viable deposits of minerals have been discovered in the last fifteen years, although there have been some encouraging results, particularly in Counties Limerick and Clare. It is too early to determine however whether these results will lead to identification of commercially viable deposits.

### **Post Office Network**

291. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the extent to which he is committed to the retention of the post office network and delivery service throughout the country, including next day deliveries and the provision of additional services suitable for administration through An Post, thereby enhancing future viability of the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11052/15]

294. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the extent to which any examination has been done to ascertain the full extent to which the post office system may be adapted using modern technology to provide a complimentary range of services to those provided through An Post throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11056/15]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 291 and 294 together.

It is Government policy that An Post remains a strong and viable company, in a position to provide a high quality postal service and maintain a nationwide network of customer focused post offices in the community.

Under the Communications Regulation (Postal Services) Act 2011, An Post is statutorily required, as the designated universal service provider, to provide a universal postal service and the essential element of this obligation is the collection and delivery of mail to every address in the State on every working day.

The post office network faces significant challenges given the impact of the economic downturn over the last few years, changes in technology and customer retail preferences. However, post offices, having being fully computerised some years ago, also stand well positioned to become the front office provider of choice for Government and the financial services sector for both electronic transactions as well as the more traditional over the counter transactions.

The recently established Post Office Network Business Development Group is examining the potential from existing and new Government and commercial business that could be transacted through the post office network and identifying the new business opportunities for the post office network, taking account of international experience.

The Group's work will be of strategic importance to the future of the post office network. I expect to receive the interim and final reports of the Group later this year.

*Questions Nos. 292 and 293 answered with Question No. 290.*

### **Taxi Data**

295. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide, in tabular form, the number of rural hackney licence applications that have been received by the National Transport Authority; the number approved; rejected, by county, in the years, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10783/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for the regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013, including responsibility for the issuing of rural hackney licences.

I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

### **Public Transport Provision**

296. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will examine and intervene regarding the restoration and continuation of the Dingle to Ballydavid, County Kerry bus service, whereby Ballydavid village was taken off of the route because of the perception of an inadequate turning point, and the local committee, Coiste Fobairt an Phobail Ceanntar Baile na nGall, in conjunction with Kerry County Council will rectify the problem, if this is the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10884/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response

within ten working days.

### **Sports Capital Programme Administration**

297. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the new sports capital programme will open; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10921/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring):** I was delighted to announce the opening of the 2015 round of the Sports Capital Programme on Tuesday. I would advise all those who are interested to ensure that they are registered on the online system before 5pm on Friday 10 April 2015 (if not already registered) and to submit their online applications well in advance of the deadline of 5pm on Friday 24 April 2015.

### **Bus Éireann Services**

298. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to support the campaign to return bus services to the Castledermot, County Kildare, and the R448 route following recent moves by private providers to stay on the M9 instead of passing through the town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10952/15]

300. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide details of the passenger numbers on Bus Éireann routes 4 and 7; where it is stated by Bus Éireann that a route is unprofitable to travel through regional towns; the measures his Department has taken to investigate before considering a public service obligation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10956/15]

301. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to support efforts to adequately cover bus services for Athy town, County Kildare, following the recent announcement by Bus Éireann to curtail services in that area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10957/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 298, 300 and 301 together.

I refer the Deputy to my reply to Priority Question No. 115 which I answered on the 10th March 2015 (copy below).

The issues raised are matters for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for securing the provision of public transport services, including the provision of PSO subvented services. I ensured that PSO funding was maintained at current levels in the last Budget, the first time this has happened since 2008. I was also able to secure an additional €101 million in funding for our public transport companies in a Supplementary Estimate.

Expressway services are commercial services operated in competition with private operators on main trunk routes and are licensed by the NTA. These commercial services do not receive any PSO funding from the Exchequer.

I am acutely aware of the concerns of many people regarding recent decisions to withdraw services to a number of intermediate locations on major routes into Dublin. Major improvements to the national roads network have provided the opportunity for commercial bus operators to offer improved journey times between Dublin and the regional cities in particular, with the consequent effect of reducing the level of service provided to a number of intermediate locations.

I should make it clear that there are two routes - not hundreds, as reported in the media - that are currently at issue. These are routes 5 and 7.

At a recent community meeting in Castlecomer, Bus Éireann agreed to postpone the changes to its licensed Route 7 services until June. A working group comprising local representatives and members of the local community and with the active participation of NTA and Bus Éireann will explore options for the continuation of public transport services in the area. The NTA is examining what might be an appropriate PSO service to put in place subject to funding.

Separately, the NTA, in conjunction with Bus Éireann, is examining options to re-configure existing PSO services in the south-east in order to maintain socially necessary services to the affected areas following the withdrawal of Route 5.

I assure the Deputy that I will continue to work with the NTA on wider issues around transport in rural Ireland over the coming weeks.

### **Public Transport Subsidies**

299. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of money his Department has provided to Bus Éireann in each of the past three years; the way this money is broken down, and the requirement there is for Bus Éireann to have a social conscience regarding its routes in view of the State funding received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10955/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The issue raised is a matter for National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

*Questions Nos. 300 and 301 answered with Question No. 298.*

### **Roads Maintenance Funding**

302. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason funding under the regional and local roads investment programme to Louth County Council has been reduced for 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10975/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Funding for the national, regional and local road network has been reduced significantly across the board in recent years; in 2008 funding was €2.3 billion while funding this year is around €730 million. Regional and local road allocations in 2015 have seen an overall reduction of 11% on the 2014 start of year figure (this 2014 figure included €50 million in one-off stimulus funding). Louth has not incurred a disproportionate reduction in regional and local road allocations. When allowance is made for the fact that €21.7 million of the reduction is due to certain local authorities becoming self-funding the net reduction in regional and local road grants is 5%.



12 March 2015

When the one-off €50 million start of year stimulus boost in 2014 is excluded, the 2015 allocation to Louth, sees a 15% increase on the 2014 allocation across the three main grant categories (Restoration Maintenance, Restoration Improvement and Discretionary Grant). The 2015 regional and local road allocation to Louth was boosted by almost €200,000 in Specific Grants in respect of the R166 Station Road Drumleck-Castlebellingham and the R132 Bridge of Peace in Drogheda. These schemes also received funding totalling €300,000 in 2014. (Most counties did not receive any Specific Grant funding in 2014 or 2015 as this Grant was curtailed).

### **Legal Costs**

303. **Deputy Shane Ross** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the total amount in legal fees paid by the Road Safety Authority to solicitors' firms each year from 2009 to 2014; the amount paid to each firm in each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10998/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The subject matter of this particular question is the responsibility of the Road Safety Authority and I have referred the question to it for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a reply has not been received within ten days.