

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 10, inclusive, answered orally.

Sports Funding

11. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update on his Department's monitoring of all sporting bodies in receipt of public moneys to ensure proper financial auditing and financial governance standards. [23470/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): The Irish Sports Council, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the promotion, development and co-ordination of sport. This includes responsibility for the allocation of funding for National Governing Bodies of Sport. The Sports Council monitors those bodies in order to ensure proper financial auditing and governance standards and my Department has no role in that process.

The Council sets terms and conditions in relation to the funding provided, including financial reporting requirements. From the information they have given me, I am confident that they have good procedures in place for the audit of use of public moneys allocated to sporting organisations. I will refer the Deputy's question to the Council to provide more detail directly to him.

In relation to my Department's Sports Capital Programme, organisations in receipt of grants must comply with the terms and conditions of the Programme. These include the submission of three quotations, paid invoices, proof of payment of invoices in the form of bank statements and tax clearance certificates for the grantees and the suppliers. All grantees must also provide a guarantee that grant aided facilities and equipment will stay in sporting use for a minimum period of time. Any organisation that does not comply with the terms and conditions may have their grant withdrawn, may be required to repay a grant or be barred from making applications for a period. The Department also inspects a random sample of payments to ensure compliance with the terms and conditions of the Programme.

Traffic Management

12. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address concerns regarding the impact of traffic congestion in Dublin in preventing companies from growing and creating jobs; his views on whether the traffic densities in Dublin are posing a threat to competitiveness and economic recovery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23475/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): With the return of economic growth, we must ensure that we have measures in place to deal with the consequent increase in traffic. It is a key objective of transport policy to encourage modal shift away from the car so as to improve economic competitiveness through reduced congestion, particularly in high density urban environments such as Dublin. This also supports climate change mitigation through reducing emissions.

The National Transport Authority, working closely with the City Council, is responsible for the development of traffic management plans in Dublin. Together, they recently announced plans for an ambitious re-drawing of the city, which will encourage the use of public transport, cycling and walking.

Tackling congestion requires choices to be made between competing demands for a finite amount of road space. It is impossible to satisfy everyone. The roll-out of the now extensive network of bus lanes in the Dublin area for example, was only made possible by the removal of cars from considerable sections of the road, a policy which received considerable opposition at the time. Dublin today is very different from Dublin of 20 years ago. It is clear that the car can no longer be king. I can assure the Deputy that every effort is being made by the relevant local authorities and the National Transport Authority to ensure that all traffic management measures implemented in Dublin will seek to reduce congestion, while supporting this Government's policy in relation to promoting continual economic growth and the creation of jobs.

National Mitigation Plan

13. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the precise targets and reduction measurement proposals his Department is proposing to mitigate harmful emissions to address the significant shortcomings in the transport sector that are projected, a 22% increase over the 2011 to 2020 period; if his Department has set in place any indicative targets for the profile of domestic fuel use for petrol, diesel, liquefied petroleum gas, electricity, fuel oil, jet kerosene and renewables; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23483/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill creates a statutory obligation to develop a National Mitigation Plan for Ireland. In anticipation of the legislation, my Department has already commenced work on preparing the transport contribution to the Plan. Furthermore, in keeping with commitments under the Aarhus Convention, my officials recently held an information exchange with stakeholders and interested parties on the measures being considered by the Department.

These measures have emerged as part of a longer consultative process that began last year and represent a multi-faceted approach to cost-effective mitigation in transport. The suite of measures currently being examined has a particular focus on policy development, smarter travel and modal shift, supports for alternative fuels and certain fiscal and taxation incentives to target behavioural change.

In terms of a future fuel profile for Ireland, the Minister of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources has responsibility for energy policy generally, which includes fuel supply and security issues as well as policy on renewable energy for Ireland. The latest publication of the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan estimates that 50,000 electric vehicles could be in circulation by 2020. In addition, the draft Bioenergy Plan recommends the continuation of the Biofuels Obligation Scheme, which will be the principal means of ensuring that 10% of the

energy in the transport sector in 2020 is from renewable sources.

Both national and EU policy provides for growth in the alternative fuels market to 2020. In order to support the policy for long-term oil substitution, and in line with the recently adopted EU Directive on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure, my Department is currently preparing a National Policy Framework to support the alternative fuels market in Ireland. My Department expects to widen the consultation process on this Framework to the general public by the end of this year.

Tourism Promotion

14. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to encourage those local authorities who are touched by or adjoin the Wild Atlantic Way to develop localised driving routes, off the main route; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23237/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): The Wild Atlantic Way has been developed by Fáilte Ireland, working closely with local authorities and local communities, to guide visitors as to what there is to see and do all along the western seaboard, and provide easy access to a range of experiences and so enable local businesses to take advantage of the benefits of the Wild Atlantic Way. For those communities that are not located directly on the designated signed route, it is important to note that all villages, businesses and geographic areas within close proximity of the route are in essence part of the geography of the Wild Atlantic Way.

My advice to communities on and near to the Wild Atlantic Way is to examine how they can take advantage of the traffic on the route to generate more visitors and tourism revenue.

I am advised by Fáilte Ireland that next phase of development for the Wild Atlantic Way in 2016 includes the development of 'loops' off the main Wild Atlantic Way spine to further develop and maximise the opportunities presented by it. This work will involve all stakeholders in each identified 'loop' including local authorities and local tourism businesses.

While my Department provides the capital funding for investment in tourism offerings such as the Wild Atlantic Way, it is not directly involved in developing or managing these. The development of the Wild Atlantic Way is an operational matter for Fáilte Ireland. I am therefore referring the question to the agency for direct reply and further information in relation to its detailed operational plans. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Road Safety Strategy

15. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report to Dáil Éireann on the pro-social driving programme in County Donegal, on the number of participants over the past three years, on any participants who have re-offended in that period, on whether victims and families of road crash victims have been asked to make presentations to the course and on this pilot programme; the way it is funded; if it will be made permanent and extended to the rest of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23243/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Govern-

ment Road Safety Strategy 2013-2020 anticipates the introduction, subject to legal advice, of rehabilitation and driving awareness courses as court-based sentencing options for specific offenders (Action No 107, due Q1 2015).

I understand that such courses would be broadly similar in style and content to those currently offered by the Pro-Social Driving Programme in County Donegal. As the Agency charged with promoting road safety in Ireland, the Road safety Authority has responsibility in the first instance for determining a proposed approach to introducing courses on a national basis and to assess any legal issues arising.

In accordance with national and EU legislation, any funding of such programmes across the State would have to be the subject of an open procurement procedure. For this reason the RSA has indicated that it is not in a position to provide direct funding for the Pro-Social Driving Programme in Co. Donegal.

I understand that the RSA has been supportive of the Programme and will continue to liaise with them through regular meetings, sharing of research and updates on RSA educational material and programmes.

The Deputy will understand that as the initiative in Donegal has not been led or funded by the by the State I am not in a position to report on the detail of its operations.

Road Network

16. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide further consideration to the proposals to upgrade the Naas-Newbridge-Sallins bypass and the Osberstown Interchange-Monread Road roundabout in County Kildare within the confines of expenditure guidelines; the extent to which either project is ready to proceed; if his attention has been drawn to the considerable economic benefit and alleviation of traffic congestion accruing in the event of approval; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23391/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding regarding the national roads programme. The construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads is a matter for the National Roads Authority under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007, in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

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

The reality is that the available funds do not match the amount of work that needs to be done to maintain existing road infrastructure or address demands for new road improvement projects. Funding this year is around €730 million for the national, regional and local road network. Unfortunately, the current financial realities are such that the budgets proposed for my Department for 2016 and 2017 indicate that capital funding will continue to be very tight, and my ability to progress new projects is limited. I acknowledge it is important to restore over time capital funding for the transport sector to ensure that infrastructure is maintained but, as of now, I am not in a position to give a commitment in regard to funding of the projects in question, although I acknowledge their national and local importance.

State Airports

17. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he recognises that reducing passenger numbers at Cork Airport needs to be addressed by a change in aviation policy; the measures he plans to take in order to assist in facilitating an increase in passenger numbers at Cork Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23239/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The draft National Aviation Policy, which I intend to publish before the summer recess, sets out Government policy in relation to Cork Airport's role as a key tourism and business gateway for its region, making particular reference to the development of key niche markets.

In line with the policy, our focus has been on exploiting the opportunity to grow inbound tourists to the Cork region, particularly in view of the fact that only 37% of Cork Airport's passengers are inbound.

Following the successful 'Grow Dublin Taskforce', both local authorities, with Fáilte Ireland, are progressing a similar initiative to prepare a cohesive strategic plan for the development of Cork's tourism potential. This strategy will focus on identifying and addressing Cork's opportunities for growth and is due to be completed by November.

daa, along with Cork Airport management, are also working to stabilise passenger numbers and return Cork Airport to growth. Indeed, following on from the Government's decision in relation to the IAG/Aer Lingus issue, I understand that there will be an announcement shortly with regard to a new service from the Airport.

However, local support in the region is a crucial component of any initiatives to reverse the current decline. It was disappointing that lack of support for the planned Cork-Prague and Cork-Ibiza routes was the reason cited by Czech Airlines for its decision not to commence operations on the routes.

The National Aviation Policy cannot address the issue of local support for the Airport. That is a matter for the people and businesses in the region. However, such support is critical to ensure the Airport's future sustainability.

Road Improvement Schemes

18. **Deputy Helen McEntee** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if further funding will be made available to County Meath for repairs and restructuring of the roads within the county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23465/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants.

I am not in a position to provide additional funding to County Meath at present. In order to address the national finances there were substantial cutbacks in the funding available for State grants for national, regional and local road programmes and this has had a major impact across the board. Funding in 2008 was €2.3 billion while funding this year is around €730 million to cover the entire national, regional and local road network. I know that it is important to restore over time capital funding for the transport sector to ensure that land transport infrastructure is maintained and renewed to support economic development but as of now my Department is

continuing to operate within a very constrained budget.

Within the budget available to my Department I have tried to allocate funding on as fair and equitable basis as I can. In this context grants in the three main grant categories (Restoration Improvement, Discretionary Grant and Restoration Maintenance) are allocated based on the length of regional and local roads within a local authority area.

It is important reiterate that State grants are intended to supplement own resources spending by local authorities and in this context I am emphasising to Councils that the commitment of local authorities to contribute significantly from their own resources towards the cost of improving and maintaining the regional and local roads network is essential.

Public Transport Provision

19. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the legislative problems identified by the National Bus and Rail Union with the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008, relating to public tendering of bus services; and the efforts that are being made to correct this. [23236/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): NBRU and SIPTU difficulties with the tendering of public bus services included a concern that current legislation referred to by the Deputy would compel the National Transport Authority (NTA) to tender the remaining 90% of PSO bus routes, in other words all PSO routes, after the end of 2019 and that it would be impossible for further direct award contracts to be put in place. I have stated publicly that this was not the intention of the Oireachtas when the legislation was passed.

Government's policy is for the NTA to procure bus services through a combination of direct award and tendering in the best interests of quality services, integrated public transport and to serve the needs of the travelling public. My Department has received advice from the Attorney General which states that Government policy can be implemented through the existing legislation and that the NTA is not precluded from entering into a further direct award contract with the two bus companies at the end of 2019.

At the LRC discussion concluded on the 14th May last to address Trade Union concerns on these matters, my Department committed to identifying how best to build confidence in the scope of the legislation, taking account of requirements of EU law and considering the views that have been expressed by the Unions. This process will be completed by the end of 2015 and will inform any actions that may be required to ensure that Government policy is implemented as intended. Appropriate clarification will be provided to the relevant parties upon completion of this process.

Harbour Authorities

20. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport in view of the recent resignation of a person (details supplied), an accountant and auditor, from the Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company in County Dublin, due to concerns over financial matters, and the numerous questions that have been raised with regard to overpayment of expenses and other irregularities, if he considers it is time to dissolve the company and take it back under the aegis of his Department pending the new legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23479/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The drafting of the Harbours Bill, 2015 is complete and I expect to seek Government approval to publish it very shortly.

The Bill will provide the legislative basis for one of the National Ports Policy's key recommendations, namely that governance of the designated Ports of Regional Significance should vest in more appropriate local authority led governance structures. As the Deputy is aware, Dun Laoghaire is one of these five Ports of Regional Significance.

The Bill is designed to provide maximum legislative flexibility. It will not prescribe the model of transfer but instead will allow for the most appropriate model of governance to be chosen in respect of each individual company. The two possible models of transfer provided in the Bill are:

1. Retention of the existing company structure and transfer of the Ministerial shareholding in the company to the local authority; or
2. Dissolution of the existing company structure and transfer of all assets, liabilities and employees into local authority structures, where the port will be administered as a functional area of the local authority.

The manner of transfer selected in each case will be the one that finds broad consensus and agreement between the parties.

Dun Laoghaire Harbour Company and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council have established an engagement team to discuss the practical issues associated with the transfer and consultants have been appointed to undertake a due diligence process, with the funding support of the Department. This exercise may assist in the decision as to the most suitable model of transfer.

It is important that a secure and acceptable plan is developed for the future of Dun Laoghaire. The enactment of the legislation, and the process I have outlined above, will be essential to this.

Marine Tourism Promotion

21. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his role in developing the nautical tourism sector, and specifically in the context of County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23471/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies primarily in the area of national policy and it is not involved in the development of regional or sectoral tourism. This is an operational matter for the board and management of Fáilte Ireland, and I have accordingly referred the question to the agency for direct reply. Please contact my private office if a response is not received within ten working days. That said, I have been advised that as part of the development of the Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth policy, Fáilte Ireland are working with the Marine Co-ordination Group to highlight the opportunities and issues effecting the development of marine tourism.

In that regard, between 2013 and 2014 Fáilte Ireland undertook research into the infrastructural requirements around berthing and marine facilities for visitors, and also into the motivations of visitors who embark upon a sailing holiday. The research findings concluded that the core potential of overseas visitors who would be motivated to travel to Ireland for sailing, was relatively modest and quite niche: primarily sailing enthusiasts rather than leisure holidaymak-

ers. Research also indicated that there was potential demand for charter services, whereby holidaymakers would charter a sailing vessel, with or without a skipper, for a day or a short number of days as part of a wider range of holiday experiences. Infrastructural requirements focussed on sufficient, well serviced mooring facilities such as pontoons rather than on larger marinas.

Public Transport Provision

22. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is satisfied with the current provision of public transport in County Wexford, in particular his views that it is adequate to serve rural communities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23481/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Ann Phelan): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for securing the provision of public transport services, including the provision of PSO subvented services. Responsibility for the integration of local and rural transport services, including management of the Rural Transport Programme (RTP), was also assigned to the NTA with effect from 1st April 2012. This includes responsibility for implementing the restructuring of the RTP announced on 9th July 2013.

The re-organisation of the Rural Transport Programme and the establishment of Transport Co-ordination Units will allow Local Link Wexford to play a greater role in the provision of public transport services to rural areas.

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.

In relation to the withdrawal of Expressway Route Number 5, the National Transport Authority (NTA) published their 'Review of the Withdrawal of Bus Éireann's Licensed Route 5 Expressway Service' on the 19th March 2015. This outlines the new and reconfigured services to be put in place to meet the transportation needs of the towns affected by the proposed withdrawal of route 5.

The announcement of changes to existing services and provision of new rural transport links to respond to the impact of the withdrawal of Number 5 is welcome. This reflects Government's commitment to maintaining access within rural communities.

I assure the Deputy that I will continue to work with the NTA on wider issues around transport in rural Ireland.

Aer Lingus Sale

23. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 1186 of 9 June 2015, if consideration was given at any stage of the process to using a percentage of the proceeds of the sale of the State's shareholding in Aer Lingus to alleviate the hardship being faced by the Irish airlines (general employees) superan-

uation scheme's deferred and current pensioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23462/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I said in my reply to the Deputy on the 9th June in relation to this issue, an agreed solution was implemented at the start of this year to address the funding difficulties in the Irish Airlines (General Employees) Superannuation Scheme (IASS). This agreed solution is a matter for the Trustee, the companies participating in the scheme, the scheme members and the Pensions Authority.

Any proceeds from the sale of the State's minority shareholding in Aer Lingus will be paid into the Exchequer and the Government has indicated that such proceeds should be used to establish a new 'Connectivity fund', as a sub-portfolio of the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF).

Under Eurostat rules, the proceeds arising from the sale of the State's shares in Aer Lingus, representing a sale of a financial asset, will have no beneficial impact on Ireland's General Government Balance (GGB).

Accordingly, the money received will not provide any capacity for additional Government expenditure on a GGB neutral basis.

It was for this reason that the Government has decided to allocate the proceeds to a special fund, which will operate on a commercial basis and therefore not constitute Government expenditure, but will facilitate the re-use of the proceeds for productive purposes within the economy, on a GGB neutral basis.

For this reason, the monies generated by the sale cannot be used for the reasons proposed by the Deputy.

Motor Tax Collection

24. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has had discussions with the Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government regarding proposals to allow for motor tax to be paid in monthly instalments by direct debit; if he is satisfied that the current system, in which taxpayers are incentivised to pay an annual rate of motor tax, does not unfairly burden those on lower incomes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23480/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): While the computer systems associated with the National Vehicle and Driver File in my Department facilitate the collection of motor tax, including, in particular through the online motor tax channel, arrangements regarding the payment of motor tax fees are a matter for Department of Environment, Community and Local Government and I have no role in the matter. I have not had any discussions with my colleague in the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government on the matters mentioned.

Aer Lingus Sale

25. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way the proposed sale of Aer Lingus to the International Airlines Group will benefit Cork Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23240/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government considers that a sale of the State's minority shareholding to IAG, on the basis of the terms offered, would be the best means of securing and enhancing Ireland's connectivity with the rest of the world and maintaining a vibrant and competitive air transport industry in Ireland. It would also best serve the interests of the travelling public, Aer Lingus and its employees, the Irish tourism industry and the Irish economy as a whole. IAG has stated its willingness to offer commitments in relation to Aer Lingus's Heathrow slots and connectivity, which would also cover services between Cork and Heathrow. I have given full details on these commitments to the House very recently during the debate on the general principles of the proposed disposal of the State's shareholding.

Furthermore, in relation to Cork, IAG has indicated its plans are that the Cork-Paris and Cork-Amsterdam routes will be maintained and that growth opportunities with tourism and business interests in the Munster region will be pursued to exploit the potential that exists in all the short haul routes currently operated by Aer Lingus from Cork. Aer Lingus has indicated that a combination with IAG would also underpin a planned Cork-Germany service.

Arts Promotion

26. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way his Department liaises with other relevant State agencies to use the arts to attract visitors from overseas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16825/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, Tourism Ireland is the agency with responsibility for the overseas marketing of Ireland as a tourist destination. Decisions on how the arts are used to attract visitors from overseas are matters for Tourism Ireland and these decisions are not subject to my approval. Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to Tourism Ireland for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

National Roads Authority Funding

27. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update on plans to address concerns over a shortfall in funding in the National Roads Authority to maintain the roads network, due to the decision by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to require the funding of public private partnerships from capital budgets; and if he is satisfied that the authority has adequate funding for maintenance and small capital project spending. [23473/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware the Government decided in 2010 that future PPP projects would be funded from capital budgets and this means that expenditure related to the current tranche of PPP projects will be drawn from NRA's capital budget together with other calls on that budget. As availability payments are contractual commitments, the onus is on the NRA to manage the balance of its budget taking account of this. It is the case that in order to address the national finances there had to be sharp reductions in the roads capital budget. I hope the position has now been stabilised and as I have indicated previously it is important to restore over time the capital budget to allow the maintenance and renewal of the roads network in support of economic development.

Departmental Schemes

28. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update on the status of the active towns smarter travel scheme; if this scheme will be open to new applications; the funding programmes available for initiatives that would meet the criteria of the scheme, such as improvements to pedestrian facilities, including footpaths and bridges beneficial to varied groups in communities, including schoolchildren; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23466/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Active Travel Towns Programme (ATT) is designed to achieve modal shift from the car to either walking and/or cycling and to secure greater public transport use through facilitating greater walking and cycling access to public transport. This objective is being achieved in a planned and co-ordinated way in towns around the country. My Department, in conjunction with the relevant local authorities, is responsible for implementing the programme in small and medium sized towns outside Dublin and the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). My Department provides grants to local authorities, under competitive process, to build the necessary infrastructure. €13m was allocated to this programme from an overall multi-annual smarter travel budget of €65 million to be distributed between 2012 - 2016. Funding under the ATT programme is being provided under two rounds. Round 1 of the programme was successfully completed at the end of 2013 and a new funding round was launched in 2014. 9 towns were awarded funding under this round following a competitive process. Two small towns were selected (Birr and Claremorris) and seven medium/large towns were selected (Ennis, Cavan, Sligo, Tralee, Wexford, Thurles and Clonmel) to develop walking and cycling infrastructure and softer measures to support behavioural change. This programme is currently underway and will be completed at the end of next year. There are no immediate plans to fund new towns while this programme is underway. It is anticipated however that the evaluation of the Smarter Travel Programmes, including the Active Travel town programme when completed, will inform future policy in this area and provide direction to where future investment in smarter travel should be focused to yield the best impact on modal shift from car to either walking or cycling.

National Car Test

29. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update on the steps being taken to reduce the backlog for those drivers waiting to obtain a national car test; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23232/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Road Safety Authority has overall responsibility for the operation, oversight, development, quality assurance and delivery of the National Car Testing Service (NCTS). As a result of capacity enhancements put in place by the NCTS earlier this year, I am informed by the RSA that the vast majority of test centres have either no waiting list or a very short one.

There are now 584 Vehicle Inspectors, more than ever before. Testing facilities were extended at the centres in Mullingar, Blarney, Portlaoise and Naas. Longer opening hours, in the form of a third shift, are in place at Galway, Enniscorthy, Killarney and Ballina providing testing from 7 am to 11.30 pm. The majority of test centres have late openings on three days per week until 10 pm and ten centres have extended opening on four days per week. Since early March, 24-hour testing is available in Dublin and Cork.

The NCTS tested record numbers of vehicles in 2014 and in the current year, to date, the

number of vehicles tested each month is an average 9% higher than in the corresponding months of last year.

The RSA would also remind customers that an NCT may be undertaken up to 90 days in advance of the test due date without affecting the expiry date of the new certificate. This system is in place to ensure that owners have sufficient time to have their vehicle tested before their current NCT certificate expires.

Road Safety

30. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is aware of the issue of dangerous traffic at a school crossroads (details supplied) in County Donegal; his plans in the event that the issue is not addressed at a local level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23469/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and operation of individual road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

I will, therefore, refer the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Taxi Regulations

31. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when a decision will be made on any changes to the knowledge test for small public service vehicle licensing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23238/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including issues pertaining to the skills tests for applicants for a taxi licence, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013. I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Marine Casualty Investigations Board

32. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his statutory relationship to the Marine Casualty Investigation Board; his role in appointing members of the board; his views on whether it is appropriate to appoint persons to the board who have no marine experience; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23241/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Marine Casualty Investigation Board (MCIB) was established on 5th June 2002 under Section 7(1) of the Merchant Shipping (Investigation of Marine Casualties) Act, 2000. The purpose of the MCIB is to investigate and to establish the causes for marine casualties, with a view to making recommendations to the Minister for Transport for the avoidance of similar casualties.

Section 8 of the Act provides that the Board shall be independent of the Minister in the performance of its functions and shall be independent of any other person or body whose interest could conflict with the functions of the Board.

The Board consists of five members and under Section 9(1)(a) of the Act the Minister has power to appoint three of those members. My predecessor, Minister Varadkar, made three appointments to the Board in 2013. The Chairperson of the Board was appointed for a period of 5 years, and two other Board members were each appointed for a period of 4 years. Those appointed have a range of skills and experience which are relevant to the MCIB's role and responsibilities, including legal, accountancy and emergency management skills.

The Chief Surveyor of my Department's Marine Survey Office is also a member of the Board (under Section 9(1)(b) of the Act), and has considerable marine experience. The Secretary General of my Department also has power to nominate a person to the Board (in accordance with Section 9(1)(c) of the Act), and his nominee is the Chief Inspector of the Air Accident Investigation Unit, who has significant experience of conducting investigations in the transport sector.

Furthermore, under Section 26(2) of the Act, the Board may appoint persons suitably qualified to undertake or assist in the undertaking of marine casualty investigations.

I consider that the Board has the appropriate range of skills and experience available to it in order to act independently and to discharge its statutory functions effectively.

Swimming Pool Programme Status

33. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update on the planned roll-out of a public swimming pool in the north Kildare area; the timeline for completion of the construction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23484/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): Under the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme grant aid to a maximum of €3.8 million is provided to local authorities towards the capital costs of new swimming pools or the refurbishment of existing pools. The current round of the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme was closed to new applicants on 31 July 2000. My priority now is the completion of the projects in the existing Programme. No decision has been taken on any new round of the Programme. If the Programme re-opens it would be open to each Local Authority, including Kildare County Council, to submit an application under the terms that would apply at that time.

Tourism Promotion

34. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the plans his Department has in place to develop tourist amenities at Fanad lighthouse in County Donegal; if he will support the recent application for funding received by Fáilte Ireland in respect of the lighthouse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23487/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): While my Department provides the capital funding for investment in tourism offerings such as at Fanad Lighthouse, Co. Donegal, it is not directly involved in developing or managing these projects.

This is an operational matter for Fáilte Ireland. Accordingly I have referred the question to the agency for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days. The Deputy will be interested to know that on 20th May I launched a new all-island initiative called - Great Lighthouses of Ireland - an EU INTERREG IVA funded tourism initiative. Featuring twelve lighthouses in stunning coastal locations, Great Lighthouses of Ireland will create a greater appreciation of the role of lighthouses, past and present, and in the maritime and seafaring story of the island of Ireland. The initiative includes newly refurbished visitor facilities and self-catering accommodation at Fanad Head Lighthouse in Co. Donegal. This project is being completed with support from the Special EU Programmes Body under the INTERREG programme via Fáilte Ireland.

Aer Lingus Sale

35. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on meetings with workers in Aer Lingus and their trade unions concerning the sale of the State's share of the company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23477/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I had constructive engagement with trade union representatives whom I met with on a number of occasions in the course of consideration of the IAG proposed offer for Aer Lingus. The Government's decision to support IAG's offer was based on careful consideration of all the issues of concern and independent expert advice.

Harbour Authorities

36. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport in view of the fact that aspects of the master plan of Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company in County Dublin do not fall under the heading of commercial shipping activities for which the company needs ministerial consent, his views that his Department was adequately consulted with regards to plans for the development of Dún Laoghaire Harbour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23478/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The objects of a State port company are clearly set out in section 11 of the Harbours Act 1996. However, as the Deputy will note from section 11, these objects are not restricted to purely commercial shipping matters, but may include, for example: *'to promote investment in its harbour; and to engage in any business activity, either alone or in conjunction with other persons, that it considers to be advantageous to the development of its harbour.'*

The Harbours Acts do require Ministerial consent in relation to certain specific activities, including the establishment of any subsidiary company (section 17(3)(g)), certain investments in undertakings (other than a subsidiary) greater than £1 million (section 17(3)(h)) and borrowings (section 23(1)).

Additionally the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies requires Ministerial consent for any *'action which would extend or change significantly the nature, scope or scale of activities in which it...engages'* and also where any joint venture is proposed.

Dun Laoghaire Harbour Company has a number of projects at different stages of conception or delivery, some of which require Ministerial consent and some of which do not.

Both my predecessor and I have previously raised concerns as regards the Company's timely adherence to their obligations in this regard. I am, however, pleased to say that I recently had a constructive meeting with members of the Board of the Company in which I outlined clearly my position in relation to these projects and I have since then written to the Company setting highlighting what is required of them with regard to their obligations in respect of these various projects.

Rail Services Provision

37. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to deal with overcrowding on the Dublin Area Rapid Transit during peak times; if Irish Rail has requested more funding to provide more trains and carriages during peak times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23233/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The provision of rail services is an operational matter for Iarnród Éireann in conjunction with the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to both the company and the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Iarnród Éireann has not applied for additional funding for new rolling stock. New projects, such as the purchase of additional rolling stock, cannot be funded within the existing level of resources available to my Department. The key priority over the coming years is to protect investment made to date and to maintain safety standards. If additional funds are available, which is not certain, there will be many competing projects from all transport modes in all regions. Any additional funds will be prioritised for projects for which there is a clear need, which are affordable, have a sound business case and add value to existing infrastructure.

Aer Lingus Sale

38. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on meetings held with Aer Lingus executives concerning the sale of the State's share of the company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23476/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I had constructive engagement with Aer Lingus executives whom I met with on a number of occasions in the course of consideration of the IAG proposed offer for Aer Lingus. The Government's decision to support IAG's offer was based on careful consideration of all the issues of concern and independent expert advice.

Sports Events

39. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport In the wake of recent sporting revelations possibly affecting the hosting of the next soccer World Cup, if he will make a submission to the relevant international sporting body promoting the possibility of hosting the soccer World Cup in this jurisdiction, unilaterally or in conjunction with adjoining jurisdictions; the degree to which the full extent of facilities required may be available here or could be, with augmentation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23392/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael

Ring): The submission of a bid to host any major football event in Ireland is a decision for the FAI in the first instance. In the event of any change to the arrangements regarding the hosting of the next World Cup, it will be a matter for the FAI to consider if they wish to submit a bid to host or co-host the event.

Road Improvement Schemes

40. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update on the plans for the upgrade to the Oughterard to Maam Cross section of the N59, which is the primary route into north Connemara, and for which the National Roads Authority has allocated funding for 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23464/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and operation of individual road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. I will, therefore, refer the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Traffic Offences

41. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on his recent comments on possible legislation following on from breaches of road traffic regulations by cyclists; the strategy he is pursuing in relation to improving safety for cyclists on Irish roads and streets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23244/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The National Cycle Policy Framework (NCPF), launched in 2009, outlines a comprehensive package of interventions to make cycling both easier and safer. My Department's strategy for promoting safe cycling involves education, infrastructure, and enforcement. The Road Safety Authority promotes safe cycling in a variety of ways, particularly through the Green Schools programme. My Department is also funding a new cycling standard "Cycle Right" that will pilot in schools this Autumn, with gradual roll-out nationally by September 2016.

All spending on cycling infrastructure is designed to impact positively on the safety of cyclists. We are working to deliver a National Cycle Network for Ireland, with an allocation of €23.5 million over the period 2012-2016, to advance routes that will provide valuable transport and recreational infrastructure. The National Transport Authority's Cycle Network Plan, published in 2013, provides the blueprint for the development of a strategic cycle network in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). The Plan comprises an Urban Network, Inter-Urban Network and Green Route Network for each of the seven local authority areas of the GDA.

Cyclists, like all road users are obliged to obey road traffic legislation. As vulnerable road users, cyclists who breach the rules put themselves and other road users at risk. I shall shortly be introducing regulations extending the fixed charge notice system to certain road traffic offences committed by cyclists. It is important to emphasise that this is not about creating any new offences, but providing a new and more effective enforcement tool for An Garda Síochána. My Department is also looking at further changes to legislation that may be necessary in order to promote cycling and make cycling safer as part of the mid-term review of the National Cycle Policy Framework which is currently underway.

Air Safety

42. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 1002 of 26 May 2015, and in view of his awareness of the University of Ghent report on atypical employment in aviation and its potential impact on safety as indicated in his reply, if his Department or the Irish Aviation Authority made any specific contact with the airlines, or undertook any specific action. [23463/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My response to the Deputy's earlier questions on this report pointed out that it was produced under the European Social Dialogue Committee by social policy experts. Aviation safety matters are most appropriately addressed within the EU's extensive aviation safety regime. The European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) has competence for all areas of aviation safety in the EU and is best placed to give an expert view on any potential safety impacts of various working arrangements.

In September 2014 last year EASA announced a new organisation structure, which aims at preparing the Agency for the challenges of the coming years. In doing so EASA pointed out that the aviation sector is constantly evolving with innovative business models and new technologies in order to achieve greater efficiencies. Earlier this year EASA established a working group to examine Developing Business Models in Aviation. The Irish Aviation Authority participates in the working group and its work is ongoing.

Road Improvement Schemes

43. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to reinstate the specific improvements grant scheme, with particular reference to his plans to specifically provide funding for a new bridge at Cockhill, Buncrana, County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23461/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In view of the significant safety concerns raised in relation to Cockhill Bridge I have reviewed the information submitted by Donegal County Council in respect of the bridge including the report dated 29th May 2015 which provides up to date traffic and pedestrian counts and sets out the case for an overall solution which caters for both traffic and pedestrians. On the basis of this review I have decided to give approval for this project to proceed. This approval takes account of the important safety considerations which the Council wishes to address through the provision of a realigned road and new bridge at Cockhill. These safety considerations in respect of a critical access route to the Inishowen peninsula (which has a population of 43,000) are paramount in my decision to proceed with this project despite the on-going financial constraints.

Social Welfare Benefits Reviews

44. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the options available in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 14, who has given up a part-time job because her one parent family payments are under review. [23969/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): All claims for one parent family payment (OPFP) are subject to periodical review on an ongoing basis in order to ensure that the payment is being made in accordance with the relevant social welfare legislation

governing the scheme.

In this regard a review was carried out on the OPFP claim of the person concerned specifically to clarify the position with regard to the living arrangement of a liable relative. This required visits by Social Welfare Inspectors to both the person concerned and her liable relative to establish and clarify the situation. This has been done following the review and no payments of OPFP were delayed or interrupted as a result of this process taking place and her payment is continuing.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

45. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the total number of working-age adults who claim any welfare payment, with the exception of child benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23971/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): At the end of May 2015 there were 1,029,296 recipients of weekly social welfare payments which are payable to persons of working age. Note that some people may be recipients of payments from more than one scheme, and that payments for a small number of these schemes can also be receivable by people over the age of 65.

A breakdown of this number is detailed in the tabular statement.

Number of Recipients of Weekly Social Welfare Payments May 2015

Type of Payment	Recipients
Adoptive Benefit	22
Local Authority Mortgage Supplement	28
Health and Safety Benefit	62
Rent Allowance	108
Interim Illness Benefit	330
Part-Time Job Incentive Scheme	376
Injury Benefit	911
Job Initiative	1,008
Partial Capacity Benefit	1,482
Pre-Retirement Allowance	1,531
Other Employment Supports(6)	1,891
Carer's Benefit	2,029
Gateway	2,129
Rural Social Scheme	2,519
Mortgage Interest Supplement	3,882
JobBridge National Internship Scheme	5,158
TUS - Community Work Placement	7,800
Farm Assist	9,142
Back To Work Enterprise Allowance	11,523
Disablement Benefit	11,870
Back To Education Allowance	13,671
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	16,793
Maternity Benefit	20,500
Community Employment Programme	24,563
Jobseeker's Benefit	40,590

Type of Payment	Recipients
Family Income Supplement	51,372
Invalidity Pension	54,565
Illness Benefit	56,682
Carer's Allowance	61,294
Rent Supplement	62,368
One Parent Family Payment	68,508
Disability Allowance	115,233
Widow/er's or Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory Pension	118,883
Jobseeker's Allowance	256,473
Total*	1,029,296

* Due to system upgrades statistics for Widow/er's or Surviving Civil Partner's Non-contributory Pension, Deserted Wife's Allowance, Deserted Wife's Benefit, Blind Pension, Guardian's Payment (Non-contributory) and Guardian Payment (Contributory) are not currently available. In addition, employers are currently in receipt of JobsPlus payments in respect of 4,901 former unemployed jobseekers.

Jobseeker's Allowance Data

46. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of recipients of jobseeker's allowance who have continuously claimed for over one year, two years, three years, four years and five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23972/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The information requested by the Deputy is detailed in the tabular statement.

Jobseeker's Allowance Recipients at the end of May 2015

<1 Year	1 to 2 Years	2 to 3 Years	3 to 4 Years	4 to 5 Years	> 5 Years	Total
80,655	46,311	29,767	22,038	18,879	58,823	256,473

Social Welfare Payments Administration

47. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she is aware of the widespread concern of the Irish Postmasters' Union in relation to the recent issue of revised application forms from her Department; if she will ensure that these forms are officially withdrawn and replaced with the previous issue of forms, where payment at the post office is the first option listed, and no recommendation is made; if she will ensure that these changes are made without delay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24001/15]

58. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 247, 248 and 249 of 9 June 2015, and in view of her reiteration in her reply that it is Government policy that An Post remains a strong and viable company which will be in a position to provide a high quality postal service, and maintain a nationwide customer focused network of post offices in the community, the reason her Department persists with a policy on the payment of benefits which is so diametrically opposed to overall Government policy; if she will direct her Department to provide practical effect to Government policy by making the option of being paid at a post office available on all benefit

application forms, making the forms at least neutral as to the payment option potential recipients may select, and end her Department's blatant promotion of for-profit commercial financial institutions, to the detriment of a nationwide public service, that is An Post; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24056/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 47 and 58 together.

Successive Governments and this one most notably, have consistently stated their commitment to maintaining the post office network as set out in the Programme for Government. The post office is seen as a key piece of financial and social infrastructure for both urban and rural areas. Part of the strength of the post office brand, and one of its chief selling points, is that it reaches all parts of the country and can be accessed by anyone. 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 customer focussed network of post offices in the community.

My Department's continuing support for An Post is apparent, both in terms of the cost of postage services and the value of the contract for welfare payments. In this regard, we anticipate this year that we will pay over €50 million to An Post under a contract for cash payment services to welfare customers. This contract is very substantial in terms of its reach, value and impact.

As you are aware my colleague the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Mr Alex White, T.D., formally launched the Post Office Network Business Development Group under the independent Chairmanship of Mr Bobby Kerr in February, 2015 to explore potential commercial opportunities available to the post office network. I look forward to viewing the report from this Group.

I understand An Post is anxious to grow its existing levels of services in the light of emerging market pressures which extend beyond the delivery of welfare payments. In this context I am pleased to note An Post has tendered for the provision of a new payment and transaction account. I look forward to that becoming available in the not too distant future as it will provide alternative payment opportunities for my Department's customers.

In order to recognise the general societal trend to electronic payments the Department has been changing some of its application forms. The option to be paid at the post office remains on the forms.

I want to emphasise that the amendments do not remove the option to be paid at the post office. This option will remain on the forms. Therefore, customers are free to opt to receive their payment at the post office if they wish. I also want to emphasise that the department continuously reviews its forms to ensure that they are amenable and relevant to all customers. I have asked the Department to review forms and update them to ensure that a more neutral wording in relation to payment options is provided.

The Department is conscious of the important role of the post office around the country, not only in respect of social welfare payments but also in offering other financial services such as paying bills and carrying out a range of banking services. The Government has consistently stated its commitment to maintaining the post office network as set out in the Programme for Government.

Social Welfare Payments Administration

48. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the amount of payment received in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24004/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The first person concerned is in receipt of jobseeker's allowance at the weekly rate of €296.80 and comprises:

Personal rate	€188.00
Increase for Qualified Adult	€124.80
Sub Total	€312.80
Less Means	€ 16.00
Total weekly rate of Jobseeker's Allowance	€296.80

The second person concerned is not in receipt of a social welfare payment in her own right as she is the qualified adult on the payment of the first person concerned.

Question No. 49 withdrawn.

State Pensions Payments

50. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the cost associated with a €10 increase in the State pension (contributory) and the State pension (non-contributory); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24008/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The cost of increasing the State Pension Contributory (SPC) and the State Pension Non Contributory (SPNC) by €10 per week is €204.3 million and €50.8 million respectively in a full year.

The cost of increasing all pension rates – SPC, SPNC, Widow/er/Surviving Civil Partner Contributory Pension (aged 66 and over), Death Benefit (aged 66 and over) and Carer's Allowance (aged 66 and over) – by €10 per week is circa €303 million in a full year.

These costs also include proportionate increases for any qualified adults, where applicable.

It should be noted that these costings are subject to change over the coming months in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2016.

Rent Supplement Scheme Administration

51. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide, in tabular form, a breakdown of the cost to the State of providing rent supplement for 2014 and to date in 2015. [24014/15]

52. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide a breakdown of the number of recipients of rent supplement currently. [24015/15]

62. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she envisages the roll-out of the tenancy sustainment protocol to County Donegal; if so, when she envisages this will take place; if not, if she will be extending increased supports to those on rent allowance who are struggling to find appropriate accommodation due to the limited cap per month in counties like Donegal which are also struggling with housing supply; and if she will

make a statement on the matter. [24073/15]

64. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if figures are available regarding the number of landlords in Dublin who are currently accepting tenants under the rent allowance scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24141/15]

65. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to confirm the number of persons living in Dublin who receive rent allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24142/15]

66. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her plans on making changes to the rent allowance scheme, in order that payment is made directly to the landlord; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24143/15]

67. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of recipients under the rent allowance scheme in Dublin who have contacted her Department highlighting difficulties they are having in securing a property with under the scheme, considering that property rental prices have steadily increased in the city; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24144/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 51, 52, 62 and 64 to 67, inclusive, together.

The rent supplement scheme provides support to eligible people living in private rented accommodation whose means are insufficient to meet their accommodation costs and who do not have accommodation available to them from any other source. There are approximately 68,000 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €298 million for 2015. In Dublin, there are currently over 25,300 landlords in respect of over 25,400 tenancies supported by a rent supplement payment. A detailed breakdown of rent supplement recipient numbers by county and information on expenditure for 2014 and to date in 2015 is provided in the tabular statements.

All prospective tenants, including those seeking to access rent supplement, are finding it increasingly difficult to secure appropriate accommodation due to the reduced availability of rental properties. In response to these difficulties, the Department has put in place a number of preventative measures to ensure that people at risk of homelessness or loss of their tenancy are supported under the rent supplement scheme where increased rental payments are required. The Department's preventative policy allows for flexibility in assessing customers' individual accommodation needs through the National Tenancy Sustainment Framework. Under this approach, each tenant's circumstances are considered on a case-by-case basis, and rents are being increased above prescribed limits throughout the country, as appropriate. Staff in the Community Welfare Service of the Department who administer the rent supplement scheme have a statutory discretionary power to award or increase a supplement for rental purposes, for example, when dealing with applicants who are at risk of losing their tenancy. This flexible approach has already assisted over 2,100 rent supplement households nationwide to retain their rented accommodation through the payment of increased rent payments. The number of rent supplement recipients in Dublin who contacted the Department highlighting difficulties in securing properties is not maintained. However, a total of some 1,400 rent recipients in Dublin have been supported through increased rental payments.

A Tenancy Sustainment Protocol in conjunction with Threshold was introduced in the Dublin region and Cork city where supply is particularly acute. The primary objective of the Protocol is to ensure a speedy intervention to ensure that families and persons at immediate risk

of losing their tenancy get rapid assistance. Of the 2,100 households referred to above, almost 700 households in Dublin have been supported as a result of engagement under the Protocol and over 20 households in Cork City.

The Department's response to the current housing difficulties, including any extension of the Protocol, remains under review at this time to ensure that the appropriate supports continue to be provided. The Department has also undertaken a communications campaign to ensure that persons in receipt of rent supplement worried about losing their home are provided with information on the supports available which includes issuing text messages to over 50,000 rent supplement recipients, issuing monthly tweets to Department followers, updating the website and the distribution of posters to Department Offices, Post Offices, Citizen Information Centres, MABs offices and Oireachtas members.

Under the legislative provisions governing rent supplement, the Department's relationship is with the tenant; the tenant makes the application for rent supplement and payment is made to the tenant to assist them with their accommodation needs. There is no direct relationship between the landlord and the Department in the administration of the scheme. However, social welfare legislation provides for the payment of a rent supplement payment to a nominated payee such as a landlord on behalf of the tenant. This arrangement is entered at the tenant's request and subject to the consent of the Department. Nominated payments are made under the rent supplement scheme in some 20% of cases.

The efficiency of the rent supplement scheme would be significantly affected if all payments were to be made directly to landlords, for the provision of short-term support. The Department's strategic policy direction is to return rent supplement to its original purpose of being a short-term income support by transferring responsibility for persons with long-term housing needs to the local authorities under the new Housing Assistance Payment Scheme (HAP). HAP is being designed so as to bring all of the social housing services provided by the State together under the local authority system and is currently being rolled out in selected local authority areas to over 2,200 households. Under HAP, the local authority pays the rent directly to the landlord.

Table 1: Rent Supplement Expenditure

Year	Cost €000
2014	338,3471
2015	107,2022

1. 2014 Revised Estimate
2. End April 2015

Table 2: Rent Supplement Recipients by County, End of May 2015

County	Recipients
DUBLIN	25,427
CORK	7,782
KILDARE	3,604
GALWAY	3,521
WEXFORD	2,486
WICKLOW	2,067
LIMERICK	2,021
TIPPERARY	1,923

County	Recipients
LOUTH	1,913
DONEGAL	1,686
KERRY	1,660
MEATH	1,633
MAYO	1,607
WESTMEATH	1,498
CLARE	1,317
WATERFORD	1,311
CARLOW	1,064
LAOIS	1,003
OFFALY	960
KILKENNY	782
ROSCOMMON	656
SLIGO	482
CAVAN	421
LONGFORD	421
LEITRIM	326
MONAGHAN	316
Total	67,887

Child Benefit Reform

53. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding child benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24023/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Child benefit is the main policy instrument for assisting families with the costs of raising children. It is a universal payment that is paid in respect of all qualified children up to the age of 16 years, or to the age of 18 who are in full-time education or who have a disability. It is paid to over 615,000 families in respect of almost 1.2 million children, at a cost of €1.9 billion.

The Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare examined the structure of child and family income support in Ireland. The Group considered the means testing of child benefit would have considerable administrative consequences, as the scale of means testing would be greater than anything required by the current system. Instead the Group recommended that child benefit should continue to be paid on a universal basis.

It is my intention to retain child benefit as a universal system to assist families with the cost of raising children. A crucial element of a strong and sustainable welfare system is the principle that everybody contributes, and that the system is there in turn to support those contributors at key stages in their lives. Child benefit is one of the few universal payments in the welfare system in that regard, and its universality has an important role to play in maintaining the sustainability of the system.

For that reason, child benefit was increased by €5 a month, or €60 per annum, from January 2015. This recognises the sacrifices that families made during the economic crisis and the fact that families are continuing to face difficulties. In the *Statement of Priorities*, the Government promised a new deal on living standards for hard-pressed families, and this increase is in line with that commitment.

National Internship Scheme Administration

54. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an arrears payment under the JobBridge scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24025/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): All arrears due were included in payments of 26th May 2015 and 16th June 2015 and the correct weekly rate now applies.

Pension Provisions

55. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding pension schemes for community employment supervisors and assistant supervisors; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24035/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): The Deputy will be aware that Community Employment (CE) supervisors are the employees of private companies. In the circumstances, it is not possible for the State to take over responsibility for funding pension arrangements for employees of private companies, even where those companies are reliant on State funding.

This position was confirmed by the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform (D/PER) to this Department in March of this year. The D/PER's position is that private companies contracted by the State to provide a service, including those in the community sector, must manage their expenditure pressures, including labour and pension costs, from within existing funding levels.

Disability Allowance Payments

56. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when an application for arrears of disability allowance will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Wexford. [24050/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Disability allowance arrears will issue to the person concerned in the next few days.

Invalidity Pension Applications

57. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when an application for invalidity pension will be approved in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Wexford. [24051/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from the 12 February 2015. Payment will issue to his nominated bank account on the 25 June 2015. Any arrears due from 12 February 2015 to 24 June 2015 (less any overlapping social welfare payment and/or outstanding overpayment) will issue in due course. The person in question was notified of this decision on the 15 June 2015.

Question No. 58 answered with Question No. 47.

Social Welfare Payments Administration

59. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 247 to 249, inclusive, of 9 June 2015, and in view of her reiteration in her reply that it is Government policy that An Post remain a strong and viable company which will be in a position to provide a high quality postal service, and maintain a nationwide customer focused network of post offices in the community, the reason it is no longer possible to elect to have a one-person family payment paid at the post office; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24057/15]

60. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 247 to 249, inclusive, of 9 June 2015, the reason she can emphasise in her reply that the amendments do not remove the option to be paid at the post office, when the option to be paid at the post office no longer exists on the family income supplement application form; if she will explain the modality by which new applicants for the family income supplement, who make an application by completing the FIS1 form, may now elect to be paid at the post office; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24060/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 59 and 60 together.

Further to my replies to Parliamentary Question Nos. 247, 248 and 249 of 9th June 2015, I would like to outline to the Deputy that the Family Income Support payment is a weekly payment for families at work on low pay. I can confirm to the Deputy that the option for payment of FIS through the post office network has not been included on the application form for that scheme since before 2007.

As the Family Income Supplement is an in-work payment the Department considers that payment through an account in a financial institution better facilitates those who are in work.

Respite Care Grant Eligibility

61. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) in County Kildare has an entitlement to a respite grant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24069/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The respite care grant (RCG) is paid automatically in June of each year (usually on the first Thursday of the month), to carers who are in receipt of a qualifying payment on the first Thursday in June. The relevant payments are carer's allowance, carer's benefit, domiciliary care allowance, and prescribed relative's allowance.

The person in question does not have an entitlement to the 2015 RCG as her carer's allowance payment ceased on 27th of May 2015.

Question No. 62 answered with Question No. 51.

Pension Provisions

63. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the rules governing the ability of a person in receipt of the State pension (contributory) or the State pension (non-contributory) to take up paid employment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24114/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Encouraging longer working is part of the strategy to address the issue of sustainability of the State pension. People in receipt of the State pension may also engage in paid employment.

There is no means test for the State pension (contributory), and so the personal rate applicable in respect of such a pension is not reduced by paid employment.

The State pension (non-contributory) is means tested and takes into account both the income and assets of the claimant and his or her spouse or partner. For this purpose, a formula is applied to the value of all applicable assets to determine a weekly means. The weekly rate payable depends on the total weekly means, from both income and assets, of the person or couple. The first €30 of means is disregarded as part of the means test.

The Deputy may also wish to note that there is no statutory retirement age in Ireland. Responsibility for setting retirement age is a matter for the employer/employee relationship and the contract of employment. As a result, people can retire before or after State pension age. It is hoped that, where appropriate, workers will choose and be able to work to pension age (and beyond if that is their desire) and in such cases they will have a higher income than they would have from their pension alone.

Questions Nos. 64 to 67, inclusive, answered with Question No. 51.

State Pension (Contributory) Applications

68. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of applications for a State pension (contributory) received by her Department in 2013, 2014, and to date in 2015; the number of applications approved, pending, or refused, per year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24194/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The table shows the total number of state pension (contributory) applications received during the period January 2013 to end-May 2015, the number of applications pending and decision outcomes.

	Year ending 31 Dec 2013	Year ending 31 Dec 2014	Year to 31 May 2015
Claims received	39,215	40,212	17,210
Claims pending	2,190	3,058	4,129
Claims awarded	28,129	27,591	10,679
Claims disallowed	7,877	8,205	4,210

The Department is committed to delivering the best possible service to its customers. The processing target of 90% of applications decided by entitlement date has been achieved for state pension (contributory) consistently during this period.

In order to ensure that entitlement to pension is decided by their due date, applicants are advised to apply at least three months in advance of reaching pension age (66). Due to improvements implemented through service delivery modernisation initiatives, where state pension contributory qualification exists, applicants are contacted and invited to make timely ap-

plications.

Invalidity Pension Applications

69. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of applications for invalidity pension received by her Department in 2013 and 2014, and to date in 2015; the number of applications approved, pending, or refused, per year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24195/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The table below shows the number of claims received, approved, pending and refused for the periods requested.

INVALIDITY PENSION CLAIMS

Year	Received	Awarded	Disallowed	Pending at end of period
*2013	9,640	9,494	9,298	2,013
2014	9,240	7,018	6,543	2,034
@ end May 2015	3,794	3,216	2,864	1,506

The award figure includes applications which were initially disallowed but were subsequently awarded following DO review or appeal.

*A number of backlog claims and appeals were cleared in 2013

Carer's Allowance Applications

70. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a decision on a carer's allowance will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24217/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the Department received an application for carer's allowance from the person in question on the 9th April 2015. The application is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

Fuel Prices

71. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Finance the progress being made to narrow the differentials between solid fuels north and south of the Border; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24003/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The price differential of fuel purchased north and south of the border is driven by a number of variable factors, exchange rates, taxes, reliefs and differing compositions of the products. The exchange rate between the Euro and Sterling at any given point in time has a significant impact on the end price of solid fuel in both jurisdictions. Since mid 2013 the sterling euro exchange rate has changed by over 14% in favour of Sterling.

Taxes applied to solid fuels differ in both jurisdictions with different VAT rates in operation on both sides of the Border, the VAT rate is 5% in the north and 13.5% in the south. Since 2013 a carbon tax has been applied in Ireland while the UK apply a Climate Change Levy on

non-domestic consumption of solid fuel.

With regard to the VAT rates, the UK can apply the 5% rate to coal and other fuels used for residential purposes on the basis that they had a zero VAT rate in place for those supplies on 1 January 1991. This provision also allows Ireland to apply the zero VAT rate to certain food-stuffs, children's clothes and shoes, and certain medicines on the basis that the VAT rate in force on 1 January 1991 was zero. However, it is not possible for Ireland to apply a zero rate or 5% rate to coal, as we did not apply a zero rate to coal on that date. Nonetheless, as Ireland applied a reduced VAT rate to coal on 1 January 1991, this allows us to continue to apply a reduced rate to coal, but only where the rate is 12% or more.

The introduction of Carbon Tax was about sending a price signal that there is a cost associated with the consumption of fossil fuels to the detriment of the environment. In this regard solid fuels have the highest carbon content of all fossil fuels. As a result they are considered the dirtiest fuels and given the environmental impact it is important that they are taxed.

The application of carbon tax to solid fuels was delayed to allow for the development of a robust mechanism to counter the large scale sourcing of coal from Northern Ireland where lower sulphur standards apply. The Department of the Environment undertook to provide such a robust mechanism in conjunction with the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI). Such a mechanism is in place since June 2011 and the Air Pollution Act (Marketing, Sale, Distribution and Burning of Specified Fuels) Regulations 2012 specify the environmental standards for coal placed on the market and provide the regulatory framework in relation to the distribution and sale of coal in the State.

In particular, the Regulations require that all bituminous coal sold and used outside smoky coal ban areas for residential use must have a sulphur content of no more than 0.7%, which is lower than that in Northern Ireland and therefore bituminous coal supplied to Northern Ireland standards, for sale on that market, may not be sold in the State. Compliance with the Regulations is being enforced by local authorities. A verification mechanism, SWiFT 7, has been developed by the NSAI for the verification of sulphur content in coal. This provides for a robust mechanism to verify the sulphur content of coal to national standards. Suppliers who produce and supply solid fuels in contravention of the Regulations are subject to investigation and prosecution under the Air Pollution Act by local authorities charged with enforcing the regulations and preventing such supply.

In the most recent cross Border price comparison, which was carried out by the Revenue Commissioners in May 2015, petrol and diesel were significantly cheaper in the south whilst home heating oils were a fraction of a cent more expensive in the south. Petrol was cheaper by 15 cent per litre and diesel was cheaper by 28 cent per litre in the south. Kerosene was 0.16 cent more expensive per litre and home heating diesel was 0.02 cent more expensive per litre in the south. Coal and peat are not among the products compared as part of this survey, however, this illustrates the price differentials that exist generally in fuel products.

Coupled with the long lead in period to the implementation of carbon tax on solid fuels this Government has also provided, through the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, generous grants via Better Energy Homes and also provides home energy upgrades free of charge to vulnerable households via Better Energy Warmer Homes to reduce dependence on combustion of fossil fuels for home heating. In 2014 the Better Energy programme provided €53m grant support towards €118m energy upgrade works.

These grants, together with the carbon tax, are key tools to reduce emissions towards meeting our climate change commitments.

Tourism Industry

72. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the adequacy of the availability of working capital to the hotel and catering industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24047/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Government recognises that small businesses, including those in the hotel and catering industry, play a central role in the sustainable recovery of the Irish economy. To facilitate this, Government policy since 2011 has been focused on ensuring that all viable SMEs have access to an appropriate supply of credit from a diverse range of bank and non-bank sources.

The Government understands the importance of the hotel and catering industry and have been supportive with measures such as the new 9% VAT rate, the Gathering Ireland 2013, the reduced 0% Air Travel Tax and the Visa Waiver. In addition I extended the Employment and Investment Incentive to include hotels, guest houses and self-catering accommodation in recent Budgets.

Recent CSO figures indicate that overseas trips to Ireland increased by 14.1% for the first quarter in 2015 while total tourism and travel earnings from overseas travellers to Ireland increased by 11.6% compared to the first quarter in 2014.

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

The following provides an overview of some other incentives introduced by Government to encourage access to credit for small business:

- The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland has been established to encourage small business, as an additional means of ensuring that SMEs are provided with sufficient access to credit, with increased flexibility such as loans of longer duration and loans with built-in payment holidays. SBCI loans are currently available through AIB and BOI and subsequent phases will see the SBCI supporting smaller, existing bank and non-bank funding providers and bringing in new participants to the Irish market.

- The Credit Guarantee Scheme encourages additional lending to small businesses by offering a partial Government guarantee to banks against losses on qualifying loans to eligible SMEs.

- The Microenterprise Loan Fund, administered by Microfinance Ireland, was established under the Action Plan for Jobs and can provide loans of up to €25,000 to small businesses who have been refused credit by commercial banks. Microfinance Ireland works in partnership with the Local Enterprise Offices LEOs nationally to administer this fund.

- The Credit Review Office helps SME or Farm borrowers who have had an application for credit of up to €3 million declined or reduced by either Bank of Ireland or Allied Irish Banks, and who feel that they have a viable business proposition. The Ulster Bank have recently joined the Credit Review office on a non-statutory and voluntary basis. The Credit Review Office also examine cases where borrowers feel that the terms and conditions of their existing loan, or a new loan offer, are unfairly onerous or have been unreasonably changed to their detriment. This is a strictly confidential process between the business, the Credit Review Office and the bank. The Credit Reviewer John Trethowan and his team have overturned 55% of the refusals

that have been appealed to the Office. Further details are available at www.creditreview.ie

- With over €2bn of Government supports available to small business in Ireland from over 20 Departments and Agencies, it is vital that SMEs can quickly access information on this range of supports available to them. With this in mind, the Supporting SMEs Online Tool, a cross-government initiative, was launched in May 2014. On answering 8 simple questions, the small business will receive a list of available Government supports. The Supporting SMEs Online Tool is available at www.localenterprise.ie/smeonlinetool.

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

Property Tax Collection

73. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance if he has concerns that Dublin property owners will have to pay a substantial amount of local property tax (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24123/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am very conscious of the concerns of homeowners, particularly those in urban areas, as regards increasing property prices and the effects this would have on their LPT liabilities.

With a view to addressing these concerns, I have asked former public servant Dr. Don Thornhill, who chaired the 2012 Inter-Departmental Group which designed the Local Property Tax (LPT), to conduct a review to consider, and make recommendations, on the operation of the LPT, and any impacts on LPT liabilities due to property price developments.

In particular the Review will have regard to:

- Recent residential property price developments,
- The overall yield from LPT and its contribution to total tax revenue on an ongoing basis, and
- The desirability of achieving relative stability, both over the short and longer terms, in LPT payments of liable persons.

It is intended that the Review be presented to me no later than summer 2015, with a view to consideration of any recommendations therein in the context of the Budget.

IBRC Operations

74. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the minutes of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation's credit committee were included in the monthly board packs sent by the bank to his Department; if so, when his Department began to receive the minutes of the corporation's credit committee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23979/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware the terms of reference of the proposed Commission of Investigation in relation to IBRC include the following explicit term of reference dealing with information received by the Department of Finance:

“in relation to each transaction under investigation, whether the Minister for Finance or his Department was kept informed where appropriate in respect of the transactions concerned, and whether he, or officials on his behalf, took appropriate steps in respect of the information provided to them.”

Both Houses of the Oireachtas have approved these terms of reference. It is important that I do not interfere with or prejudice the important work to be conducted by the Commission of Investigation. In those circumstances I have received legal advice that it would be inappropriate for me to comment publicly in respect of information received from IBRC in relation to the various transactions under review.

IBRC Operations

75. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 71 of 10 June 2015, when the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation commenced the practice of sending monthly board packs to his Department. [23980/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware the terms of reference of the proposed Commission of Investigation in relation to IBRC include the following explicit term of reference dealing with information received by the Department of Finance:

“in relation to each transaction under investigation, whether the Minister for Finance or his Department was kept informed where appropriate in respect of the transactions concerned, and whether he, or officials on his behalf, took appropriate steps in respect of the information provided to them.”

In those circumstances I have received legal advice that it would generally be inappropriate for me to comment publicly in respect of information received from IBRC in relation to the various transactions under review. However in this instance, as the information has already been publically disclosed, I am in a position to answer the question posed.

The Department of Finance began receiving Board Packs from Anglo/IBRC in August 2011. Prior to this the Board Packs were sent to the NTMA as the NTMA Banking Unit was responsible for receiving the board packs prior to that unit being seconded to the Department of Finance.

Departmental Staff Remuneration

76. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide, in tabular form, the current number of employees with income over €100,000; the percentage of income tax these employees pay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24017/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I wish to inform the Deputy that the current number of employees in my Department with income over €100,000 is 9.

The percentage of income tax these employees pay is a matter between themselves and the Revenue Commissioners.

Tax Relief Availability

77. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a list of all available tax reliefs associated with property; the rationale for such tax reliefs; the number of persons availing of them; and the cost to the Exchequer in the past full tax year. [24027/15]

81. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a list of all tax reliefs available associated with property; the rationale for the tax relief; the number of persons availing of the tax relief; and the cost to the Exchequer in the past full tax year. [24082/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 77 and 81 together.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that within the tax code there are a significant range of tax reliefs associated with property. All reliefs, including property related reliefs, are a cost to the exchequer and in a report on tax expenditures published by my Department last October I set out this Government's tax policy basis in relation to future tax expenditures. The Government will:

- Support economic growth by ensuring that any increase in taxation be effected in the first instance by base broadening including through the elimination or curtailment of overly-generous, poorly targeted or otherwise unaffordable tax reliefs;

- Use tax reliefs only in limited circumstances where there are demonstrable market failures and where a tax-based incentive is more efficient than a direct expenditure intervention;

- Time-limit all tax expenditures and subject those with higher costs to ex ante evaluation; and

- Conduct a regular programme of reviews of tax reliefs, engaging in public consultation as appropriate, and publish the results.

I propose to provide an analysis of the property reliefs under each Tax and Duty heading. Unless otherwise stated the figures relate to the year 2013.

Income Tax/Corporation Tax Reliefs

The following table is a list of the property based incentive schemes qualifying for capital allowances. It should be noted some of these figures are provisional. While the majority of these schemes have been terminated, (capital allowances have been retained for expenditure on hotels, holiday camps, holiday hostels, guest house and registered caravan and camping sites at a rate of 4% per annum over 25 years.) tax relief may continue to be claimed on expenditure incurred prior to the termination date in question.

Scheme	Number of Claimants	Tax Cost €m
Urban Renewal	2,618	45.4
Town Renewal	739	10.6
Seaside Resort	272	2.1
Rural Renewal	2,098	17.9
Multi-storey car parks	57	3.0
Living Over the Shop	43	0.5
Student Accommodation	522	11.5
Enterprise Areas	104	1.9
Park and Ride	19	0.7

Scheme	Number of Claimants	Tax Cost €m
Hotels	1,015	35.2
Holiday Cottages	572	11.0
Holiday Hostels	5	0.09
Guest Houses	6	0.07
Nursing Homes	411	10.7
Housing for the Elderly/Infirm	98	1.4
Convalescent Homes	12	0.5
Qualifying Hospitals	357	9.2
Qualifying Mental Health Centres	*	*
Qualifying Sports Injury Clinics	81	1.4
Buildings used for certain Childcare Purposes	296	4.2
Buildings or structures in registered Caravan & Camping sites	*	*
Mid-Shannon Corridor Tourism Infrastructure Investment Scheme	*	*

* is displayed in where the cost/number of claimants is negligible.

As statistics were not captured separately for Third Level Educational Buildings and the Countrywide Refurbishment Scheme (both now terminated) these have not been included. Also not included are the ordinary industrial buildings e.g. mill/factory (4%), and airport runways/buildings (4%) as statistics are not captured separately for these either.

Home Renovation Incentive (HRI)

This scheme provides a tax relief by way of an income tax credit on repair, renovation or improvement works on principal private residences or rental property carried out by tax compliant contractors. In addition to providing an income tax relief, the HRI also aims to support tax compliance in the building industry by moving activity out of the shadow economy into the legitimate economy.

The year 2014 was the first full year in which the incentive operated. The incentive came into operation on 25 October 2013 and will run until 31 December 2015. Rental properties were brought within the scheme from 15 October 2014.

Since the introduction of the incentive, works on 21,722 properties have been notified to Revenue's HRI online system (as of 12 June 2015). This represents more than €458 million worth of works involving some 5,286 contractors. The potential total cost to the Exchequer in respect of these properties is approximately €31m. As a claim for the HRI credit can only be made in the year after works have been paid for, there was no cost to the Exchequer in 2014 (works paid for in the period from 25 October 2013 to 31 December 2013 were deemed to have been paid for in 2014). The number of claims made in the period from 1 January 2015 to 12 June 2015 is 7,673, representing a total cost to the Exchequer of approximately €14.69m. This cost will be split evenly between 2015 and 2016.

Additional Income Tax Reliefs

Other property based reliefs include interest relief on loans to acquire a principal private residence, relief for rental payments on private tenancies (terminated for any new cases after 7 December 2010*) the rent-a-room relief and relief for expenditure on significant buildings or gardens. The cost of the reliefs and the number claiming the relief are set out on the attached table:

Year 2013	Number of claimants	Cost €m
Mortgage interest relief for PPRs	498,000	353.0

Year 2013	Number of claimants	Cost €m
Rent paid for private tenancies	153,100	37.9
Rent-a-room relief	4,370	5.9
Expenditure on significant buildings or gardens	120	2.1

*Individuals who were in receipt of the relief at 7 December 2010 may continue to claim it until 2017

Capital Gains Tax Reliefs

For the purpose of capital gains tax there are three significant property based reliefs, the property purchase incentive, the Principal Private Residence relief and the farm restructuring relief.

Property purchase incentive

This relief was introduced in the Finance Act 2012. The relief applies to properties purchased between 7 December 2011 and 31 December 2014. For the relief to apply, the property must be owned for a period of at least 7 years. The rationale for the relief was to encourage investment in Irish property at a time when the property market was at low ebb.

Principal Private Residence Relief

This relief is available for individuals disposing of a house which was occupied by them as their only or main residence. Full relief is given where the house has been so occupied for the entire period of ownership of the house apart from the last 12-month period which is deemed to be a period of occupation by the owner. Where the house has been occupied by an individual for part of the period of ownership, only the portion of the gain that corresponds to the period of occupation is exempt. The rationale for the relief is to ensure that the sale of a house, which will generally be replaced with another house, can be done on a tax-neutral basis.

Farm restructuring relief

This relief was introduced in the Finance Act 2013. The relief applies where the first transaction in the restructuring - for example, the sale, purchase or exchange of land is carried out in the period commencing on 1 January 2013 and ending on 31 December 2016 and where the restructuring is completed within 24 months of that first transaction. The rationale for the relief is to facilitate the consolidation of land holdings, thereby increasing the productivity of those land holdings.

There is no statistical information available for the numbers availing of the Principal Private Residence relief and the farm restructuring relief or their cost to the exchequer. The property purchase incentive had no cost to the exchequer in the past full year since the entitlement to avail of the relief will not arise until a future point in time.

Capital Acquisitions Tax

The property based reliefs available for the purposes of capital acquisitions tax are set out on the table:

Relief	Rationale for relief	Number	Cost €m
Reduction of 90% in market value of agricultural property	To encourage entrepreneurial activity and to prevent the forced sale of farms to pay significant CAT liabilities.*	1,581	70.3

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Relief	Rationale for relief	Number	Cost €m
Reduction of 90% in market value of business property	To encourage entrepreneurial activity and to prevent the forced sale of businesses to pay significant CAT liabilities.*	495	94.1
Exemption from CAT on the inheritance or gift of a residential property where the beneficiary has lived in the property as a sole or main residence for a specified period both before and after the inheritance/gift.	To ensure that what may be the family home for many people will not be liable to CAT when it is the subject of a gift or inheritance.	619	N/A
Spouses and civil partners	Gifts and inheritances of property between spouses and civil partners are exempt from CAT.	24	N/A
Public or charitable purposes	To exempt from CAT gifts/inheritances of property where the property is applied for purposes that are public or charitable.	N/A	N/A
Heritage properties	To exempt from CAT gifts/inheritances of houses/gardens that are of national, historic or artistic interest and where there are reasonable viewing facilities offered to the public.	N/A	N/A

* The estimated cost for the agricultural and business reliefs are particularly tentative because of the potential interaction between these reliefs and the normal thresholds for CAT liability which are determined by the relationship between disponent and disponentee.

“N/A” indicates “not applicable”.

Valued Added Tax

The VAT Consolidation Act 2010 provides for the making of Orders whereby VAT that has been paid may be refunded in certain circumstances. Three Refund Orders provide for the possibility of recovering VAT associated with property.

- VAT Refund Order (No. 15) of 1981 allows for certain construction costs incurred in the adaptation of a house for certain qualifying disabled persons. The Order does not allow for the initial construction cost of a house.

- Refund Order (No. 29) of 1996 allows for VAT refunds/remission for qualifying accredited diplomatic personnel who purchase property for use as embassies/consulates and also for use as their principal private residences.

- SI 201 of 2012 provides for refunds of VAT for farmers on the construction, extension, alteration or reconstruction of farm buildings which are used solely or mainly in the farming business.

Each of the Refund Orders provides for relief for a number of areas of expenditure, including the property costs, so it is not possible to provide the cost to the Exchequer that relates solely to the property costs.

Local Property Tax

In relation to local property tax the following table sets out the exemptions and reliefs available:

Local Property Tax (LPT) exemptions	Rationale for exemption
Properties fully subject to commercial rates	To provide relief for owners of properties that may be fully liable for both LPT and commercial rates charged by a local authority.
Long term mental or physical infirmity	To provide relief for owners of properties who are unable to continue living in their property because of a long-term mental or physical infirmity and where those properties are vacant. An exemption is also available for nursing homes that are used exclusively for the care of such persons.
Owned and sold by builders and developers	To provide relief for builders and developers who have built properties with the intention of selling them but that were not yet sold or rented out or occupied as a residence at the time of the first liability date of 1 May 2013. In the event of a sale before the next liability date of 1 November 2016, the exemption continues to be available for the purchasers of such properties.
Special needs accommodation	To provide relief for charitable and social housing bodies who own properties that are made available to persons who require special accommodation and support to enable them to live in the community because of old age, physical or mental infirmity or other reason.
Recreational activities	To provide relief for charitable bodies who own properties that are used solely as residential accommodation to facilitate recreational activities in the course of carrying out the body's main purpose.
First time buyers	To provide relief, following the termination of mortgage interest relief, for persons who purchased properties during 2013 and who occupy the properties as their sole or main residence.
Unfinished housing estates	To provide relief, as had been done in relation to the Household Charge, to owners of properties that were located in housing estates that were certified as 'unfinished' by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government.
Pyrite damage	To provide relief to owners of properties that have been appropriately certified as having been damaged to a significant extent by pyrite.
Incapacitated persons	To provide relief for owners of properties that have been acquired or adapted because of their suitability, or to make them suitable, for occupation by persons who are totally and permanently incapacitated from maintaining themselves by earning a living from working and whose condition dictates the type of property they can live in.
Reduced chargeable value of property	Rationale for reduction in chargeable value
Property adapted for occupation by certain disabled persons	To provide relief for owners of properties who have had to incur expenditure on construction or adaptation work to make the properties suitable for occupation by certain disabled persons where the work has the effect of increasing the value of the properties so that they move into a higher LPT valuation band with a higher tax liability.
Deferral of payment of LPT	Rationale for deferral
Income threshold	To provide relief for persons whose annual income does not exceed a specified threshold by allowing them to defer payment of either the full or partial LPT liability until their circumstances improve or their property ceases to be owned by them.
Estate of deceased person	To provide relief for executors and administrators of a deceased person's estate to give them an opportunity to transfer ownership of any residential property to a beneficiary or to sell the property and distribute the proceeds of sale.
Insolvency	To provide relief for persons who have entered into certain formalised insolvency arrangements for the management of their debts until such time as the arrangements cease to have effect.
Hardship	To provide relief for persons who suffer a significant financial loss or incur a significant expense that are unexpected and unavoidable and as a result of which are unable to pay their LPT liability.

In relation to the LPT exemptions, I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the cost to the Exchequer for 2014, the most recent year available, is estimated to be €12 million in total. Exemptions have been claimed for around 39,600 properties. LPT deferrals have resulted in delayed LPT receipts estimated at €7 million in 2014. Claims for deferral have been made in respect of around 24,300 properties for 2014. I am further advised that costs for individual exemptions or deferrals are not available at this time.

Stamp Duty

Finally, the table below sets out the relief or exemption from stamp duty for transactions associated with property.

Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999 Exemptions and reliefs from stamp duty:

Section	Relief	Rationale for relief	Numbers	Cost €m
Section 79	Associated companies	Exemption from stamp duty is available where property is transferred between companies with a significant degree of common ownership	1,237	€3,841
Section 81AA	Young trained farmers	Exemption from stamp duty is available to encourage the early transfer of farmland to young farmers with approved educational qualifications.	812	€4.7
Section 82	Charitable bodies	Exemption from stamp duty is available where property is transferred or leased to a charitable body.	589	€3.5
Section 82B	Approved sports bodies	Exemption from stamp duty is available where land is transferred to an approved sports body where the land is used for the sole purpose of promoting athletic or amateur games or sports.	65	€0.2
Section 82C	Pension schemes and charitable bodies	Exemption from stamp duty is available where property is transferred by pension schemes and charitable bodies	13	€1.3M
Section 93	Industrial and provident societies	Exemption from stamp duty is available where a house is transferred or leased by a registered industrial and provident society to a member of the society for the purpose of providing housing for members of the society.	N/A~	N/A
Section 93A	Approved voluntary body	Exemption from stamp duty is available where land is transferred or leased to a voluntary body for the purpose of providing social housing.	45	€0.08
Section 94	Land Commission	Exemption from stamp duty is available where land is purchased from the Land Commission	N/A	N/A
Section 95	Commercial woodlands	Partial relief from stamp duty is available to encourage the sale or lease of land on which trees have been planted as a commercial undertaking.	108	€12
Section 96	Spouses and civil partners	Exemption from stamp duty is available where property is transferred between spouses and civil partners.	3,579	€9.1

Section	Relief	Rationale for relief	Numbers	Cost €m
Section 97	Dissolution of a marriage	Exemption from stamp duty is available where property is transferred on foot of a court order between divorced spouses and between civil partners where the civil partnership has been dissolved or annulled	405	€0.6
Section 97A	Cohabitants	Exemption from stamp duty is available where property is transferred on foot of a court order from one cohabitant to his or her cohabitant.	< 10	*
Section 98	Foreign property	Exemption from stamp duty is available in respect of transfers of property that is situated outside the State.	N/A	N/A
Section 99	Dublin Docklands Development Authority	To encourage development in the docklands area of Dublin, exemption from stamp duty is available where land is acquired by the Dublin Docklands Development Authority	< 10	*
Section 99A	Courts service	Exemption from stamp duty is available where land is acquired by the Courts Service.	< 10	*
Section 100	Temple Bar Properties Limited	To encourage development in the Temple Bar area of Dublin, exemption from stamp duty is available where land is acquired or leased by Temple Bar Properties	N/A	N/A
Section 103	Shared ownership leases	Exemption from stamp duty is available to assist those on low incomes to purchase their own homes under a shared ownership lease.	< 10	*
Section 106A	National Building Agency Limited	Exemption from stamp duty is available where land is transferred or leased to the National Building Agency Limited for social housing purposes	N/A	N/A
Section 106B	Housing authorities and Affordable Homes Partnership	The stamp duty charge is capped at €100 where property is transferred or leased to certain social housing bodies.	599	€0.7
Section 106C	Grangegorman Development Agency	To encourage development at Grangegorman, exemption from stamp duty is available where land is acquired or leased by the Grangegorman Development Agency	N/A	N/A
Section 108AA	Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland	Exemption from stamp duty is available where property is transferred or leased to the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland which was established by the Minister for Finance to improve the supply of funds to SME's.	N/A	N/A
Section 108B	National Asset Management Agency	Exemption from stamp duty is available where property is transferred or leased to the National Asset Management Agency	N/A	N/A
Section 108C	Ireland Strategic Investment Fund	Exemption from stamp duty is available where property is transferred or leased to a Fund Investment Vehicle under the control of the NTMA	N/A	N/A
Schedule 1	Consanguinity relief	A 50% reduction in the rate of stamp duty encourages early transfers of farmland to certain relatives who will actively carry on farming activities.	3,973	€6.9

“N/A” indicates “not applicable”

* indicates that, where the numbers are less than 10, the costs are not provided on the basis of protecting confidentiality.

Tax Yield

78. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide an update on the percentage of the value of inherited property that capital acquisitions tax was paid on (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24063/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that €356m was paid in respect of capital acquisitions tax for the year 2014. A breakdown of this total by gift tax, inheritance tax, probate tax and discretionary trust tax is available on the Revenue Commissioners' statistics website at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/cat-receipts.pdf>. The most recent year for which this information is available is 2014 and updates will be published in due course. However, they are not in a position to provide the figure requested by Deputy Tuffy. The source of their information on the value of inherited property are the returns that persons, who are liable for the payment of capital acquisitions tax (CAT), are required to make when property is transferred under a deceased person's will or intestacy. These returns do not contain information in respect of all such properties. There are a number of reasons for this.

In common with most other taxes, CAT operates on a self-assessment basis. Several of the tax exemptions that are available are taken on a self-assessment basis and the person who inherits the property is not required to submit a return to Revenue. For example, information in respect of property transferring between spouses and civil partners, from deceased children to parents and to charitable bodies does not have to be submitted to Revenue as tax exemption is taken on a self-assessment basis.

The relationship between the deceased person and the person who inherits a property determines the maximum life-time aggregate tax-free threshold below which CAT is not charged. There are, in all, three separate relationship thresholds (set out below). The value of each of a person's inheritances since 5 December 1991 is aggregated and CAT is charged, where the aggregate value exceeds the relevant threshold, on any amount that exceeds the threshold. However, it is only where the value of property inherited by a beneficiary exceeds 80% of the relevant threshold (or the actual threshold) that a return has to be submitted to Revenue.

Group A: tax free threshold €225,000 applies where the beneficiary is a child (including adopted child, stepchild and certain foster children) or minor child of a deceased child of the deceased person. This threshold also applies to parents where they inherit an absolute interest in a property from a child.

Group B: tax free threshold €30,150 applies where the beneficiary is a brother, sister, nephew, niece, lineal ancestor (for example, a grandparent) or lineal descendant of the deceased person.

Group C: tax free threshold €15,075 applies in all other cases, for example, from uncle to niece, between in-laws and persons with no relationship to each other.

Apart from the absence of the information requested by the Deputy, other considerations are also relevant. CAT is not an 'estate' tax in the sense that it does not apply to the value of a deceased person's entire estate. Rather, it is a tax on the value of property inherited by an individual beneficiary. This means that a high value property, if inherited jointly by several beneficiaries, may be below the individual tax-exempt thresholds for those beneficiaries and, therefore, not liable for the payment of CAT.

Significant relief from the payment of CAT is available where farmland and other business property is inherited. Where certain conditions are met, for example, in relation to the use to

which the farm/property is put following the inheritance, the market value of the farm/property may be reduced by 90% before CAT is charged.

Banking Sector Staff

79. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Finance if he is aware of Allied Irish Banks' plans to outsource work and staff from its application and development management teams within the information technology division to third party providers; if he is confident that any such move would not pose a risk to key areas such as payment processing and online banking, as was demonstrated by failures in Ulster Bank; the assurances he will provide that jobs will be protected in the bank's plans to outsource this work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24064/15]

97. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the planned outsourcing of the application and development management section of the information technology department in Allied Irish Banks; his views regarding the outsourcing of a key sector of the Department that deals with core functions of the bank's operations; if a risk assessment has been carried out on the outsourcing to the bank's operations; his further views on the consultations with unions and staff; his views on the matter of outsourcing of staff in the bank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24205/15]

98. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 340 of 9 June 2015, if he is aware that previous outsourcing two years ago has resulted in the redundancy of all those Allied Irish Banks staff, except three or four persons, and that it is this experience that is causing concern regarding the latest outsourcing proposals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24219/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 79, 97 and 98 together.

As I have previously stated under the Relationship Frameworks the State does not intervene in the day to day operations of the banks in which it holds investments or their management decisions regarding commercial matters and hence any discussions around matters such as outsourcing are a matter for the bank, the relevant staff and their union representatives. Notwithstanding this position, my officials do take an active interest in how the bank's cost base evolves to ensure that the State's interests as shareholder are protected and to ensure that the Government's remuneration policy is enforced.

The bank has previously indicated that as part of its restructuring plan to reduce costs and increase efficiencies, outsourcing of certain functions would be considered in consultation with unions and affected staff. I have also been informed by the bank that there have been no compulsory redundancies as a result of its recent outsourcing activities. Any staff who transfer under outsourcing arrangements transfer under the TUPE regulations.

In the case of previous outsourcing arrangements the same TUPE regulations would also have applied to the staff affected.

Property Tax Exemptions

80. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance his views regarding his previous commitments that prior to the summer recess he would have sorted out the anomaly in the

statutory instrument and legislation which means that owners of home that have pyrite have to undertake a hard-core infill test analysis, costing thousands of euro, in order to claim their lawful entitlement to a property tax exemption. [24070/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy will be aware that I have initiated a review of the operation of the Local Property Tax (LPT).

The Review will primarily have regard to recent residential property price developments, the overall yield from LPT, and the desirability of achieving relative stability in LPT payments. It will also address a number of issues which have arisen in relation to the efficient and effective administration of the LPT, including the operation of the pyrite exemption provisions.

Resolution of this matter may necessitate a change in the relevant provisions of the LPT legislation and/or the Pyrite Regulations. If so, I will examine the scope for the implementation of any changes on an administrative basis, in advance of such legislative amendments.

It is intended that the outcome of the Review will be presented to me no later than summer 2015.

Question No. 81 answered with Question No. 77.

Mortgage Arrears Rate

82. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons in mortgage distress as of the latest calculable month and the duration of their distress. [24083/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy will be aware that the Central Bank prepare quarterly statistical bulletins on Residential Mortgage Arrears and Repossessions, the most recent of which was published on 4th June last in respect of Quarter one 2015.

I am informed by the Central Bank that the CBI mortgage arrears data relate to the number of accounts rather than people in arrears. The number of primary dwelling home (PDH) accounts in mortgage arrears at end-March 2015 was 104,693, representing a decline of 5.1 per cent relative to quarter four of 2014. Of this figure, the arrears breakdown was as follows:

- In arrears up to 90 days: 30,298
- In arrears 91-180 days: 8,229
- In arrears 181-360 days: 10,696
- In arrears 361-720 days: 17,537
- In arrears over 720 days: 37,933

The number of PDH mortgage accounts in arrears over 90 days (74,395) continued to fall during quarter one, the sixth consecutive decline in the number of PDH accounts in arrears over 90 days. The number of PDH accounts in arrears for more than 720 days continues to rise, although the pace of increase in this category has reduced significantly in recent quarters.

Tax Code

83. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Finance if he agrees that funds raised to

support the health service should be subject to value added tax; if not, if he will consider making provision in the budget to exclude moneys provided by charitable organisations (details supplied), particularly moneys used to support public services, from being subject to value added tax in order that all moneys go into these projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24095/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): VAT is a tax on consumption and is applied to supplies being made by a person and not to supplies received by them.

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

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

Tax Data

84. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide, in tabular form, the number of tax opinions issued by the Revenue Commissioners each year for the past five years and if he will provide a breakdown of the number provided to persons, small and medium enterprises, larger enterprises and to companies based outside the jurisdiction. [24157/15]

85. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of tax opinions issued in the past five years, in tabular form, by type of transactions and-or concerns, including the numbers that relate to transfer-pricing arrangements and with cross-Border implications. [24158/15]

86. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of requests for tax opinions that have been refused by the Revenue Commissioners in the past five years, on the basis that the seeking of the opinion was suspected to be part of an arrangement designed to avoid tax or a duty. [24159/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 84 to 86, inclusive, together.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that, in discharging their statutory role in relation to the administration and collection of taxes, the Revenue Commissioners provide a range of information, including tax opinions, to taxpayers to assist them in understanding and complying with their obligations under tax law.

Revenue has published detailed guidelines on the provision of tax opinions which are available on Revenue's website at www.Revenue.ie. While it is open to any taxpayer to seek an opinion from Revenue on the tax treatment of a particular transaction or activity, the circumstances in which a taxpayer should require an opinion from Revenue are relatively limited. This is because Revenue already publishes extensive detailed information on the application of tax legislation in various tax briefings and guidelines which are available on the Revenue website.

An opinion will be provided by Revenue where the issues are complex, information is not readily available or there is genuine uncertainty in relation to the applicable tax rules as set down in the legislation. An opinion will provide Revenue's view of the correct application of tax law to a particular transaction or situation so that the taxpayer can file a correct tax return as required under the legislation.

As statistics are not compiled on the number of tax opinions issued by Revenue each year, data on the number of opinions broken down between those issued to individual persons, small, medium and large enterprises, companies outside the jurisdiction and by type of transaction are not available. However, I can inform the Deputy that, in responding to the European Commission enquiries in relation to tax ruling practice in the various Member States, Revenue identified that in the period 2010-2012 the total number of advance opinions issued to companies on various matters relating to corporation tax was as follows:

Year	Total
2010	99
2011	128
2012	108

In regard to transactions that may involve tax avoidance, the Revenue guidelines clearly state that Revenue will not provide an opinion where it is of the view that a proposed transaction is part of a scheme or arrangement the purpose of which or one of the purposes of which is the avoidance of tax. While, in accordance with these guidelines, Revenue refuses to provide opinions whenever it considers transactions would facilitate tax avoidance, it does not record the number of such refusals.

State Aid Investigations

87. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the European Commission's preliminary finding that in several instances the methods for determining profit allocation between a company's subsidiaries (details supplied) here do not appear to comply with the arm's length principle for establishing transfer prices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24160/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Last year, the European Commission announced its intention to open formal state aid investigations into tax rulings provided to a number of companies in various Member States of the European Union. More recently the Commission announced that it was broadening its enquiries to include all Member States.

I would like to emphasise that, while the Commission has opened a formal investigation in relation to one particular case involving Ireland, it has not made a final determination in the matter. As the Commission has acknowledged, Ireland has co-operated fully with the process to date and will continue to do so.

For state aid to exist in this case, the company must have been charged less tax than should have been charged under Irish tax legislation. As part of this formal investigation, the Commission wrote to Ireland to ask for our response to their concerns in relation to the particular case. Ireland has responded to this letter, comprehensively addressing the Commission's concerns and making it clear that the appropriate amount of Irish tax was charged in accordance with the relevant legislation, that no selective advantage was given and that there was no state aid.

This is a confidential matter between Ireland and the Commission and I am not in a position to comment on the specific details of our response as the matter is subject to a formal process of investigation and relates to a specific taxpayer.

While it would not be appropriate to speculate on the outcome at this stage, I remain of the view that there was no breach of State aid rules in this case and that the legislative provisions were correctly applied.

In the event that the Commission forms the view that there was state aid, as I and my colleagues in Government have already indicated Ireland will challenge this decision in the European Courts, to continue to vigorously defend the Irish position.

Tax Code

88. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to publish the criteria used by the Revenue Commissioners to determine an advance pricing arrangement. [24161/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that, while tax legislation does not set out specific criteria for advance pricing arrangements (APAs), Revenue adheres to the published OECD and EU transfer pricing guidelines for all bilateral APAs concluded with treaty partner countries.

An advance pricing arrangement is defined in the 2010 OECD Transfer Pricing Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and Tax Administrations (“TPG”) as “an arrangement that determines in advance of controlled transactions, an appropriate set of criteria for the determination of the transfer pricing for those transactions over a fixed period of time”.

An APA is formally initiated by a taxpayer and requires negotiations between the taxpayer, one or more associated enterprises and one or more tax administrations. Ireland will only enter into bilateral APAs with its treaty partners. As such, an APA involving Ireland will always involve two tax administrations, the other being a treaty partner country.

Bilateral APAs are agreed in accordance with the mutual agreement procedure article of the relevant double taxation treaty. For all bilateral APAs, Revenue adheres to the detailed guidelines for concluding APAs which are contained in “Annex to Chapter IV: Advance Pricing Arrangements” of the TPG. All of our bilateral APAs are negotiated on the basis of identifying an arm’s length remuneration for the transactions covered by the APA and in each case the transfer pricing method applied will be in accordance with one of the methodologies contained in Chapter II of the TPG.

In addition, when negotiating a bilateral APA with an EU Member State, Revenue will adhere to the best practices for the conduct of APA procedures which are set out in the Guidelines for Advance Pricing Agreements within the EU which have been published by the EU Joint Transfer Pricing Forum.

Taxpayer Confidentiality

89. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance in view of the support of the European Commission for the publication of tax rulings, his plans to publish, while taking measures to protect the appropriate privacy of persons and corporations, the details of tax opinions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24162/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Under Irish tax law, taxpayer information is confidential and the Revenue Commissioners are prohibited from publishing taxpayer information or providing such information to third parties. Other EU Member States have a similar confidentiality rule in relation to taxpayer information, so that taxpayers can be assured of strict confidence and trust in providing full information in their dealings with the tax authorities. This assurance of confidentiality is subject to requirements to exchange information between tax authorities under bilateral and multilateral treaties and EU law.

Because of the statutory requirement in relation to confidentiality of taxpayer information, details of tax opinions issued to taxpayers are not published by Revenue. As Revenue opinions merely seek to apply the tax law to the particular facts and circumstances of a taxpayer, they are specific to the particular case and do not have general application. However, where Revenue considers that the issue on which an opinion is given is likely to be of more general interest to taxpayers, it will publish a tax briefing or guidance note on the matter to ensure that taxpayers are fully informed of their entitlements and obligations under the tax system.

In March this year, the European Commission adopted a proposal to amend Council Directive 2011/16/EU on administrative cooperation in the field of taxation to provide for mandatory automatic exchange of information between Member States in relation to advance cross-border tax rulings and advance pricing arrangements (APAs). Although they are not referred to as rulings and are non-binding, Revenue opinions on the application of tax law to particular transactions or activities would come within the scope of the Directive if adopted by the Council.

Ireland has welcomed the Commission proposal and officials of my Department and Revenue are participating in the discussions on this proposal that are currently taking place in the Council Working Group. While the proposed Directive will require the tax authorities of Member States to share information on cross-border tax rulings and APAs, it does not provide for the publication of these and any information exchanged under the Directive will be protected by the confidentiality laws in the EU Member States that apply to taxpayer information.

Tax Code

90. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance his views on providing the Revenue Commissioners with powers to tackle transfer pricing that artificially boosts the profits of the Irish subsidiaries of multinational corporations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24163/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Specific transfer pricing legislation was enacted in Ireland in the Finance Act 2010 and there is an increasing focus by the Revenue Commissioners, as for tax authorities in other countries, on ensuring that multinational profits are not understated.

Transfer pricing law and practice across countries seeks to ensure that the profits of multinational companies are not understated in each of the countries concerned, and this may result in upward adjustments to profits for tax purposes. Where a country makes an upward adjustment to a multinational company's profits then the relevant treaty partner country will typically make a matching downward adjustment to the multinational company's profits, to the extent that it accepts that the upward adjustment made by the other country was in accordance with the arm's length principle.

This bilateral, tax treaty-based interaction addresses overstatements of profits by multinationals in one country as a corollary of examinations to identify and quantify understatements

of profits in another country a multinational's profits will only be reduced in one country where they have been increased in another country. Transfer pricing law and practice does not provide for, or result in, unilateral downward adjustments to company profits, separate from matching adjustments under tax treaties, and it would be inappropriate to provide powers to unilaterally reduce the taxable profits of multinational companies.

Tax Code

91. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding inheritance tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24177/15]

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

For the purposes of CAT, the relationship between the person who provides the gift or inheritance (i.e. the disponent) and the person who receives the gift or inheritance (i.e. the beneficiary), determines the maximum life-time tax-free threshold known as the "Group threshold" below which gift or inheritance tax does not arise.

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

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

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

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

Where a person receives gifts or inheritances in excess of their relevant tax free threshold, CAT at a rate of 33% applies on the excess over the tax free threshold. In recent years these thresholds were reduced and the rate has been increased in order to maintain the yield from capital taxes in the face of falling asset prices and as part of our fiscal consolidation efforts. In addition, taxes on certain capital are less harmful from an economic perspective than taxes on employment.

I am aware that property values have increased, with developments which had been restricted to the Dublin area now manifesting in other areas of the country, though not to the same extent in terms of price rises. I recognise that this has a bearing on taxation of the inheritance and gifting of property with respect to CAT thresholds. In this light, I will be keeping Capital Acquisitions Tax thresholds, rates and other aspects of the tax under review, particularly in the context of preparations for Budget 2016 and the consequent Finance Bill.

Deposit Guarantee Scheme

92. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if he is aware of the concern of the Irish League of Credit Unions in relation to the transposition of the deposit guarantee directive into Irish law (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24178/15]

99. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Finance his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding transposition of the deposit guarantee directive into Irish law; his plans to address the concerns expressed; if he has or is planning to meet with the National Group to discuss this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24221/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 92 and 99 together.

The Deposit Guarantee Scheme (DGS) provides protection of up to €100,000 per saver per credit institution, including credit unions. The scheme gives confidence to depositors that their money is safe in the event that a financial institution gets into financial difficulty.

Directive 2014/49/EU is a new Directive in relation to the DGS which is being transposed into Irish law. Before transposition, the Department of Finance established a public consultation process to provide an opportunity for stakeholders to give their views on how discretions should be applied. This process concluded last Friday 12 June 2015. While this Directive provides less flexibility in transposition to Member States than the previous Directive governing the DGS, Article 13 provides some discretion for Member States on the calculation of contributions to the DGS where a lower level of contribution for low risk sectors which, if justified, could be put in place. In relation to the contribution amount, Question 6 in my Department's consultation paper specifically asks whether or not credit unions should be considered a low risk sector and thus qualify for a lower level of contribution, it also requests justification for the answer provided.

All submissions received by my Department will now be examined and the views therein considered carefully over the coming weeks.

Departmental Correspondence

93. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Finance his views on correspondence regarding the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 12; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24182/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that interest charges are levied on taxpayers who do not meet their tax payment obligations in a timely fashion or who seek to pay their liabilities through phased payment arrangements. The charges are imposed to compensate the Exchequer for the late payment of funds and to ensure equity for the vast majority of taxpayers who pay on time.

Revenue has also assured me that where possible, it always seeks to work with taxpayers that are experiencing temporary cash-flow difficulties in preference to deploying debt collection/ enforcement measures to secure outstanding taxes. However, such discussions require open and committed engagement to identify and agree mutually acceptable solutions. Where there is no such engagement Revenue has no alternative but to use its debt collection/enforcement options.

In regard to the specific case to which the Deputy refers, the person in question has already been facilitated with two separate phased payment arrangements to help him manage his tax liabilities. One of the arrangements included a full deferral of payment for a twelve month period, which is beyond the normal level of concession afforded by Revenue but was considered appropriate given the particular circumstances of the case.

Unfortunately the person failed to adhere to the various payment arrangements provided to

him and, as mentioned in his letter to the Deputy, also failed to keep Revenue informed of his situation. This lack of engagement left Revenue with no alternative but to refer the outstanding amount, including interest, to the Sheriff for collection.

However, notwithstanding the previous failed arrangements Revenue is still willing to work with the person to agree a mutually satisfactory arrangement providing he makes every effort to adhere to the terms of any agreement and to keep the Collector-General informed of any subsequent difficulties that might arise.

Revenue will now ask the Sheriff to put a hold on any further action for a brief period to allow discussions to take place and will also make direct contact with the person in the coming days in an attempt to agree a mutually acceptable solution.

Tobacco Seizures Data

94. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the number of seizures of cigarettes and tobacco products by the Revenue Commissioners at Dublin Airport, Dublin Port and Dún Laoghaire Port in County Dublin, in the years 2013 and 2014 and in 2015 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24196/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that seizure figures are not separately maintained for Dún Laoghaire. That data is incorporated in the data maintained for Dublin Port as the Revenue operations at Dún Laoghaire are directed and managed from Dublin Port.

The data requested by the deputy is as set out in the following tables:

2013

Product category	Location	Number of Seizures	Volume	Value	Value (incl. Taxes)
Cigarettes (number)	Dublin Airport	3,146	9,224,685	€670,416	€4,272,845
	Dublin Port	266	22,073,208	€1,569,455	€10,028,661
	Total	3,412	31,297,893	€2,239,871	€14,301,506
Tobacco (Kgs)	Dublin Airport	458	2,331	€156,180	€998,185
	Dublin Port	71	419	€28,085	€177,068
	Total	529	2,750	€184,265	€1,175,253

2014

Product category	Location	Number of Seizures	Volume	Value	Value (incl. Taxes)
Cigarettes (number)	Dublin Airport	3,850	8,486,796	€615,509	€3,979,912
	Dublin Port	437	2,856,828	€204,032	€1,370,327
	Total	4,287	11,343,624	€819,541	€5,350,239
Tobacco (Kgs)	Dublin Airport	417	822	€55,077	€349,874
	Dublin Port	118	461	€30,904	€193,137
	Total	535	1,283	€85,981	€543,011

2015 (01/01/2015 - 31/05/2015)

Product category	Location	Number of Seizures	Volume	Value	Value (incl. Taxes)
Cigarettes (number)	Dublin Airport	1,552	3,337,772	€243,232	€1,646,276
	Dublin Port	120	28,076,728	€1,996,254	€13,303,945
	Total	1,672	31,414,450	€2,239,486	€14,950,221
Tobacco (Kgs)	Dublin Airport	232	477	€32,001	€211,318
	Dublin Port	34	43	€2,880	€19,616
	Total	266	520	€34,881	€230,934

Deposit Guarantee Scheme

95. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans for the transposition of the European Union deposit guarantee directive into law; the changes that will be made to current deposit guarantee schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24197/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The DGS Directive which applies to all credit institutions, whether banks or credit unions, entered into force on 4 July 2014 and is required to be transposed into Irish law by 3 July 2015 in order to be applied from 4 July 2015.

The main objective of the Directive is to introduce greater harmonisation in areas such as the funding mechanism of DGSs, the introduction of risk-based contributions, level of coverage and the harmonisation of the scope of products and depositors covered. It does not change the basic coverage level of €100,000.

The major changes that the Directive introduces are as follows:

(i) it introduces an added protection for what are known as temporary high balances for a period of between 3 and 12 months. These balances are over and above the standard coverage level of €100,000 and are designed to provide short-term protection, in circumstances where a person deposits money from for instance a real estate transaction.

(ii) it will require that we change the nature of the funding arrangements for the DGS. Currently, these are asset based in the form of ring-fenced deposits in the deposit protection account in the Central Bank which can be called upon to fund a compensation event for depositors. However, once the new arrangements are in place, banks and credit unions will have to pay contributions to the DGS which will be reflected as a cost in their financial accounts.

(iii) it will not be possible to provide DGS coverage of up to €100,000 for deposits held by credit unions with banks as is currently permitted. The rationale for this is that credit unions are classified as credit institutions and Article 5(1) of the Directive excludes from any repayment by a DGS, deposits made by other credit institutions on their own behalf and for their own account.

(iv) a reduction in the number of days that a DGS must pay out within, from 20 working days to 7 working days. However, this is phased in over an 8 year period.

In relation to the calculation of contributions to the DGS (Article 13), the Directive provides that Member States may provide for lower contributions for low-risk sectors which are regulated under national law. As part of the transposition, I will give consideration as to whether credit unions can be so categorised. It should be noted that the Directive allows Member States up until 31 May 2016 to implement this Article and it is likely that we will avail of at least some of this extra time.

Finally, you should be aware that I am giving consideration to legislating for maintaining

the availability of the existing deposit protection account resources in the early years of the build-up of the new fund. The purpose of such an arrangement would be to maintain the level of overall funds available for DGS purposes at an amount close to the existing arrangements. This matter is still the subject of legal advice and it is almost certain that if it is permissible, primary legislation will be required in order to achieve this objective.

Tax Data

96. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the income tax liabilities of the key sectors of the Irish economy during each of the years 2012 to 2014, inclusive, and on the actual gross amounts of income tax contributed by each sector during that period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24198/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the net liability for income tax for the major sectors for the years 2012 and 2013 was as shown in the following table, as at the end of March 2015. These figures include net income tax liability and also liability for USC and PRSI. I am also informed that approximately €141 million of this amount was still under active collection at the end of March 2015. Analysis of the 2014 tax year is not yet available. These figures relate to income tax liabilities under Schedule D only, i.e. self-employed income tax payers, and do not include income tax liabilities of employees which are collected via the PAYE system.

Distribution of Income (Schedule D) Net Liabilities by Trade Sector for the 2012 and 2013 Years of Assessment

Sector	2012	2013
A Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	€217,443,235	€219,792,155
B Mining and Quarrying	€203,298	€370,822
C Manufacturing	€14,919,233	€15,631,597
D Electricity, Gas, Steam and Air Conditioning supply	€24,518	€109,244
E Water Supply; Sewerage, Waste Management and remediation activities	€1,078,916	€1,034,635
F Construction	€97,373,024	€109,502,646
G Wholesale and retail trade; Repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	€117,180,852	€107,308,502
H Transportation and Storage	€42,676,736	€46,217,182
I Accommodation and food service activities	€58,505,607	€53,461,224
J Information and Communication	€21,576,834	€23,343,643
K Financial and Insurance Activities	€29,100,060	€38,721,245
L Real estate activities	€272,987,187	€296,807,016
M Professional, scientific and technical activities	€483,148,612	€517,846,572
N Administrative and support service activities	€21,922,737	€22,674,278
O Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	€6,656,831	€12,942,121
P Education	€12,703,323	€13,853,648
Q Human health and Social Work activities	€226,623,158	€216,477,967
R Arts, entertainment and recreation	€31,509,378	€29,999,641
S Other services activities	€33,345,293	€33,904,220
T Activities of households as employers of domestic personnel; Undifferentiated goods-and-service-producing activities of private households for own use	€3,495,291	€3,735,537
U Activities of extraterritorial organisations and bodies	€673,937	€583,610
All other Sectors/Unknown	€73,070,773	€115,713,812

Sector	2012	2013
Total	€1,766,310,843	€1,880,033,330

Questions Nos. 97 and 98 answered with Question No. 79.

Question No. 99 answered with Question No. 92.

Coastal Protection

100. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding works to prevent storm damage in an area (details supplied) in County Kerry; if the funding will be provided to do these works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24071/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government Decision of 11 February, 2014 in relation to repair of public infrastructure damaged in the Winter 2013/2014 storms allocated funding of up to €1,226,920 to Kerry County Council (KCC) for repair of coastal protection and flood defences based on a submission made by the Council to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. KCC's submission included for both repair and strengthening works of a coastal embankment at Cromane Lower – Gloscha was not mentioned specifically. The Council was advised by the Office of Public Works (OPW) that strengthening works were outside of the scope of the Government Decision and that only the repair element of projects were covered under the allocation. The OPW approved KCC's programme of repair works, which included €30,000 for Cromane Lower. Of the total approved allocation of €1,226,920, KCC has drawn down €1,206,275 to date including the funding approved for Cromane Lower.

Local coastal protection issues such as the one referred to in the Deputy's question are a matter for the Local Authority to investigate and address in the first instance. KCC may carry out flood mitigation and coastal protection works using its own resources.

The Office of Public Works operates a Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme. This administrative Scheme's eligibility criteria, including a requirement that any measures are cost beneficial are published on the OPW website, www.opw.ie. It is not available for repair of damaged infrastructure or for maintenance of existing flood defence or coastal protection assets. It is open to the Council to submit a funding application under the Scheme. Any application received will be considered in accordance with the scheme eligibility criteria and having regard to the overall availability of resources for flood risk management.

The OPW has not to date received an application from KCC for funding in relation to works in the area referred to by the Deputy.

National Lottery Regulator

101. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a report and accounts have been issued by the Irish lottery regulator (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24080/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The National Lottery Regulator took up office on 17 November 2014. In accordance with the terms of the

National Lottery Act 2013, the Lottery Regulator has compiled draft accounts for the period during 2014 in which he was in office. These accounts have been submitted to my Department and to the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Once the accounts have been audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General, they will be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas. At that point, they will be publicly available.

Public Procurement Contracts

102. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which post-tender negotiation takes place in respect of contracts awarded through the public procurement process, despite this practice contravening the Irish rules for public procurement (details supplied); if during the lifetime of the current Government any contracts awarded through the public procurement process were contingent on, or awarded as a result of, successful post-tender negotiation; if the results of these negotiations materially disadvantaged other tenderers who would otherwise have been the winning bidder; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24097/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Public procurement is the acquisition, whether under formal contract or not, of works, supplies and services by public bodies. National rules governing public procurement must comply with the relevant EU, WTO and national legal requirements and obligations. In general under EU law, public contracts above a certain value must be advertised EU-wide and awarded to the most competitive tender in an open and objective process.

As set out in the guidance to which the Deputy refers post-tender negotiation is prohibited under EU rules as it diminishes transparency and can give rise to abuses in the tendering process. The system is designed to operate on the basis that tenderers submit their most competitive bid in response to the specifications set out in an RFT. It is not envisaged for example that a contracting authority using an open or restricted tendering procedure would seek to negotiate either price or elements of the tender post the tender closure date.

Where a negotiated procedure is used, this must be done strictly in accordance with either Article 30 (with prior publication of a contract notice) or Article 31 (without prior publication of a contract notice) of EU Directive 2004/18/EC. This is a separate procedure to an open or restricted tendering procedure and it can only be used in very limited and defined exceptional circumstances.

I am not aware of any post tender negotiations used by contracting authorities that were in breach of EU Directive 2004/18/EC which materially disadvantaged other tenderers that would otherwise have been the winning bidder. If the Deputy has any concerns or information regarding such cases, I would encourage you to raise the matter directly with the relevant contracting authority or enforcement body.

Public Procurement Contracts Expenditure

103. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount of money which has been spent by this Government since 2011 to ensure that suppliers who, through outsourcing or by other means, are dependent on offshore suppliers to win contracts meet all requisite ethical standards for contracts awarded through the public procurement process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24098/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The main purpose of the EU public procurement regime is to open up the market and to ensure the free movement of supplies, services and works within the EU having regard to Treaty of Rome principles including transparency, proportionality and equal treatment. This is the rationale that shapes the detailed rules (Directives) governing the regime.

Public procurement procedures require applicants to meet certain standards when applying for public contracts. The criteria upon which contracting authorities may exclude applicants from the award procedure of public contracts are set out in Regulation 53 of SI 329 of 2006 European Communities (Award of Public Contracts) Regulations and Article 45 and Recitals (34) and (43) of 2004/18/EC, the EU Directive on the co-ordination of procedures for the award of public works contracts, public supply contracts and public service contracts. Before an applicant, in relation to certain breaches, is excluded the applicant may make a case and provide supporting evidence as to why it should not be excluded. The contracting authority must consider this evidence before deciding whether to exclude or include an applicant.

In qualifying for inclusion in tender competitions for public contracts, applicants must submit signed declarations stating that none of the circumstances outlined in Regulation 53 of SI 329 or Article 45 of 2004/18/EC apply.

Under the current regime and standard forms of contract, there are requirements in place for compliance with legal obligations. For example Clause 2 of the standard form of the public works contracts requires the contractor, his personnel and sub-contractors to comply with all legal requirements.

There is a substantial body of legislation that directly or indirectly governs construction activities, however two key pieces of industry specific legislation; the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Construction) Regulations 2013 and the Building Control Regulations 1997 2014 both place considerable responsibility, not only on contractors, but on all those involved in construction projects including designers, supervisors and individual workers.

The ultimate sanction for serious breach of health and safety regulations is a criminal conviction and imprisonment. Compliance with health and safety regulations is separately assessed in a pre-qualification of a works contractor with supporting evidence required to demonstrate the applicant possesses sufficient resources and is competent to carry out the proposed works. The Works Requirements which are a key part of the contract documents also set out detailed specifications on how regulatory standards are to be met.

Contractors are required to submit on-going certification under Clause 5.3 (Pay and Conditions of Employment) of the contract that they have complied in full with the requirements of that clause which covers aspects such as compliance with employment law, and deductions for social welfare. Contractors are also required under this Clause to maintain records and timesheets in respect of all those engaged on the works.

The new EU rules comprise a suite of three Directives (Public Procurement, Utilities and Concessions) that repeal the existing rules governing the conduct of procurement across the EU but the basic architecture of EU procurement will remain intact. The changes in the new regime were agreed principally to streamline the public procurement process and to put in place more simplified and flexible rules to reduce red tape and to make the procurement process more efficient.

The Office of Government Procurement (OGP) is currently exploring policy choices as part of the transposition process. One of the policy areas highlighted in the consultation document is adherence to “applicable obligations” in labour law. Each Member States has the choice

on which appropriate measures to adopt to ensure compliance with this obligation as well as choices on the level of oversight down the subcontracting supply chain. The OGP is currently exploring the appropriate measures to adopt and have sought views on this choice as part of the consultation process. Clearly, a key objective in transposing these new provisions is to avoid imposing disproportionate administrative burden on contracting authorities and tenderers while at the same time adhering to applicable labour law obligations. Getting the balance right will help to ensure value for money outcomes from procurement for the economy as a whole.

Public Procurement Regulations

104. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will confirm that all contracts awarded through the public procurement process during the lifetime of this Government were so awarded only after the company to which the contract was awarded was fully incorporated, including those contracts with a value of below €5,000, which were awarded but which still require the successful party to have corporate capacity to contract, for the award to be legal, fair and proper; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24099/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Public Procurement can be defined as the acquisition, whether under formal contract or not, of works, supplies and services by public bodies. It ranges from the purchase of routine supplies or services to formal tendering and placing contracts for large infrastructural projects by a wide and diverse range of contracting authorities.

EU directives set out advertising requirements and tendering procedures for contracts above certain value thresholds that must be applied by all public bodies involved in procurement. For contracts or purchases below these threshold values national rules apply.

There is no requirement for a tenderer to be a registered company in order to be awarded a public contract. Any economic operator, defined as a person, or a group of persons, that carries out works, or supplies products or services, is entitled to tender for a public contract under EU Directive 2004/18/EC, transposed into Irish law by SI No 329 of 2006

Economic operators applying for above EU threshold contracts are typically assessed against pre-qualification criteria to establish their ability to do the job by reference to their financial and economic standing, their technical and professional capacity, and their insurance levels. Successful economic operators who progress to the award stage are assessed either in terms of the lowest price or the most economically advantageous tender (MEAT) to determine the best offer. Establishing the levels of qualification criteria and award criteria that are relevant and appropriate to a particular contract is a matter for the contracting authority concerned. This is because the contracting authority is in the best position to gauge what is appropriate relative to the needs of that specific contract.

It is a basic principle of public procurement that a competitive process should be used unless there are justifiably exceptional circumstances and that winning government business is done in a fair, transparent and accessible way.

Public Procurement Contracts Expenditure

105. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the total quantum of expenditure with suppliers on contracts of value less than the €5,000 threshold, be-

low which contracts may be awarded on the basis of a verbal quotation; when he plans to extend the national e-procurement system to cover all public procurement contracts, with a value both above and below €5,000; if he has confidence that the existence of less stringent requirements for public procurement contracts with a value below €5,000 is not being abused by State bodies, Government Departments or their proxies; the controls that are in place to prevent such abuse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24100/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): EU directives set out advertising requirements and tendering procedures for contracts above certain value thresholds that must be applied by all public bodies involved in procurement.

For contracts or purchases below these threshold values, contracting authorities can contact the OGP to see if they can procure the goods or services on their behalf. Where this is not the case the following national procedures apply:

- supplies or services costing less than €5,000 in value may be purchased on the basis of verbal quotes from one or more competing suppliers;

- contracts for supplies or services between €5,000 and €25,000 in value should be awarded on the basis of responses to specifications sent by fax or email to at least three suppliers or service providers. ICT procurement opportunities with a value of €10,000 or greater are required to be advertised on eTenders in line with paragraph 2. (viii) of DoF Circular 2/09.

- goods and general services with an expected value of €25,000 or more should be advertised on the eTenders website.

Public bodies are required to publish all contract award notices over €25,000 on the eTenders website with effect from 1 August 2014. There are no plans to compel contracting authorities to publish procurements below this level on eTenders at present and it is questionable whether SMEs would welcome the increased administrative burden this would place on them. I would point out however that under Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Circular 10/14 buyers are requested to extend the use of the eTenders website to include tenders for low value purchases where possible. In relation to the level of procurement that falls below €5,000, there is no data available on the quantum of procurement involved as this information is not published on the eTenders system.

In relation to abuses by State bodies, Government Departments or their proxies regarding procurements below €5,000, I would point out that it is a matter for individual contracting authorities to ensure that their public procurement function is discharged in line with the standard accounting and procurement rules and procedures. The question of putting controls in place in these areas is a matter for the local management which in turn is subject to scrutiny by the internal and external audit functions of these bodies.

Public Procurement Contracts

106. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if persons and bodies corporate without any training in procurement or commerce are permitted to put services out to tender through the public procurement process; the training that persons or bodies must undertake in order to be eligible to run tendering processes and interpret responses received using the public procurement process, and award work to bidders that is funded by the Exchequer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24101/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Currently,

public service procurement activity is carried out by many contracting authorities throughout the State ranging from small schools to hospitals to central Government Departments. Public procurement in Ireland is complex, with different levels of procurement development, capabilities and systems across the public service. To date, there have been no specific training requirements for those undertaking public tendering, although many staff have received training in procurement through various bodies such as IPA, IIPMM and DIT. Many procurement staff also have academic qualifications in procurement or related fields such as engineering, law and business. As part of the procurement reform programme, the OGP is considering the nature of professional public procurement training and possible accreditation.

The Office of Government Procurement commenced sourcing operations in 2014 and, together with sector sourcing organisations, is taking responsibility for sourcing all goods and services on behalf of the public service. In addition, the OGP has responsibility for procurement policy and procedures, sourcing systems and data analytics.

Staff have been recruited into the OGP from across the Public Service, thereby concentrating and leveraging the public sector's procurement expertise. In addition, the OGP is operating to common policies, processes and procedures. This strengthening of procurement expertise will in turn provide Departments and Agencies with increased certainty and reduced risk by providing them with compliant sourcing solutions.

To ensure a consistent approach to operations and an over-arching cohesive culture in an organisation consisting of people from diverse entities and backgrounds, the OGP has developed a learning and development strategy based upon a set of technical and behavioural competencies as well as a matrix of appropriate training interventions to address any gaps in these competencies.

Initial training has commenced and is aimed at equipping staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to work to a common standard in the following three core areas:

- Core Procurement & Category Management Training;
- Public Sector Procurement;
- Customer Service.

Public Procurement Contracts

107. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the ethical standards public servants must conform to when they contract on behalf of the State; if there is a central register where public servants personally declare that they have no vested interest in the awarding of contract, and no conflict of interest in awarding any contracts of any value whatsoever; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24102/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Under the Standards in Public Office Act 2001, civil servants are required in the performance of their duties to maintain the highest standards of probity by conducting themselves with honesty, impartiality and integrity. Specifically they are not allowed to use their official positions to benefit themselves or others with whom they have personal, family, business or other ties or seek to influence decisions on matters pertaining to their official positions. They are not permitted to negotiate or arbitrate in any matter affecting a Government contract or the purchase from or sale of goods to the State where, in their private capacities, they are interested either as principals or as shareholders in a company being one of the principals in the matter under consideration.

I would also point out that the standard procurement template documents (RFTs and Contracts) on the Government's eTenders website require tenderers, individual employees, or agents or subcontractors of a tenderer to fully disclose any conflict of interest or potential conflict of interest as soon as it becomes apparent. Failure to do so may result in elimination from a competition or termination of a contract.

In relation to a central register, under the Ethics in Public Office Acts 1995 and 2001 all persons who occupy or occupied a "designated position" of employment in a public body are required to furnish an annual statement of interests disclosing any interest held by the person and any interests held, to the person's actual knowledge, by his or her spouse or civil partner, a child of the person, or a child of a spouse, which could materially influence the person in or in relation to the performance of his or her official functions. In the public service all positions at Principal Officer level are prescribed as designated positions of employment. In the case of the Office of Government Procurement all posts are designated for the purposes of the Ethics Acts.

In conclusion, it is very important that the public procurement function is discharged with probity, transparency and accountability and in a manner that secures best value for public money. Procurement practices are subject to audit and scrutiny under the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993 and Accounting Officers are publicly accountable for expenditure incurred. If the Deputy has any concerns or information regarding potential ethical breaches, I would encourage you to raise the matter with the relevant contracting authority or enforcement body.

Public Procurement Regulations

108. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if any measures are utilised to ensure that competing parties in the public procurement process are compared on a like-for-like basis in respect of standards in workplace safety and employment regulations, notwithstanding that a competing party may use inputs from low-cost countries outside of the European Union in the supply-chain process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24103/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The main purpose of the EU public procurement regime is to open up the market and to ensure the free movement of supplies, services and works within the EU having regard to Treaty of Rome principles including transparency, proportionality and equal treatment. This is the rationale that shapes the detailed rules (Directives) governing the regime.

The enforcement of employment and health & safety legislation apply equally to public and private sector contracts. Consequently, it is not for me as Minister of Public Expenditure and Reform to set out a separate policy for public sector contracts. My colleague Mr Richard Bruton TD, Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation has overall policy responsibility for employment rights and the area of health and safety in the workplace. The National Employment Rights Authority (NERA) is responsible for enforcing minimum statutory employment rights and entitlements in the State and, in undertaking that role, carries out a range of functions including the provision of employment rights information and the inspection of employment related records. NERA operates a system of risk based inspections in sectors where there are identifiable risks. Inspections are also carried out in response to complaints received and routine inspections are undertaken as a control measure. It is a condition of any contract entered into by a public authority with a private sector entity (other than for operations that may reasonably be considered as small scale) that the entity is required to provide access to certain information. This information may assist the authority to assess compliance with employment

legislation consistent with the requirements of EU and national law. While the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) has overall responsibility for the administration and enforcement of health and safety at work in this jurisdiction. The HSA monitors compliance with legislation at the workplace and can take enforcement action up to and including prosecutions.

Public procurement procedures require applicants to meet certain standards when applying for public contracts. The criteria upon which contracting authorities may exclude applicants from the award procedure of public contracts are set out in Regulation 53 of SI 329 of 2006 European Communities (Award of Public Contracts) Regulations 2006 and Article 45 and Recitals (34) and (43) of 2004/18/EC, the EU Directive on the co-ordination of procedures for the award of public works contracts, public supply contracts and public service contracts. Before an applicant, in relation to certain breaches is excluded, the applicant may make a case and provide supporting evidence as to why it should not be excluded. The contracting authority must consider this evidence before deciding whether to exclude or include an applicant.

In qualifying for inclusion in tender competitions for public contracts, applicants must submit signed declarations stating that none of the circumstances outlined in Regulation 53 of SI 329 or Article 45 of 2004/18/EC apply. The OGP has made provision within its standard template suite of tender and contract documentation to address situations where breach of employment or health and safety (or other relevant) legislation comes to its attention in the context of contract administration. Discharge of fees is subject to compliance with terms and conditions of contract which includes legislative compliance. Similarly material breach of such terms may trigger a right of termination.

Public Procurement Contracts

109. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the appeal mechanisms, outside of judicial review, that are in place for parties who are unsuccessful in the public procurement process; his plans to introduce such an appeal mechanism; the specific steps the State takes to ensure that parties who are unsuccessful in the public procurement process and undertake a judicial review against the awarding body are not disadvantaged when competing in subsequent public procurement processes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24104/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Office of Government Procurement (OGP), has developed a pilot service to address concerns raised by suppliers most notably SMEs, in relation to possible barriers for suppliers in competing for public procurement tender opportunities, as part of the Action Plan for Jobs 2014.

The pilot service known as the Tender Advisory Service (TAS) was launched on 1st February 2015 and was welcomed by industry representative bodies. The service is designed to give an informal outlet for potential suppliers to raise concerns in relation to a particular live tender process. The pilot covers all procurement processes carried out by the OGP or other public sector contracting body (excluding the commercial semi-state bodies) and will be subject to review after the first twelve months.

The objectives of the initiative are to improve communications with suppliers and increase professionalism and consistency in how procurement processes are carried out across the public service. Engagement with the service in no way impedes the rights of individuals to pursue their rights formally under the Remedies legislation.

Under EU and National rules, contracting authorities are responsible for their own decisions

relating to the tendering process. However, in the interests of best practice the contracting authority should comply with any suggestion made by this service.

Parties who engage with TAS or undertake a judicial review against a contracting authority in respect of a particular tender competition should not be disadvantaged when competing in subsequent public procurement completions. To do so would be in contravention of national and EU rules which seek to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime. Contracting Authorities cannot favour or discriminate against particular candidates and there are legal remedies which may be used against any public body infringing these rules. Contracting authorities are responsible for establishing arrangements for ensuring the proper conduct of their affairs, including conformance to standards of good governance and accountability with regard to procurement.

Ministerial Correspondence

110. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when a final reply will issue to his interim response (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24112/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I regret the delay in issuing a final reply to your representations. Unfortunately, this occurred because the issues raised on behalf of the organisation involved crossed a number of areas of responsibility. The question of the availability of financial assistance would be a matter for the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government whose Department has responsibility for a number of Community and Rural schemes that may be relevant. I have made arrangements to refer this matter to him for consideration.

As regards access to laptops or other computer equipment in Government Departments, guidance from my Department to Departments on Depreciation and Disposal of PC's and other computer hardware sets the period for depreciation of IT assets at five years. The Circular also states that equipment that continues to function properly should be replaced only when necessary and that equipment should be sold at market value. Each Department is responsible for the management and disposal of its own IT assets. For instance, my Department disposes of obsolete IT equipment via a charity which was chosen as part of a periodic competitive exercise.

Enterprise Support Services Provision

111. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 11 of 10 June 2015, the educational training courses, other than those in responsible welding co-ordination, required in order for steel fabricators to meet their compliance obligations under European Union Directive EN-1090-1; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24094/15]

112. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 180 of 19 May 2015, the training possibilities under SOLAS and Education and Training Boards for steel fabricators in order for them to comply with European Union Directive EN 1090-1; the subsidies or grants available, or envisaged, in this regard under these schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24145/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 111 and 112 together.

In general, the implementation of the EU Construction Products Regulation, (CPR), which sets out requirements regarding the CE Mark for Structural Steel, is a matter for the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (D/ECLG). I understand that officials in that Department have worked with a broad range of stakeholders to ensure the industry was aware of, and prepared for, the implementation of the Construction Products Regulation in Ireland. I also understand that a significant number of steel fabricators operating in the State have already established the systems necessary to comply with their obligations under the Construction Products Regulation and, more specifically, the requirements of I.S. EN 1090-1. D/ECLG remains committed to working with all stakeholders in order to continue to raise awareness and facilitate the implementation of the Construction Products Regulation in Ireland.

With regard to your specific question concerning the educational/training courses provided by SOLAS for steel fabricators to meet the requirements of I.S. EN 1090-1, the programmes provided by SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) are primarily targeted at unemployed people who are generally referred to programmes by the Department of Social Protection. I understand that the ETBs in Cork, Dundalk, Galway, Shannon, Tralee and Waterford provide metal fabrication apprenticeship training, which incorporates elements of certification training.

Skillnets, on the other hand, is funded from the National Training Fund through the Department of Education and Skills and funds groups of companies in the same region/sector, and with similar training needs, through training networks that deliver subsidised training to Irish businesses. It may therefore be beneficial for steel fabricator companies to explore what economies of scale might be achieved for companies seeking the same upskilling in the same area. There are no subsidies or grants available or envisaged to meet the requirements of the CPR or I.S. EN 1090-1.

The role of the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) is to provide information to small and micro firms and to signpost them to relevant agencies/bodies for training and certification. The provision of the specialist technical training required to achieve certification to an International or European Standard, such as that required by steel fabricators in this instance, is outside of the remit of the LEO services. However, to date, the LEOs - in conjunction with the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) - have provided five general awareness/information seminars on the topic at various venues around the country.

In view of the NSAI's final certification role, and given the roles and responsibilities of other Departments and agencies, my Department has discussed the requirements of the CPR with the relevant Departments and agencies i.e. Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Department of Education and Skills, the LEOs and the NSAI. Based on the information provided, my Department has devised a step-by-step guide on the current training provision in the public education sector. The guide is available on my Department's website under 'Latest Publications/Notices' and has been distributed to the LEO network and to the relevant Departments for uploading on their websites.

The guide is tailored for those steel fabricator firms affected by the two key areas requiring action i.e. Responsible Welding Coordinator (RWC) and Factory Production Control (FPC) under Execution Class 2 (commercial and residential buildings). Further courses can be provided depending on the level of demand from firms. In relation to FPC training, this is only available through consultants. However, as part of their information provision and advisory role, the LEOs may be able to organise group training between firms and consultants. Firms should enquire about this through their local LEO office. In addition, the newly-formed Irish Association of Steel Fabricators has a website with useful information in relation to the CPR requirements including weld testing to meet the I.S. EN 1090-1 requirements.

NSAI has undertaken the accreditation requirements to enable it to act as a notified body under the CPR. More detailed information on the certification assessment process is available on the NSAI website at <http://www.n sai.ie/Steel-Fabrication-CE-Marking.aspx>, including clarification about which products are covered by standard I.S. EN 1090 and a helpful pre-audit questionnaire to facilitate preliminary assessment by affected businesses.

Unemployment Levels

113. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation his assessment regarding the level of unemployment among recent graduates in Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24135/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Action Plan for Jobs (APJ) 2015 was published in January this year and is the fourth in the multi-annual series of a whole of government approach to economic recovery, export growth and job creation. The Action Plan for Jobs set a target to increase employment by 100,000 by 2016 and this target was achieved 21 months ahead of the target. Much work remains to be done however to replace all the jobs lost in the downturn, and we are determined as set out in the Action Plan for Jobs and the Spring Economic Statement to have 2.1 million at work by 2018 and to get the unemployment rate below 8 per cent.

Our focus will continue to be on ensuring that there are rewarding employment opportunities for all those who lost their jobs during the recession and for those new to the labour market in to the future. Each quarterly progress report published on my Department's website of the Action Plan for Jobs contains within its commentary section an update on employment data. This year we have also embedded a new assessment framework, which will improve monitoring associated with our employment policies. This is in response to a suggestion by the OECD that one area of improvement for APJ was to more clearly link actions to outcomes.

It is important to record that over 104,000 more people are at work since the launch of the first *Action Plan for Jobs* in 2012. In the case of Dublin, the unemployment rate has been brought down from 13.2% in the first Quarter of 2012 to 8.8% in the first Quarter of 2015 and there were 584,900 at work in the Dublin region, an increase of 43,400 since 2012.

My Department, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and the Local Enterprise Offices work closely with the Department of Social Protection to provide opportunities for all those seeking employment in Dublin, including graduates. According to the HEA publication "What do graduates do – the Class of 2013" (published Dec 2014), Dublin is the Region with the most employment opportunities for graduates across all levels of qualifications with 34% Honours Bachelor Degree, 32% of Higher Diploma, 27% of Graduate Diploma, 43% of Taught masters, 37% Research Masters and 32% of Doctorates employed in the Region. One third of the population live in Dublin.

Overall the HEA data indicates that in 2013 the proportion of university graduates with an Honours Bachelor Degree seeking employment after nine months of graduation was 6%. Similarly, the proportion of graduates with a Higher & Postgraduate Diploma seeking employment after 9 months was 9%, while for Masters/Doctorates holders the proportion seeking employment 9 months after graduation was 11%. Our aim is to further increase job vacancies especially for new entrants to the labour market.

Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

114. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the position regarding the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership; his views regarding the investor state dispute settlement therein; his views that this new court-arbitration system for disputes is going to be inaccessible to the small and medium enterprises sector due to costs and affordability issues; if he will ensure that this issue is addressed in the ongoing negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24204/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): According to assessments made by the EU Commission, a comprehensive TTIP could over time boost EU GDP by 0.5% per annum bringing significant economic gains as a whole for the EU. This converts into 400,000 jobs across the EU. A study commissioned by my Department estimates that these benefits in Ireland will be proportionally greater than in the EU as a whole. It suggests growth in Irish exports of almost 4%, increases in investment of 1% and increase in real wages of 1.5%. It estimates somewhere between 5,000 and 10,000 additional export related jobs.

The last formal round of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiations, which was the ninth since negotiations began in 2013, took place in New York during the week beginning 20 April, 2015. The tenth formal round is scheduled to take place in Brussels during the week beginning 13 July, 2015. Work has advanced in all three pillars of the negotiations, namely, market access, regulatory cooperation and rules.

One of the general principles set out in the EU's negotiating mandate is the objective to take into account the particular challenges faced by small and medium-sized enterprises in contributing to the development of trade and investment. TTIP will include a specific chapter on SMEs which is aimed at making the terms of TTIP more accessible by providing information which in turn will help to identify opportunities to trade and invest.

Insofar as negotiations on investment is concerned, the stated aim of EU's negotiating mandate is to negotiate investment liberalisation and protection provisions on the basis of the highest levels of liberalisation and highest standards of protection that both sides have negotiated to date. The mandate makes it clear that the ultimately, the decision to include investment protection and ISDS in TTIP will depend on EU interests being met and on the final balance of the Agreement. Negotiations on investment protection including ISDS are on hold pending further work being undertaken by the EU Commission.

The EU's aim is to overhaul investment protection provisions and the ISDS in international agreements, learning from experience of others under existing agreements globally. Significant progress in this regard has already been made under the EU-Canada (CETA) free trade and investment agreement. The Commission's Concept Paper on reforming ISDS "*Investment in TTIP and beyond – the path for reform*", builds on this progress and sets out ideas to further improve four key issues, namely, Governments' right to regulate, establishment and functioning of tribunals, relationship between national judicial systems and an ISDS system, and an appellate mechanism.

As regards accessibility of SMEs to arbitration, some of the improved provisions included in CETA were introduced with SMEs in mind and should provide the basis for similar provisions in TTIP. These include specific provisions on mediation, to encourage an amicable solution between parties and avoid a longer and costlier formal arbitration process. CETA also introduces the possibility of a sole arbitrator when both parties agree, which would reduce costs, and also introduces limits on the fees paid to arbitrators.

I am open to considering proposals that can achieve a reasonable and workable arbitration system that is fair, transparent and efficient and addresses the shortcomings of historic models of investment arbitration which have given rise to concern.

Job Creation Data

115. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he is aware of impending job losses at a company (details supplied) in County Clare, despite the Government's announcement last year that the company intended to create 100 additional jobs over the next year; if he will provide, in tabular form, the annual number of full-time jobs announced by the Government, via the regular jobs announcements Government statements; and of these, the actual number of jobs delivered. [24218/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): In 2014, this company announced the expansion of its facility in Shannon, County Clare, with the creation of approximately 100 new jobs over the 200 jobs already in place with the company. These 100 jobs were created and are currently in situ. Any further announcement about its future is a matter for the company.

So far this year IDA Ireland has announced four new projects for the Mid-West Region (Shannon and Limerick) with a job potential of over 600 people at full operation. These companies are. Amax, Viagogo, Northern Trust and Dell.

In relation to the Deputy's query on new job announcements, 2014 was a record year for IDA Ireland with 197 investments being secured for Ireland and 15,012 gross new jobs being created in IDA Ireland client companies. There was a notable rise in new name investments with 88 new name investments being secured in 2014. For a variety of reasons many companies do not seek any publicity on proposed investments and many projects proceed without being publicly announced. During 2014, there were only 66 investment announcements, of which 38 were new projects with the balance being made up of expansion projects.

In relation to expansion of the Irish –owned sector, it is noteworthy that client companies of Enterprise Ireland created 19,705 jobs in 2014, which represented a net increase of 8,476 people employed in EI supported companies, the highest net gain in the history of that Agency.

It is important to acknowledge the natural time lag between an announcement of an investment and the coming on stream of that project, which can be between 3 and 5 years in some cases. That time is required for such activities as locating and acquiring a suitable site for the company's operations, constructing a facility, installing machinery, the recruitment and training of suitable staff and a natural developmental phase.

Because of the time lag it is not possible to compare the numbers of jobs announced with the numbers of jobs created. In any given year the number of jobs created exceeds the number of jobs announced. Taking 2014 as an example, the IDA job announcements indicated a potential job creation figure in the region of 7,000 jobs whereas the actual number of new jobs created in IDA Ireland client companies in 2014 was in fact 15,012.

The level of investments coming on stream is best measured by the number of new jobs created in any given year as recorded in the Annual Employment Survey carried out by my Department.

GLAS Eligibility

116. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if Natura lands with an area of 69.931 hectares have been accepted in an application under the green low-carbon agri-environmental scheme in respect of persons (details supplied) in County

Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23991/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): A GLAS application for the person named was received on my Department's online application system on the 19th May 2015. Almost 27,000 applications were submitted in the first tranche of GLAS applications, which is a testament to the level of interest which this new scheme has generated in a very short time. All GLAS applications received on or before the closing date of the 26th May 2015, including the application of the person-named, will now be assessed and approved in line with the terms and conditions of the Scheme, confirming also all priority environmental assets such as Natura land which have been claimed by applicants. This process must be carried out as a single exercise, comparing and ranking all applications against each other. Accordingly, I am unable to comment on individual applications at this point in time.

All applicants will be notified in writing of the outcome of their applications and I anticipate contracts commencing in October.

GLAS Applications

117. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a special area of conservation totalling 17.3 hectares has been recognised in an application under the green low-carbon agri-environmental scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23997/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): A GLAS application for the person named was received on my Department's online application system on the 19th May 2015. Almost 27,000 applications were submitted in the first tranche of GLAS applications, which is a testament to the level of interest which this new scheme has generated in a very short time. All GLAS applications received on or before the closing date of the 26th May 2015, including the application of the person-named, will now be assessed and approved in line with the terms and conditions of the Scheme, confirming also all priority environmental assets such as Special Areas of Conservation which have been claimed by applicants. This process must be carried out as a single exercise, comparing and ranking all applications against each other. Accordingly, I am unable to comment on individual applications at this point in time.

All applicants will be notified in writing of the outcome of their applications and I anticipate contracts commencing in October.

GLAS Eligibility

118. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a special area of conservation totalling 4.63 hectares has been recognised in an application under the green low-carbon agri-environmental scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23998/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): A GLAS application for the person named was received on my Department's online application system on the 21st May 2015. Almost 27,000 applications were submitted in the first tranche of GLAS applications, which is a testament to the level of interest which this new scheme has generated in a very short time. All GLAS applications received on or before the closing date of the 26th May 2015, including the application of the person-named, will now be assessed and approved in line with the terms and conditions of the Scheme, confirming also all priority environmental assets

such as Special Areas of Conservation which have been claimed by applicants. This process must be carried out as a single exercise, comparing and ranking all applications against each other. Accordingly, I am unable to comment on individual applications at this point in time.

All applicants will be notified in writing of the outcome of their applications and I anticipate contracts commencing in October.

Beef Industry

119. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide an update on the last beef forum meeting; when the forum is due to meet again; and the main items on the agenda. [24005/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I established the Beef Forum last year in order to bring all relevant stakeholders together and to facilitate open discussion between industry, farming organisations and others on the strategic path forward for the beef sector. The Forum has met on 5 occasions, including in November last year when the stakeholders agreed to a broad range of outcomes which address issues of concern for the sector in areas such as weight and age specifications, the Quality Payment system, live exports and producer organisations. The Forum allows stakeholders to engage in a positive way on strategic goals for the sector. As an example, the most recent meeting of the Forum held in February proposed the preparation of written guidelines for beef farmers which would act as a blueprint for those currently producing bull beef or those considering developing bull and other beef production systems, taking into account production efficiency and market dynamics. There was also general consensus at February's Forum meeting that good progress was being made in delivering on the outcomes agreed at the November meeting, accompanied by a commitment from all participants to continue this work.

We have seen the benefits that the forum can bring with positive co-operation from all of the stakeholders. In order to build on the progress made, another meeting of the Beef Roundtable is scheduled and I expect to be able to confirm the date in the coming days. The meeting includes a discussion on Producer Organisations, and the current market situation, and I am finalising other elements of the agenda at present.

Farm Inspections

120. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the new farmers charter will be agreed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24006/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am pleased to advise that negotiations between my Department and the main farming organisations on a new Farmers Charter concluded on Thursday 11th June 2015. I welcome the achievement of consensus on the Charter and commend all parties involved for their positive engagement over the last number of months. *The Charter is effectively an agreement between my Department and the main farming organisations on improving the standards and delivery targets for the Department's schemes and services, including on-farm inspections, and brings clarity to the arrangements around inspections which I am particularly pleased about.* The Charter sets out, in very clear language, the timelines, application, payment and appeals processes and is a very useful reference for farmers.

The new Charter will remain in place until 2020 coinciding with the lifetime of the current

Pillar I and Pillar II schemes.

A Charter Monitoring Committee will be established under an independent chairman to monitor agreed targets and standards. This Committee will be composed of representatives of the farm organisations and staff of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Bovine Disease Controls

121. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the detection of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, BSE, on a farm in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24009/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): As the Deputy is aware, a cow on a farm in County Louth has tested positively for BSE. The animal was not presented for slaughter and did not enter the food or feed chain. The case was identified through the ongoing surveillance system of my Department. This surveillance system is part of the overall control systems in place to protect the food and feed chain. A series of confirmatory tests is now being undertaken and the final results will be available shortly.

Ireland's BSE surveillance and controls are effective and consistent with legal requirements and best international practice. These controls are applied at different stages along the feed and food supply chain, supplementing and reinforcing each other to ensure the safety of the food and feed chain. The effective and systematic application of these controls, in accordance with EU and OIE rules, means that beef and beef products may be safely traded internationally.

The OIE has this week stated that it very much respects the integrity and transparency demonstrated by Ireland in providing preliminary information on this suspect case. It further commends the commitment to the protection of animal and human health as demonstrated by the effectiveness of the ongoing BSE surveillance program and the controls in place that prevented any part of the animal from entering the human food or animal feed chain.

In accordance with normal procedure, cases of BSE are subject to a full epidemiological investigation. The investigation of this particular case is now underway and will be concluded as soon as possible. The birth cohorts - animals born and reared in the herd of birth, around the same time as the positive animal - and progeny of the infected animal have been traced and will be sent for destruction and tested as a precaution.

I am confident that the controls being applied by my Department are among the best in the world. *The record of Irish agriculture in producing beef and other products to such a high standard will continue to be important to us and the proven success of our control and monitoring regime will continue to enhance our reputation as one of the best food producers in the world.*

Farm Inspections

122. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 88 of 25 March 2015, if the information in respect of 2014 will be supplied; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24026/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The following tables detail the outcome of the 2014 Full Cross Compliance and Animal Identification and Registration Inspections. It should be noted that this data is subject to change as the outcome of review requests and appeals to the Agriculture Appeals Office are finalised.

2014 Full Cross Compliance Inspections

County	Number Completed	Number of Clear Cases (No Breach)	Number with Minor Breach*	Number with Penalty/Sanction
Carlow	30	6	9	15
Cavan	34	3	11	20
Clare	48	11	18	19
Cork	150	25	58	67
Donegal	44	27	11	6
Dublin	10	2	3	5
Galway	118	41	33	44
Kerry	68	23	23	22
Kildare	34	14	11	9
Kilkenny	47	10	14	23
Laois	51	9	29	13
Leitrim	24	10	6	8
Limerick	87	26	43	18
Longford	26	4	12	10
Louth	27	9	11	7
Mayo	72	32	18	22
Meath	48	10	24	14
Monaghan	44	7	15	22
Offaly	40	10	12	18
Roscommon	39	9	12	18
Sligo	34	18	7	9
Tipperary	127	14	53	60
Waterford	41	3	16	22
Westmeath	34	6	11	17
Wexford	65	14	19	32
Wicklow	26	7	11	8
Total	1,368	350	490	528

* 'Minor Breach' refers to cases with minor non-compliances resulting in no monetary sanction

2014 Animal IDR Inspections

County	Number Completed	Number of Clear Cases (No Breach)	Number with Minor Breach*	Number with Penalty/Sanction
Carlow	53	20	19	14
Cavan	200	52	84	64
Clare	186	63	88	35
Cork	361	109	147	105
Donegal	201	121	42	38
Dublin	38	17	11	10
Galway	410	178	134	98
Kerry	241	159	47	35
Kildare	116	47	40	29
Kilkenny	127	46	48	33
Laois	112	24	59	29
Leitrim	89	40	28	21
Limerick	200	70	83	47

County	Number Completed	Number of Clear Cases (No Breach)	Number with Minor Breach*	Number with Penalty/Sanction
Longford	110	40	47	23
Louth	48	14	23	11
Mayo	372	176	116	80
Meath	183	81	73	29
Monaghan	197	59	92	46
Offaly	125	43	58	24
Roscommon	221	78	84	59
Sligo	133	53	44	36
Tipperary	385	96	173	116
Waterford	119	23	48	48
Westmeath	154	46	69	39
Wexford	216	67	69	80
Wicklow	146	71	36	39
Total	4,743	1,793	1,762	1,188

* 'Minor Breach' refers to cases with minor non-compliances resulting in no monetary sanction.

The data on the value of 2014 Cross Compliance penalties is currently being finalised for EU reporting requirements and will be provided when available.

Single Payment Scheme Applications

123. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) in County Mayo has been refused entitlements under the single payment scheme. [24074/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department received a 2014 Transfer of Entitlements application on 7 May 2015 to transfer 4.70 entitlements by way of sale to the person named from another person. The closing date for receipt of Transfer of Entitlements applications for the 2014 Single Payment Scheme Year was 15 May 2014. As such, it was not possible for my Department to process this application. A letter was issued from my Department to both parties on 9 June 2015 advising them that their late application had been rejected due to the fact that it was received after the closing date of 15 May 2014.

Both parties have been advised that if they are dissatisfied with my Department's decision, they may submit an appeal providing details of any extenuating circumstances which led to the late application. To date no appeal has been received.

Fish Farming

124. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 223 of 3 April 2014, the reason he replied regarding the inspection of licensed aquaculture sites that he was satisfied that the current inspection regime is satisfactory, when at the same time he provided the European Commission with a programme of measures intended to avoid daily fines for non-compliance with the European Court of Justice case C-418/04, informing the Commission that a dedicated monitoring and compliance unit has been established within his Department to ensure enhanced monitoring and regulatory standards, practices and procedures, and that he had substantially enhanced the existing regulatory

procedures and supplements for all other inspections of sites. [24147/15]

125. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will outline the very substantial enhancement of the existing regulatory procedure which supplements all other inspections of sites, specifying how it supplements the inspection checklist for marine fish farms which was first published in 2000 and which is currently the sole record of fish farm inspections made available to members of the public. [24148/15]

126. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide the structure, staffing and resources allocated to the marine fish farms monitoring and compliance unit; the date it was established; the number of meetings it has held; and any work it has undertaken. [24149/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 124 to 126, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy has been previously advised, I am satisfied that the current inspection regime operated by my Department is satisfactory. The establishment of the Monitoring and Compliance Unit referred to by the Deputy has added a further enhancement to the monitoring and regulatory standards, practices and procedures already in place. A key element of the work carried out by the Monitoring and Compliance Unit is the undertaking of Integrated Systems Inspections of selected aquaculture licensed operations to further ensure that all the terms & conditions of the licence(s) are fully adhered to by the operator. This procedure is over and above other inspections of sites carried out in the normal way by my Department and relevant agencies.

The Monitoring & Compliance Unit forms part of the Aquaculture & Foreshore Management Division of my Department and was established following the transfer of certain Foreshore functions to the Department of Environment, Community & Local Government in 2010.

The Unit has a current staffing allocation of 1 Higher Executive Officer, 1 Executive Officer and 1 Clerical Officer. Specialised technical and scientific inputs to the work of the Unit are sourced as necessary from my Department's Engineering Division and relevant agencies.

Fish Farming

127. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will confirm that the majority of site inspections undertaken by his Department do not check the condition of the shackles, an important structural component of fish farm installations, when an inspection of these shackles is required on his Department's checklist for marine fish farms; and the measures he plans to take to insure that inspection checklists for marine fish farms are properly completed. [24150/15]

128. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will confirm that there is no requirement to ensure operators of marine fish farms undertake appropriate and regular inspections of every item of the mooring system by divers, cleaned down where necessary to allow such inspections, with its conditions recorded and submitted to his Department, as recommended to him by his Department's engineering division; and if he is satisfied that no such requirement is needed, in view of the failure of such structural components at Inver Bay in 2010, Clew Bay in 2010, and Bantry Bay in 2014 with the total loss of more than 300,000 salmon. [24151/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to

take Questions Nos. 127 and 128 together.

My Department's Inspection Checklist for Marine Finfish Farms includes a section on the condition of the shackles and where appropriate and in so far as it is possible to do so, having regard to visibility constraints pertaining at the time, this section is filled in by the inspector.

I would also point out that my Department is currently finalising a Protocol for the Structural Design of Marine Finfish Farms that will specifically address the structural design of the components of finfish farms including the shackles and other important elements of the farm structure. I can also confirm that the Inspection Checklist for Marine Finfish Farms is currently being updated by my Department.

Bord na gCon

129. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the Irish Greyhound Board will require his permission to sell the Greyhound Stadium in Harold's Cross in Dublin 6W; if the board has discussed this issue with him; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24181/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Indecon report which was published in July 2014 contained 27 recommendations, including a recommendation that a plan for asset disposals should be implemented. The Indecon report included Harolds Cross greyhound racing facility in the list of potential asset disposals. Following the publication of the Indecon Report Bord na gCon submitted an action plan to my Department with timelines for implementing the recommendations. Bord na gCon has assured my Department that it has assiduously followed up on the undertakings included in its response to the Indecon Report.

In accordance with the provisions contained in the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies and in accordance with the Horse and Greyhound Racing (Betting Charges and Levies) Act 1999, Section 10 (18C) Bord na gCon must obtain the consent of the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Marine and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for the disposal of any property. I have not received any request for such consent at this point.

Air Ambulance Service Provision

130. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Defence the number of missions carried out by a service (details supplied) in County Clare in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23999/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The pilot Emergency Aeromedical Support (EAS) service, as operated by the Air Corps, completed 16 missions in County Clare during 2014.

Coroners Service

131. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide, in tabular form, by county, the number of cases dealt with by coroners in 2014; the total cost in each county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24000/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The details in respect of the number of cases dealt with annually by coroners are available on the website www.coroners.ie under “Publications”.

The number of cases dealt with by coroners in 2014 are set out in the following Table:

Area	Report	Report and Post Mortem	Report/Post Mortem and Inquest
Carlow	103	31	31
Cavan	159	30	33
Clare	314	59	37
Cork Co Borough	566	159	192
Cork North	263	72	36
Cork South	353	74	50
Cork West	119	28	27
Donegal North East	74	43	2
Donegal North West	271	43	34
Donegal South East	101	18	14
Donegal South West	115	8	17
Dublin	2838	1236	666
Galway East	234	68	35
Galway North	44	21	12
Galway West	488	171	79
Kerry North	67	24	3
Kerry South East	162	28	12
Kerry West	171	56	34
Kildare	359	101	74
Kilkenny	184	67	31
Laois	103	54	17
Leitrim	59	23	10
Limerick City	49	28	35
Limerick South East	228	81	40
Limerick West	129	1	27
Longford	63	17	11
Louth	256	93	55
Mayo East	20	10	5
Mayo North	44	12	21
Mayo South	178	118	58
Meath	245	104	40
Monaghan North	39	13	6
Monaghan South	47	1	11
Offaly	157	32	19
Roscommon	149	6	31
Sligo	182	97	41
Tipperary North	179	29	14
Tipperary South	177	66	28
Waterford City	125	108	26
Waterford East	104	22	5
Waterford West	14	9	6
Westmeath	231	55	33
Wexford	394	67	56

Area	Report	Report and Post Mortem	Report/Post Mortem and Inquest
Wicklow East	164	24	33
Wicklow West	38	5	6

Information on the cost of the Corners Service in each county is being compiled and verified by Departments officials and will be forwarded to the Deputy when completed.

Wildlife Protection

132. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will engage with the Garda Commissioner to devise a protocol for dealing with reports of illegal burning (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23965/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): At the outset I must point out that my colleague the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, has policy and legislative responsibility in this area. I am advised by her that the burning of vegetation on uncultivated land is prohibited without exception from 1 March to 31 August under section 40 of the Wildlife Acts, and that Authorised Officers in relation to the prosecution of breaches of the Wildlife Acts include members of An Garda Síochána.

In these circumstances, I do not have a direct role in relation to the development of protocols along the lines referred to by the Deputy. I have, however, brought the specific issues raised by the Deputy to the attention of the Garda authorities and the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

I am further advised that the Garda investigation into the recent fires is continuing and therefore the Deputy will appreciate that it would not be appropriate to make any further comment on these incidents. However, I would urge anyone with any information, no matter how trivial it may seem, to pass this information on to the Gardaí or to the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

I also understand that, last year, stakeholders had an opportunity to input their views on the operation of the section 40 of the Wildlife Acts as part of a consultation process initiated by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and that the formulation of future proposals is currently under consideration by a Working Group in the Minister's Department.

Residency Permits

133. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Waterford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23970/15]

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 his parentage of an Irish citizen child. The application was received in the Residence Division on the 3 October, 2014 and is under consideration at present.

Garda Misconduct Allegations

134. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the historical case of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23973/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The particular case to which the Deputy refers is amongst those being considered under the mechanism established for the independent review of certain allegations of Garda misconduct, or inadequacies in the investigation of certain allegations, which have been made to me as Minister for Justice and Equality, or the Taoiseach, or other public representatives with a view to determining to what extent and in what manner further action may be required in each case. A panel consisting of two Senior and five Junior Counsel was established for the purpose, all selected on the basis of their experience of the criminal justice system.

The first batch of draft submissions and letters of notification of the outcome of the review have been submitted to me for consideration. I believe that it would be in the best interests of all concerned that an independent element should now be brought into this part of the process. I have decided to appoint a former judicial figure to oversee the preparation of these summaries. That person will be able to independently vouch for the fact that the summaries of conclusions and the reasoning behind them are a fair reflection of the advice which has been made available to the Department.

Retired High Court Judge Mr Justice Roderick Murphy has agreed to undertake this task. I believe that Mr Justice Murphy's involvement in the process will offer additional reassurance to those whose cases were considered by the Panel. I believe it is better to take that time now so as to provide complete reassurance on the probity and independence of this entire process, from start to finish.

Following the review of the complaint by counsel in this particular case a recommendation will be made to my Department and the outcome will be notified to the person concerned as soon as possible.

Court Accommodation Provision

135. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide a comprehensive update, including an estimated timeframe and cost, on plans for a new courthouse in County Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24002/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts, including the provision of accommodation for court sittings, is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions.

In order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that while they plan to develop a new courthouse in Galway city there is not sufficient space on the current site to allow for the extension of the building. The Courts Service is currently working with the Office of Public Works in searching for a suitable alternative site.

I am also informed the Courts Service purchased a site in Tuam, Co. Galway, a number of years ago for the construction of a new courthouse. I am informed that the plans for a new courthouse will be based on incorporating the existing building on site. The Courts Service cannot at present provide details of the time-frame or cost of the project, however I am assured that the matter will be kept under review, having regard to available resources.

Direct Provision System

136. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there will be an opportunity to make submissions to her on the recommendations put forward by the working group to report to Government on improvements to the protection process, including direct provision and supports to asylum seekers and the direct provision system, before the recommendations are considered by her and brought before the Cabinet; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24105/15]

137. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the report of the working group to report to the Government on improvements to the protection process, including direct provision and supports to asylum seekers, will be published before it is debated in Dáil Éireann; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24106/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 136 and 137 together.

I understand that the Report of the Independent Working Group on the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and supports to asylum seekers will be submitted to me shortly following which I will present it to Government for approval to be published. Should the Government approve the publication of the Report it will be open to any interested parties to comment on the Report and its recommendations.

Garda Recruitment

138. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will confirm, in respect of the panels that were established for the Garda Síochána recruitment campaigns, that all of the candidates in band 1 have now been called and that band 2 candidates will now be called in the next round of recruitment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24109/15]

146. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current position of bands 1, 2 and 3 that were formed in the Garda Síochána recruitment process; in view of the fact the candidates who have already been chosen for recruitment have come from band 1; when it is envisaged that the candidates in band 2 will be informed that they will progress to band 1; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24200/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 138 and 146 together.

The Public Appointments Service (PAS) is managing the recruitment process for the Garda Commissioner and I have no direct involvement in the matter. I understand however that PAS is continuing to progress Band 1 through the selection process and interviewing for that group will conclude in August. The names of candidates who qualify through these initial rounds will be forwarded to the Garda Commissioner for further consideration.

Depending on the Commissioner's recruitment requirements, PAS will revisit those in Band 2 and Band 3, if necessary.

Drugs Crime

139. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her assessment regarding the problem of drug taking in Dublin city centre (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24129/15]

140. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the powers that An Garda Síochána has when dealing with persons openly taking drugs on the streets of Dublin city centre; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24130/15]

141. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide an update regarding Operation Spire, its success in tackling drug taking on the streets of Dublin city centre; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24131/15]

142. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the measures she is considering to address the problem of drug taking on the streets of Dublin city centre; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24132/15]

143. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide details of the discussions she has held with other Departments regarding the need for a strategy to be developed to address the problem of drug taking and anti-social behaviour on Dublin city centre streets; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24133/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 139 to 143, inclusive, together.

I am of course aware of the issues raised in the media reports referred to by the Deputy and I am sure the Deputy would concur that the issues involved are not simply policing ones.

In relation to specific Garda responses I can assure the Deputy that I am in ongoing contact with the Garda Commissioner in relation to the measures which are being taken to deal with crime and public safety in the city centre area. I am advised that Gardaí make full use of the extensive range of legislation which is in place to address street crime and anti-social behaviour, including drug related crime.

The Garda response to the particular issues raised forms part of the 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. A range of measures are in place to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour in the city centre. 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. Garda strategy is also supported by other operations including Operation Pier which focuses on the Pearse Street District, as well as Operation Viking and Operation Clean Streets which further target the sale and supply of illicit drugs in the city centre.

I think it is generally accepted that the complex issues which contribute to drug addiction and related behaviours must be addressed in a coordinated and cross-cutting manner. In response to the particular issues arising in Dublin City Centre a 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.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Government's overall response to the problem of drug misuse generally, is set out in the National Drugs Strategy for the period 2009-2016. The Strategy

provides a coordinated and comprehensive response founded on a partnership approach.

The Strategy is being delivered under the stewardship of my colleague, Minister of State Ó Ríordáin at the Department of Health, in his capacity as Minister of State with responsibility for the National Drugs Strategy. The Strategy, the implementation of which is monitored by the Oversight Forum on Drugs Group chaired by Minister of State Ó Ríordáin, adopts a pillar based approach to the problem involving the implementation of a wide range of measures across the five pillars of drug supply reduction, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and research. The Group includes representatives from the key Departments and agencies involved in the implementation of the National Drugs Strategy.

My Department and its agencies continue to progress the actions assigned to the criminal justice sector under the National Strategy and to actively participate in all of the structures in place under the Strategy.

Garda Stations

144. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to reopen any of the Garda stations that closed under the current Government; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24134/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The formulation of proposals in relation to the opening and closing of Garda stations is a matter, in the first instance, for the Garda Commissioner in the context of annual policing plans, as provided for in section 22 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005.

An Garda Síochána completed a comprehensive review of its district and station network in 2012 and 2013. The objective was to identify opportunities to introduce strategic reforms to enhance service delivery, increase efficiency and streamline practices within the organisation. The review concluded that a revised district and station network commensurate with the organisation resource base would best meet public demand.

The Garda District and Station Rationalisation Programme provides for effectiveness and efficiencies through a programme of restructuring and reconfiguration of the service delivery methods, concomitant with changes to work practices within the new rostering arrangements already introduced. In addition, I am advised by the Garda authorities that the closure of these Garda Stations has resulted in an additional 61,000 patrolling hours being made available to the communities right across the country.

The deployment of resources is kept under review at all times by the Garda Commissioner to ensure that Garda resources continue to be used in the most efficient and appropriate way possible to target criminal activity at the local and national level.

Legislative Measures

145. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she has given consideration to repealing the current legislation dealing with blasphemy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24152/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will be aware that the Government agreed last September to hold a referendum on removing the offence of blasphemy from the Constitution, in response to the 6th Report of the Convention on

the Constitution.

The work necessary to prepare a Referendum Bill and a Bill to amend the current legislative provision for the offence of blasphemy is ongoing in my Department.

An appropriate date for the Referendum will be decided by Government when the legislation has been prepared. Earlier this year, the Taoiseach confirmed in the Dáil that the blasphemy referendum will not be held before March 2016.

In the meantime, my officials and I are working on preparing the necessary legislation, which is included in the current Government Legislative Programme.

Question No. 146 answered with Question No. 138.

Departmental Funding

147. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide details in tabular form of State funding to a charity (details supplied) for the past ten years including to date in 2015. [24028/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The information sought by the Deputy is being compiled and I will respond directly to the Deputy when the information is received.

Departmental Funding

148. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide details in tabular form of State funding to a refuge (details supplied) in Dublin 17 for the past ten years including 2015 to date. [24029/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The information sought by the Deputy is being compiled and I will respond directly to the Deputy when the information is received.

Child Protection

149. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the details of the concerns of the head of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, (details supplied) as expressed in The Irish Times on 8 June 2015 regarding Louth-Meath child protection services; the action that is necessary to ensure a rapid improvement in these services; the way this situation has arisen and the concerns he has. [24058/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has been implementing a national quality assurance strategy and the findings to date are that, generally, there are good systems in place for managing and monitoring cases. Improvements were needed in the refinement and consistent application of some processes and definitions, particularly with respect to the appropriate diversion of cases to a local area pathway or for a case to be formally closed.

Local area pathways involve working with parents to provide support focussed on protective factors for children, and family support to avail of universal services. I understand that the

findings from the ongoing quality assurance work will be used to inform future business planning with my Department. In the Louth/Meath administrative area, Tusla has indicated that key aspects of the service were not at an acceptable standard. Currently, intervention measures, led by the Chief Operations Officer, are being taken to address this. This involves a comprehensive action plan and the reinforcing of the management structures in line with the service delivery model.

I have been informed that an inspection by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) on services in the Louth/Meath administrative area has taken place. I understand that publication of this report, in line with HIQA's procedures, is expected in the near future. I will refrain from further comment until the report has been published, other than to say that I have been advised that the interventions needed to support and progress service improvements, referred to in the associated action plan, are well under way.

Surgical Symphysiotomy Payment Scheme

150. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update regarding the case of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23962/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Firstly, I want to extend my sympathies to the family of the individual concerned on the sad occasion of her death last August.

The Department of Health commissioned two research reports into the practice of symphysiotomy prior to the commencement of the Symphysiotomy Payment Scheme. From the information provided it was estimated in 2012 that around 1,500 women had undergone a symphysiotomy in Ireland between 1944 and 1984, but of that number only 350 were still alive. The Scheme commenced on 10 November, 2014 and 577 applications were made to the Assessor for the Scheme, former High Court Judge Maureen Harding Clark.

The Terms of the Scheme included at Section 38 that "the right to seek payment under the terms of the Scheme is personal to the Applicant and is therefore contingent on the Applicant being alive to accept the offer of any award. If therefore, an Applicant dies at any time after application and before she has accepted an award, the claim shall lapse and the Applicant's estate and her spouse and/or members of her family shall not be entitled to any award or payment under this Scheme."

Regrettably, as the woman concerned was deceased prior to the commencement of the Scheme in November, 2014, the Scheme is not applicable to her case.

Health Services

151. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health when an assessment of needs will be carried out in respect of a child (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23963/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the particular issue raised by the Deputy relates to an individual case, this is a service matter for the Health Service Executive. Accordingly, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Treatment Abroad Scheme

152. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health when a decision concerning a person (details supplied) in County Clare under the treatment abroad scheme will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23981/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Waiting Lists

153. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a hospital appointment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23982/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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 Appointments Status

154. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a hospital appointment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23985/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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.

Dental Services Provision

155. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a breakdown of the staff numbers employed in the public dental service, including their principal roles, for example dentist, administrator and so on, currently and in 2008. [23986/15]

156. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of employing an additional 50 dentists in the Health Service Executive. [23987/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 155 and 156 together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on these matters. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up these matters with them.

Departmental Staff Data

157. **Deputy Helen McEntee** asked the Minister for Health the number of employees under the age of 35 years of age currently working in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23990/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): There are currently 35 people under the age of 35 working in my Department.

Legislative Programme

158. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 121 of 10 June 2015, when the legislation to regulate surrogacy will be enacted; and if it will prevent persons who are unfit to have a child from doing so. [23992/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In February of this year I received Government approval to draft the General Scheme of a Bill for assisted human reproduction, which will include provisions relating to surrogacy and the assignment of parentage in such cases. Drafting is at an early stage and the General Scheme is not expected to be completed before the end of the year.

The General Scheme will provide for welfare of the child assessments which will afford a way of assessing whether intending parents are suitable for assisted human reproduction treatment (assessments will be conducted for all forms of treatment, including surrogacy).

It should be noted that under the proposed legislation commercial surrogacy will be prohibited, however, the reimbursement of reasonable expenses for surrogates will be permitted. There will also be a requirement for intending parents, and surrogates to have counselling and give their genuine and informed consent prior to the commencement of treatment.

It is my intention that the legislation will promote and ensure the health and safety of parents, others involved in the process (such as surrogate mothers) and, most importantly, the children who will be born as a result of assisted reproduction.

Psychological Services

159. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a list of all residential psychiatric units; the weekly cost of accommodating a person in these units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24012/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): A list of acute Psychiatric Units, both public and private, can be found on the Mental Health Commission Website under “Approved Centres” at mhcirl.ie. As the remainder of this question is an operational matter, I have referred it to the HSE for direct reply. If you have not received a reply within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Departmental Expenditure

160. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide figures for expenditure on the health service for the past ten years; if he will provide details on the amount spent on staffing during this period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24016/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the table below.

This information has been taken from Revised Estimates Volumes 2006-2015. The Net Current Health Service Expenditure represents the provisional outturn position for the Health Group of Votes for each year. From 2008 - 2010 the Health Group of Votes included the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

Year	Net Current Health Service Expenditure	Exchequer Pay/Pensions
	€'000	€'000
2005	9,155,350	6,279,589
2006	9,927,485	6,779,068
2007	11,339,729	7,264,422
2008	13,184,716	7,640,691
2009	12,244,320	7,521,943
2010	11,224,149	6,912,613
2011	12,399,545	6,530,351
2012	12,392,024	6,631,916
2013	12,436,213	6,504,067
2014	12,052,305	6,403,104

Health Services

161. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 667 of 26 May 2015, his views on the appropriateness of the reply of the Health Service Executive where it was questioned concerning its attitude in refusing a request from the family of a vulnerable adult for a cognitive assessment to be carried out independently, at the expense of the family, and shared fully with the executive, in order to ascertain the competency of the person to instruct a solicitor, were passed on to that solicitor and a response was subsequently received to the question that this solicitor had persuaded other public representatives to withdraw their representations and that they trusted that this dealt with the issue. [24032/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, she can contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with the HSE.

Hospital Appointments Status

162. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the case of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; in view of the urgency of the person's situation; when this person will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24049/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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.

Hospital Services

163. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Health when a full-time asthma nurse will be appointed for Wexford General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24052/15]

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

164. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health the reason funding has not been made available in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow, who suffers from Prader-Willi syndrome, to enter residential care; if he will provide the necessary funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24065/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service issues, they have been referred to the HSE for direct reply. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, he can contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with the HSE.

Cancer Services Funding

165. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the reason the combined therapy cancer treatment, that has been recommended in respect of a person (details supplied) at Tal-laght Hospital, Dublin 24, is only available on a private basis, at a cost of €70,000 to the person; if it will be made available through the public system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24066/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Deputy's questions relate to service delivery matters and accordingly I have asked the HSE to respond directly to him.

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

Mental Health Services Funding

166. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide figures for expenditure on mental health services in County Kerry for each year of the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24077/15]

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

Disability Services Funding

167. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide figures for expenditure on disability services in County Kerry for each of the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24078/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service issues, they have been referred to the HSE for direct reply. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, he can contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with the HSE.

Rare Diseases

168. **Deputy Derek Keating** asked the Minister for Health in view of the fact that the Health Service Executive has now opened the National Rare Disease Office, the scope of the conditions that will be dealt with there; if a person (details supplied) in County Dublin who has the condition Alkaptonuria, which is extremely rare and of which this person is one of only two sufferers here, will have her condition managed here rather than having to travel to Liverpool in England for treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24087/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Health Services

169. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 506 of 31 March 2015, if he will direct the Health Service Executive to answer the question posed, which was to explain the reason the executive took speedy action against a person (details supplied) in relation to a complaint, where no mother and baby suffered harm, but delayed in dealing with complaints where babies died. [24088/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): With regard to the issue raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply. I have noted the point raised in the question relating to the correspondence previously received by the Deputy, and have asked the HSE to clarify this matter in its further response. If you have not received a reply within 15 working days, please contact my private office and they will follow up the matter.

General Medical Services Scheme Data

170. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide the details of the general medical services scheme, covering medications prescribed that are only supplied in 28-pill packages; if patients are to be out-of-pocket for the additional month at the end of the year; if he will consider ensuring that all patients have access to their medications throughout the year, and are not asked to contribute to an extra month; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24091/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): There is no legislation or agreement that deals with the quantity of prescription tablets to be included in a monthly pack. This is at the discretion of the marketing authorisation holders. The standard industry practice across Europe is for prescription tablets to be packaged in sizes of 28, as this number has been found to be convenient for patients.

Where the quantity of a preparation prescribed does not correspond with an original pack size and it is not feasible to supply the exact amount prescribed, the pharmacist may, in the exercise of his or her professional judgement and bearing in mind the nature of the product and his or her statutory obligations, supply the nearest pack size to the quantity prescribed.

Drug Treatment Programmes

171. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health his views that a medically-supervised injection centre should be opened in Dublin in a bid to address the problem of persons taking drugs on the streets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24136/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin): There is a problem with street injecting in Dublin and elsewhere. This creates a public nuisance, and is unhygienic and unsafe for drug users. Supervised Injecting facilities exist in a number of other countries and it is a policy I am very interested in. I recently received a draft legislative proposal from Ana Liffey and the Bar Council's Voluntary Assistance Scheme which would allow for the provision of such services. I welcome this initiative and I have asked my officials to examine the practical and legal issues surrounding this proposal.

Misuse of Drugs

172. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health to outline his assessment

regarding the success of the assertive case management team in addressing the problem of persons taking drugs on Dublin city centre streets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24137/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin): In September 2014, the HSE, in partnership with a local voluntary service provider, the Housing First service and An Garda Síochána set up an assertive case management programme to engage with a high-risk cohort who are involved in anti-social behaviour and/or public drug use. The pilot programme aims to provide shared care planning for these individuals, who have complex needs, and address their issues of homelessness and addiction using shared resources.

44 individuals have signed up to case management with the assertive case management team since the programme began. 42 service users who had previously not been engaging with services are continuing to access the services. The team has also engaged with local businesses and initiatives to provide a direct referral route for individuals who may be negatively impacting on business. It also takes on a role in disposing of drug paraphernalia and liaises with Dublin City Council where large quantities need to be disposed of. The next step is to evaluate the programme, and review its effectiveness in light of the overall outcomes of the service for the individuals involved.

National Children's Hospital Status

173. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update regarding the construction of the national children's hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24138/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board is the statutory body responsible for planning, designing, building and equipping the new children's hospital. The new hospital will be co-located with St. James's Hospital, and ultimately tri-located with a maternity hospital to be developed on campus. In addition to the main hospital, the project includes two satellite centres at the campuses of Tallaght and Connolly Hospitals. Design development is ongoing and a planning submission is to be made in the coming weeks. Subject to planning, work is scheduled to commence at the main site at St. James's, and at satellite centre sites at Connolly and Tallaght, in early 2016.

I hope that this update is sufficient for the Deputy.

Hospital Staff

174. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health to explain the reason a specialist is not available at a hospital (details supplied) in Dublin 9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24139/15]

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.

Epilepsy Incidence

175. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health to outline his plans for im-

plementing the recommendations of the World Health Organization's resolution (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24140/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The resolution concerned of the World Health Organisation is largely encompassed in the aims and work of the HSE's National Clinical Programme for Epilepsy (NCPE). This has been in operation since 2010. Its main objective is to provide the best value, safe care for all people with epilepsy in the right place, at the right time by sharing the best available information.

Under the first recommendation of the resolution, the NCPE has a specific remit to describe models of care and formulate guidelines, where necessary, which aim to improve quality, access and value of clinical care. An advisory group of medical, nursing, technical and patient experts was convened with a remit to define a Model of Care for epilepsy. Consensus was rapidly agreed based on best international practice on the need to define centres of expertise nationally, to invest in nurse specialists and electronic communication, and to standardise procedures in epilepsy care. The NCPE has supported the implementation of this policy position with over 30 new Whole Time Equivalents (WTEs) in 6 defined national centres. The Model of Care has been signed off by the National Clinical Lead and Clinical Advisory Group and is being prepared for submission to the HSE Office of the National Director for Clinical Strategy and Programmes.

The NCPE has also developed and supported the implementation of an Electronic Patient Record; this promotes patient safety by supporting the availability of current, accurate patient information to clinicians involved in patient care. In addition, a suite of over 40 guidance documents (SOPs) have been developed by the NCPE. These look at the management of persons with Epilepsy across the care continuum from initial presentation, specialised treatment (including surgery) and to long-term management in primary care.

A detailed SOP has also been developed for the management of women with epilepsy, which includes family planning, pregnancy, delivery right through to menopause. This was completed in conjunction with the National Clinical Programme for Obstetrics and Gynaecology. Three Primary Care SOPs have also been developed in conjunction with the National Clinical Programme for Primary Care to cover the critical areas of managing seizures in the community, the process of referral to specialised services and the intelligent support process for managing Epilepsy in primary care. The NCPE also contributes to the National Medicines Liaison Centre collaborative and GP bulletins with information relating to the management of Epilepsy in the Community.

Under the second recommendation of the WHO resolution, the NCPE's Model of Care for Epilepsy advocates self management. Epilepsy specific self-management programmes, such as Epilepsy Ireland's STEPS programme (Support & Training in Epilepsy Self-management) and the 'Training for Success' initiative run at the Sligo Institute of Technology, address more condition-specific issues such as living with Epilepsy; managing seizure triggers; lifestyle and safety; and understanding the impact of diet, exercise and sleep. The NCPE also supports the development of transitional programmes that support adolescents with epilepsy transition from paediatric services to adult services. Included in successful transition is the development of self-management and self-awareness skills to enable the young adult to take more responsibility for the management of their condition.

For the third recommendation of the WHO resolution, the NCPE has a close working relationship with Epilepsy Ireland. The programme regularly contributes to the Epilepsy Ireland newsletter and various national and regional conferences with updated information on developments within the programme.

Finally, on the question of research as per the fourth recommendation of the resolution, long-standing links with the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland Genetics group has resulted in senior participation in the International League Against Epilepsy (ILAE) genetics consortium; this has been making important discoveries that will impact on diagnosis and treatment of epilepsy in the future. In this regard, significant advances on epilepsy research capacity have been made in Ireland. Furthermore, clinicians and researchers associated with the NCPE have been regular recipients of Health Research Board sponsored research grants. Other examples of research projects underway in Ireland include:

- Improving our understanding of the gene-based regulation of neuronal cell death and hippocampal remodelling in epilepsy
- European collaborative project called EpimiRNA which aims to understand molecular mechanisms, diagnostics and develop novel therapeutics for epilepsy
- Research group focused on identifying genetic predictors of the development and treatment of epilepsy
- A study on children with undiagnosed early onset epileptic encephalopathy.

Nursing Staff Recruitment

176. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health whether he is aware of the significant potential loss of nurses in our nursing homes and senior citizens services; the action he will take on this urgent matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24153/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I wish to thank the Deputy for raising this issue. The nursing home public and private sectors are collaborating with the Department of Health and the HSE in sourcing several solutions to meeting the issues arising in relation to nurse recruitment and retention.

Currently, there are two areas under active review in relation to these recruitment and retention issues. Firstly, there is the issue of recruitment of nurses educated and trained in Ireland. The HSE Office of the Nursing and Midwifery Services Director has been supportive in allowing the nursing home sector meet with graduate students in the universities, to discuss employment opportunities. In addition, the Chief Nursing Office in the Department has been engaged with, the public and private nursing home sector in promoting nursing in the older adult as a career choice. The Office has facilitated ongoing discussions, spoken at conferences and engaged with 3rd level universities on seeking solutions to the recruitment and retention issue. These discussions have involved exploring and reviewing career pathways within older people services to encourage more staff into this area of nursing practice.

The second area under review relates to the undertaking of initiatives for the recruitment of global nurses. The background to this issue is that nurses who trained in a country outside of Ireland and wish to work in Ireland are required to apply to register as a nurse with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland. The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland, following assessment of qualifications by an applicant, may require an applicant to undertake a six to twelve week period of adaptation and assessment. A period of adaptation is designed to make up for differences in education and ensure competence for working in the Irish health service. If this adaptation is required it must be successfully completed as a pre-requisite to registration.

A collaborative group including Department of Health, HSE and Nursing Homes Ireland (NHI) representatives continue to explore options to facilitate adaptation. In this regard some

hospitals will respond to local need from local nursing homes, and this has been encouraged within the hospital group structures; some hospitals will continue to support placements pending funding from NHI though not at peak undergraduate student times; and, some are withdrawing from the provision of clinical placements to facilitate their own internal international recruitment initiatives.

In addition, options are being explored with an Irish university to offer a one-day programme of assessment through an examination format. It is hoped that the pilot of this programme will be complete and results available in the last quarter of 2015.

Community Care Provision

177. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will support a matter (details supplied) regarding the Donnycarney centre for senior citizens in Dublin 5; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24154/15]

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

Health Services Provision

178. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide support in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5 in view of the circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24155/15]

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

Health Services Provision

179. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide support in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5 who requires taxis to get to hospital appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24156/15]

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.

Cross-Border Health Initiatives

180. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health to outline his plans to inform citizens of their right to receive treatment abroad under the cross-border Directive 2011/24/EU with only the requirement of a general practitioner referral letter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24189/15]

181. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health to outline his plans to inform persons on waiting lists of their rights to obtain care outside Ireland and to be reimbursed, fully or partially, in case of non-medical card holders for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24190/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 180 and 181 together.

The EU Directive on the application of patient's rights in cross-border healthcare seeks to ensure a clear and transparent framework for the provision of cross-border healthcare within the EU and is designed to clarify patients' rights to access safe and good quality treatment across EU/EEA Member States.

The Health Service Executive operates the EU Directive on Patients' Rights in Cross Border Healthcare in Ireland. In line with practice in other EU Member States, the HSE, through the National Contact Point (NCP) office, provides information for patients on the Cross-Border Directive on its website - <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/schemes/cbd/> - and also by phone. The principal function of the NCP (which is the mechanism specified under the Directive for the dissemination of information on the Directive by Member States) is to facilitate exchange of information for patients concerning their rights and entitlements relating to receiving healthcare in another Member State, in particular the terms and conditions for reimbursement of cost and the procedures for accessing and determining those entitlements. The NCP also has a responsibility to ensure that all enquirers are informed of the right to healthcare, if any, that they may have through the European legislation on the coordination of social security schemes (EU Regulation 883/04) and which may be more beneficial to them. The NCP is able to inform patients what the cost of their treatments would be in Ireland to allow them make a comparison with the costs they are being quoted for comparable treatment in another Member State.

The healthcare being sought under the CBD can only be healthcare that a person would be entitled to within the public health system in Ireland, which is not contrary to Irish legislation. Referral for care under the CBD can be made by a GP, a hospital consultant and certain other HSE clinicians. It will be a matter for the patient and his/her referring doctor to identify the clinician abroad and satisfy him/herself in relation to the qualifications, quality and safety of the services being availed of in the other jurisdiction.

Prior authorisation may be required from the HSE for certain healthcare. This requires completion of an application process; consequently patients intending to access care under the CBD should check with the HSE in advance of travelling. The costs must be borne by the individual and he/she then will seek reimbursement for the cost of the healthcare upon return to Ireland. The HSE will reimburse the patient for care which meets the terms of the CBD in line with the Directive. Costs will only be reimbursed up to the level that would have been arisen if the healthcare had been provided in Ireland or the actual cost of the healthcare in the other member state, whichever is the lesser. All other costs associated with accessing care abroad under the CBD are a matter for the patient and will not be reimbursable by the HSE.

Nursing Home Accommodation Provision

182. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the further funding resources he will make available at the 26 Health Service Executive nursing homes identified by the Health Information and Quality Authority as requiring accommodation upgrades; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24191/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) has indicated that a number of public units do not fully meet the standards one would expect to find in a modern nursing home. This is not surprising given the age and structure of many of our public nursing homes. Compliance issues are in the main related to physical infrastructure and to issues such as personal space and privacy and access to toilet facilities. It is important to stress that the care provided to residents of these facilities is of a generally high standard.

Discussions are ongoing between the Health Service Executive (HSE) and HIQA in this context. Addressing these issues will require prioritisation across facilities within the overall resources that can be made available.

Mental Health Services

183. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the location of each of the four mental health high observation units; the number of staff allocated to each unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24192/15]

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

Accident and Emergency Departments

184. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to submit funding proposals to provide for additional capacity at the accident and emergency department of Beaumont Hospital in Dublin 9 for 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24193/15]

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.

Home Help Service Provision

185. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide, in tabular form, the number of home help hours that have been allocated but are currently unfilled due to financial constraints, by Health Service Executive local area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24215/15]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

186. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (de-

tails supplied) regarding the bed crisis in Kerry General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24220/15]

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.

Citizenship Applications

187. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress to date in determining an application for citizenship in the case of a person (details supplied) who made an application on behalf of her son, through the Ottawa Embassy in Canada; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23964/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): An application for citizenship through Foreign Birth Registration on behalf of the person (details supplied) was received by the Embassy of Ireland in Ottawa on 23 April 2015. The Embassy is currently processing applications received in January. The application has been examined and certain required documentation has not been submitted. The Embassy will advise the applicant regarding the missing documentation and once the application is complete it will be processed in due course.

Foreign Conflicts

188. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he is aware of the serious claims and mounting evidence that the Sri Lankan military committed war crimes and gross human rights violations in 2009, in the final months of that country's civil war; his views that there should be an independent and international legal inquiry into these claims; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24062/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am aware of allegations of human rights violations in Sri Lanka in 2009. At the UN Human Rights Council session in March 2014 Ireland voted in favour of a resolution promoting reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka. One aspect of that resolution was a request for an investigation by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights into alleged serious violations and abuses of human rights and related crimes by both parties in Sri Lanka. A report of that investigation is due to be presented at the UN Human Rights Council in September 2015.

There has been a change in Government in Sri Lanka following the presidential election in January 2015, and I welcome the stated commitments by the new President, Maithripala, to re-establish democracy, freedom, good governance and respect for human rights.

Our Ambassador to Sri Lanka (who is based in New Delhi) maintains regular contact with the Sri Lankan authorities and regularly visits Sri Lanka for discussions there. Our Embassy in New Delhi monitors developments in Sri Lanka on an ongoing basis. Through the Embassy, we are in regular contact with the EU Delegation in Colombo which reports that the new Government have already taken some positive steps to deal with resettlement issues, including returning some military land (used for commercial purposes), nomination of a civilian governor in the Northern Province, cancelling the foreign travel restrictions in the North and welcoming Tamil refugees from India.

At the meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council of the European Union in Brussels on 9 February 2015, which I attended, the Council agreed a number of conclusions on EU priorities at UN Human Rights Fora in 2015. With regard to Sri Lanka, the Council welcomed the commitments by the new Sri Lankan Government on rule of law and reconciliation, while encouraging the new Government to work with the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights and the UN Human Rights Council to address ongoing human rights concerns and make credible domestic progress on reconciliation.

A meeting of the EU-Sri Lanka Joint Commission took place in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 2 April 2015. The Joint Commission, which oversees the EU-Sri Lanka Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development (in place for 20 years) deals with a broad range of bilateral and multilateral issues of mutual interest. At this meeting, it was agreed in principle to establish a new Working Group on Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights, to allow for a dialogue on these issues.

Middle East Peace Process

189. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if there is any indication that the European Union will move to recognise the Palestinian state; if such a move, either by Ireland or the European Union, would be helpful in achieving peace; if any consensus is emerging at European Union level as to the way the peace talks could be restarted; the way the Palestinian question could be moved up the international agenda; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24146/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Recognition of states is a matter for the national governments of the Member States.

Debate continues in the EU, the UN and elsewhere of how best to try to restart and advance the political process to achieve a two state solution, but both the international situation and the domestic position of the parties make this very difficult at present. Since my appointment as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, I have strongly advocated for a stronger EU involvement in the Peace Process. I visited the region myself and urged HRVP Mogherini to do so upon her appointment. She has visited the region on a number of occasions, most recently with the newly appointed EU Special Representative, Fernando Gentilini.

There was some discussion of the Middle East Peace Process at the last Foreign Affairs Council and I expect HRVP Mogherini to brief Ministers on her recent visit with SR Gentilini at this month's FAC.

I endeavour to use all appropriate opportunities in my international engagements as Minister to press for progress in restarting peace talks in the region. Most recently I have had useful discussions with the Swiss Foreign Minister, Didier Burkhalter, and with UN SG Ban Ki-moon during his visit to Ireland.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

190. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the average primary school class size for the 2014-15 school year. [23966/15]

191. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the current pupil teacher ratio; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23967/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 190 and 191 together.

Information on average primary school class size and pupil teacher ratio is currently being finalised and will be published as part of my Department’s Key Statistics Report 2014/2015. This report will be available on my Department’s website at the following link at the end of June: <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Key-Statistics>.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

192. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary school children who were in classes of 30 or more during the 2014-15 school year, by county. [23968/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Provisional data on the number of pupils in classes of 30 or more for the 2014/2015 school year is available by individual primary school on my Department’s website at the following link - <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Data-on-Individual-Schools/>. This list includes the county council of the school. Final data in relation to the 2014/15 school year will be published later in the current school year.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

193. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding home tuition in respect of a child (details supplied) in County Kerry who was referred to a unit that has not been built yet; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23978/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The purpose of the Home Tuition Scheme is to provide compensatory educational service for children who, for a number of reasons such as chronic illness, are unable to attend school. The scheme also provides a compensatory educational service for children with special educational needs seeking an educational placement and provision is made for early educational intervention for children with autism. Eligibility for children seeking an educational placement is determined in consultation with the local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO).

In the case referred to by the Deputy, the SENO has confirmed that there are places available in a local autism class for the 2014/2015 school year and therefore an application for home tuition was refused. The child’s parents were advised accordingly last month.

In relation to the Deputy’s reference to a new class being established the SENO has confirmed that a separate autism class has been established in another school which will be operational from September 2015.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

194. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the timeframe it would take and cost to reduce pupil-teacher ratios to 20:1, at the rate of reducing class sizes by one pupil per year, taking into account growing number of students in the next few years. [23983/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Teacher allocations to all schools are approved annually by my Department in accordance with established rules based on recognised pupil enrolment. The staffing schedule at primary level operates on the basis of 1 classroom teacher for an average of every 28 pupils, with lower thresholds for DEIS Band 1 schools.

Each one point adjustment to the current 28:1 schedule at primary level is estimated to cost of the order of 250 posts (€15m).

My focus in Budget 2015 was on obtaining the additional funding that was necessary to provide for demographic growth. The last Budget included an increase in spending on education for the first time in recent years, amounting to additional funding of €60m during 2015. This funding will be used to provide 1,700 additional teachers and SNAs for our schools, as well as to fund prioritised reforms, such as implementation of the literacy and numeracy strategy, reform of junior cycle, and the introduction of education focussed pre-school inspections. The improvements in the Primary Staffing Schedule for small schools which I announced in February last are the only changes that I will be making to the staffing arrangements for schools for the 2015/16 school year.

The Government’s approach to restoring the economy has helped Ireland to return to a position where we are seeing economic growth. It is a continuing improvement in our economic growth over a sustained period that will enable us to move to a point where we can look again at providing for additional teacher resources in schools which could bring about an improvement in PTR, class size and support for classroom teachers.

Departmental Correspondence

195. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a reply will issue to an interim reply (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24020/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise that my Department has recently contacted the school referred to by the Deputy to seek clarification in respect of the issues arising. On receipt of this clarification, the matter will be considered further.

I will issue a separate final response to the Deputy reflecting the above position in the coming days.

Schools Building Projects Status

196. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when she received additional plans from a school (details supplied) in County Donegal; when a reply will issue from her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24022/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Major Building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is at an early stage of Architectural Planning - Stage 1 - Preliminary Design which involves the initial sketch scheme for the project.

A Pre Stage 1 Stakeholder Meeting was held in December 2014. Based on the information presented at the meeting, the Department and School Authority were of the view that there were a number of issues which needed resolution before the Design Team developed the initial sketch proposals to completion of Stage 1. Following resolution of these issues the Board of

Management and their Design Team prepared the Stage 1 submission which was received by my Department earlier this month for review.

On completion of the review, and subject to no issues arising, the Board of Management and its Design Team will be authorised to progress to Stage 2a, Developed Design Stage.

This project is included in my Department's five year construction programme announced in 2012.

Physical Education Facilities

197. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she is aware that a school (details supplied) in County Galway has done significant fundraising for a new sports hall on its campus; if she will consider part-funding sports halls for schools considering the increased focus on, and importance of, physical education for children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24024/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): As the Deputy is aware, my Department devolved very significant funding to the school in question in 2010 and 2011 to provide additional general classrooms, specialist rooms and ancillary accommodation to meet the school's accommodation needs.

I wish to assure the Deputy that my Department fully recognises the key role of physical exercise within the school environment and continues to respond to the need to improve Physical Education facilities for all pupils attending schools within the constraints of the available funding.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that the Physical Education curriculum has been designed on the basis that facilities in schools may vary. Practically all schools have outdoor play areas which are used for teaching different aspects of the P.E. programme. In addition, many schools, including the school in question use local facilities, which can include public parks, playing fields and swimming pools.

As the Deputy is also aware, due to the competing demands on my Department's capital budget imposed by the need to prioritise available funding for the provision of essential school classroom accommodation, it is not possible at this point to provide an indicative timeframe for the provision of funding towards a multi-purpose/PE hall for the school concerned.

However, if the school has a co-funding proposal that it wishes to submit to my Department, it is open to the school to submit that proposal for consideration.

School Transport Provision

198. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the distance in kilometres, as determined by Bus Éireann, from Urris to Carndonagh Community School in County Donegal, and the distance in kilometres, as determined by Bus Éireann, from Urris to either Crana College or Scoil Mhuire in Buncrana in County Donegal, using the main routes, and not the road through Mamore Gap; if she is aware that Bus Éireann has confirmed to families that it will not be using Mamore Gap when transporting students from Urris to their nearest secondary school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24067/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English): Bus Éireann, which operates the school transport scheme on behalf of my Department, has confirmed that Buncrana post primary education centre is the nearest education centre to families residing in the Urris area.

Distance eligibility for school transport is determined by measuring the shortest traversable route from a child's home to the nearest education centre.

The Deputy will be aware that the shortest traversable route between a child's home and the nearest education centre may be either a pedestrian or vehicular route, and it is not necessarily the route that the school bus takes.

The terms of the school transport scheme are applied equitably on national basis.

Schools Refurbishment

199. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a final reply will issue further to her interim reply (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24068/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): As the Deputy will be aware, this school made an application to my Department for funding for a GP room. The current status of all projects on the school building programme may be viewed on my Department's website at www.education.ie and this is updated regularly throughout the year.

Due to competing demands on my Department's capital budget, imposed by the need to prioritise funding available for the provision of essential additional classroom accommodation, my Department is not in a position to indicate at this point when a GP room for the school in question will be progressed.

I will issue a separate final response to the Deputy reflecting the above position in the coming days.

School Management

200. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her Department provides specific guidelines to primary schools on the times they should start school every morning and when premises should be open and available for children to be dropped off; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24075/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Rules for National Schools require that a school must be open to receive pupils not later than 9.30 a.m. Subject to this requirement, the decision with regard to the actual opening time of a primary school is a matter for the Board of Management of the school concerned.

My Department has not issued any guidelines to school in relation to when the school premises should be open for children to arrive in advance of the official opening time. This is a matter for each individual school having regard to its own specific circumstances.

School Staff

201. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if Garda Síochána clearance is required for all persons teaching and working in schools; if this procedure applies to members of the boards of management of schools and to bodies that oversee the provision of schools, such as Educate Together, Gaelscoileanna and other national organisations; if Garda Síochána vetting is required for board members in these situations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24079/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The current arrangements for Garda vetting of teaching and non-teaching school staff were introduced in September 2006. In late 2010, my Department issued Circular 0063/2010 which updated and clarified the requirements for Garda vetting as part of recruitment procedures for all teaching and non-teaching positions. This circular also set out the vetting requirements of non-employees such as volunteers, sports coaches etc. In relation to non-employees, the key criterion in determining whether a vetting requirement arises is whether the person will have or may have unsupervised access to children in the school. This would not normally be the case in the case of board of management members or persons employed by the bodies referred to by the Deputy.

The existing Garda vetting arrangements for the recognised schools sector operate on a non-statutory basis. However, the Deputy will be aware that the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012, will, when commenced, put in place statutory requirements for vetting of persons involved in working with children and vulnerable adults, including those working in schools.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

202. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if persons may include mortgage payments and household outgoings in their assessment under the Student Universal Support Ireland scheme; if there is any way in which these can be included; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24084/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Student grant applications are means tested on gross income from all sources earned inside and outside the State within a specified reference period.

The means test arrangements of the Student Grant Scheme are applied nationally on the same basis to both employed and self-employed applicants. Gross income before the deduction of income tax or universal social charge, is assessed with certain specified social welfare and health service executive payments excluded.

Therefore, the assessment of income from the same starting point is deemed to be fair and reasonable because this approach eliminates any distortion which might arise from different spending decisions in different households. No allowances can be made for outgoings i.e. mortgage repayments, utilities, travel, medical expenses etc.

In the interest of equity, I have no plans to change the current arrangement.

English Language Training Organisations

203. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 18 of 10 June 2015 and her stated priorities to introduce reforms in international education to protect the students who come to study here and to protect

our national reputation for offering high-quality education, the measures her Department has taken, including those in conjunction with other Departments, to protect the 600 students of the recently closed Medgar Evers College, including those who have paid for courses and are still in Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela, those who have arrived here to find a closed school and no support, and those who are here having just paid for new courses in a school now closed and who do not have the relevant documents to renew their visas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24090/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Deputy will be aware that MEC (Modern Educational Centre) ceased trading with effect from 1st May 2015. A number of measures have been implemented to assist genuine students affected by the closure. The Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of the Department of Justice and Equality acted swiftly to assure the immigration status of affected students. All current immigration permissions are being fully honoured by the immigration service.

In addition, any student who arrives at a port of entry with a valid visa or letter of enrolment for MEC issued prior to 1st May 2015 is being permitted to land. This is to allow students to pursue the college for any refund owing to them and to allow them to make alternative arrangements to continue their studies as soon as they can. For students who have not yet registered with the Garda National Immigration Bureau, INIS is allowing those students up to the end of June 2015 to make alternative arrangements for study.

While I have every sympathy for the genuine affected students who have lost money when this college closed, the relationship between students and private colleges is based on a private contract between the student and the provider. However, it should be noted that the Task Force which I established jointly with the Minister for Justice and Equality to assist affected students has worked closely with the representative bodies of the high-quality private sector providers to develop solutions that could provide alternative courses at a significantly discounted rate for students impacted by the private college closures, including MEC, who were not covered by learner protection arrangements. Other individual colleges and representative groups, such as the recently-formed Private College Network, have also made offers to accommodate impacted students.

The new package of reforms to the student immigration system for international education being introduced by my Department and the Department of Justice and Equality includes a number of specific measures to protect international students including compulsory learner protection arrangements and a separate account facility to safeguard student advance payments.

Education and Training Provision

204. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 11 of 10 June 2015, if she will provide information on the two Skillnets networks which provide subsidised training in responsible welding co-ordinator training; the amount these courses will cost those in employment; the subsidies available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24093/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The name of the Skillnets networks are the TechNorthWest Skillnet and the IIE Manufacturing Skillnet. I have attached a spreadsheet of training that has been delivered earlier in the year with costs, trainee numbers and company details. At present, I understand that neither network plan to run the programmes again in 2015, but could do so if there was a demand and interested parties should make contact with the networks directly.

Welding Programmes Information - 10-4-15

TechNorth West - Responsible Welding Coordinator

-	Location
Multispan Steel	Donegal
Inishowen Engineering	Donegal
Mulhall Contracts	Donegal
Welditz	Donegal
Crana Engineering Ltd.	Donegal
PJ Designs Metal Craft Ltd	Donegal
K.P. Engineering	Donegal
Long Roulston Tld. T/A WDL	Donegal

IIE Manufacturing and Engineering Skillnet

-	Location
CDS Architectural Metalwork	Kilkenny
MF Hopkins Engineering	Mayo
MF Hopkins Engineering	Mayo
McKeon Engineering / Agri Supplies Ltd	Longford
John Keville Engineering	Roscommon
Killian Engineering	Longford
Hickey Engineering	Offaly
Tipperary Fabrication Ltd.	Tipperary
Jamestown Profiling	Kildare
Kenneally Steel Fabrication Ltd.	Waterford
3 Eng Ltd.	Waterford
Delmec Engineering Ltd.	Carlow
Coughlan Engineering (Tullamore) Ltd	Offaly

Programme Information

One programme - Responsible Welding Coordinator run for 8 people
Programme cost € 13,600
Participant fee € 1,190
No additional programmes planned in 2015 at this point
Programme run in Letterkenny over 3 days
Certified by International Institute of Welding
1 Programmes of Responsible Welding Coordinator and Visual Inspection 3 days
1 Programme of Responsible Welding Coordinator 2 days
Total of 26 people from 13 member firms - spend of €44,200
Programme cost of € 1,700 per person
Participant fee of € 1,360 per person
1 additional Programmes of Responsible Welding Coordinator and Visual Inspection planned for 17-18 April 2015
Programmes normally run in Athlone
Certified by International Institute of Welding

Teaching Council of Ireland

205. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a final reply will issue further to her interim reply (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24113/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Deputy is aware that the Teaching Council has been asked to examine and advise on entry requirements to courses of initial teacher education including the Gaeltacht entry scheme to the Bachelor of Education. As you know, it is proposed in the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language that up to 20% of places in Colleges of Education will be retained for students educated through Irish in Gaeltacht schools and gaelscoileanna, with students in English medium schools also being eligible, subject to a high performance threshold in Irish in the Leaving Certificate.

I understand that the Teaching Council’s research report in relation to entry requirements is currently being finalised and it is due to be considered by Council in the autumn, prior to submitting advice to me. As the research relates to a broad spectrum of entry requirements, and it may take some time for the Council to deliberate on same, I have asked the Council to prioritise the area of entry requirements for Gaeltacht applicants, and I understand that it intends to submit its advice separately on that matter. I expect to receive it in the coming months and following its consideration, I will then take a decision on the matter.

Departmental Correspondence

206. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a final reply will issue further to her interim reply (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24116/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to inform the Deputy that a final reply to the correspondence in question has now been issued by my Department.

Legal Costs

207. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she or her Department have any further update on the settlement from the State to a victim (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24211/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The European Court of Human Rights awarded the applicant €30,000 in respect of pecuniary and non-pecuniary damage and €85,000 in costs and expenses, plus any tax chargeable. A total amount of €134,550 in respect of these amounts together with Valued Added Tax of €19,550, was paid to the applicant’s solicitor in February 2014.

Child Abuse

208. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she or her Department officials have received files from the State Claims Agency which were received from those victims who were sexually abused in State schools but who have decided to drop their cases; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24212/15]

209. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she has a further update on the outstanding claims made for compensation by those who were sexually abused in State schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24213/15]

210. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the actions she and her Department have taken since she met in December 2014 the victims of sexual abuse in State schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24214/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 208 to 210, inclusive, together.

The Government agreed that out of court settlements be offered in those cases of school child sexual abuse being brought against the State where the cases come within the terms of the ECHR judgment and satisfy the Statute of Limitations. The State Claims Agency is engaging with plaintiffs’ solicitors to clarify the position in cases and to make settlement offers where appropriate. In pursuing settlements, the State Claims Agency will be considering cases of school child sexual abuse where there was a prior complaint about the relevant teacher’s sexual abuse to school authorities. The rationale for this approach is that these were the circumstances on which the European Court of Human Rights judgment was based.

The position in relation to those cases that were not progressed for a number of reasons, including those which might have been discontinued after receiving letters from the State Claims Agency is that I asked the Agency to undertake a review to clarify the exact position as to whether the cases had been formally discontinued or not. The Agency has completed its review and my Department sought some clarification from the Agency. I expect to be in a position to report to Government on this matter shortly at which time the Government will consider whether any measures will be taken in relation to these cases.

There are a significant number of additional cases in which the State has either been joined as a party or notified of the intention to seek to join the State. The State Claims Agency will be engaging with the Plaintiffs’ solicitors involved in each of these cases having regard to the facts in each individual case.

As the Deputy may be aware, the Government initiated a review of current and planned child protection mechanisms in the school system to assess the extent to which issues identified in the ECHR Judgment have been addressed in the period since 1973. This review is being undertaken by a specially tasked Sub-Committee within the Children First Inter-Departmental Implementation Group which is considering current and planned legislative and administrative child protection measures in the education sector. It is expected that its report will be submitted to Government in the near future.

Haulage Industry Regulation

211. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the Irish haulage sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24033/15]

212. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding costs for local hauliers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24034/15]

213. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding hauliers’ road tax; and if

he will make a statement on the matter. [24055/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 211 to 213, inclusive, together.

My colleague, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, has established an Inter-Departmental Working Group to consider issues relating to the Irish haulage industry, which includes representation from my Department. The haulage industry is seeking a reduction in motor tax for the sector, a change in the basis of taxation from unladen to gross design vehicle weight and the introduction of road user charging. In relation to the latter two proposals, these are currently being considered and implementation, if recommended, would be for the medium to long-term. In relation to the first proposal, any changes to rates of motor tax are for consideration in the context of the budget.

Housing Assistance Payments Administration

214. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views that the rent ceilings being imposed on persons in Waterford City and County are too low, and do not reflect the real cost of rent being paid by tenants (details supplied); if he will consider abolishing the rent ceilings, and introducing an incentive to landlords, in order to encourage them to take on tenants who wish to take part in the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme; and if he will increase payments under the Scheme to reflect the enormous cost of rent in Waterford City and County. [23974/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The implementation of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a key Government priority and a major pillar of the Social Housing Strategy 2020. The HAP scheme will bring all social housing supports provided by the State under the aegis of local authorities. The scheme will remove a barrier to employment by allowing recipients to remain in the scheme if they gain full-time employment. HAP will also improve regulation of the rented accommodation being supported and provide certainty for landlords as regards their rental income.

Further to the enactment of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 on 28 July 2014, the first phase of the HAP statutory pilot commenced with effect from 15 September 2014 in Limerick City and County Council, Waterford City and County Council and Cork County Council. HAP commenced in Louth, Kilkenny, South Dublin and Monaghan County Councils from 1 October 2014. Subsequently, on 18 December 2014, Dublin City Council became part of the statutory HAP pilot, with a specific focus on accommodating homeless households. Dublin City Council is implementing the HAP pilot for homeless households in the Dublin region on behalf of all 4 Dublin local authorities. The second phase of the HAP pilot has commenced with the HAP scheme becoming operational in Donegal County Council since 25 May 2015 and in Offaly County Council since 15 June 2015. HAP will become operational in Carlow, Clare and Tipperary County Councils and Cork City Council from 29 June 2015.

There are now over 2,200 households in receipt of HAP across the local authority areas taking part in the statutory pilot scheme, with 293 of these households accommodated in the Waterford City and County area.

Section 43(2)(a) of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 provides for the making of Regulations to prescribe the maximum rent limits for different household classes that will apply in each local authority where HAP has been commenced. In prescribing these limits, household size and prevailing rents in the relevant areas are taken into consideration. These

limits are currently based on the rent supplement limits as set out by the Department of Social Protection, in advance of the introduction of a national differential rents framework for local authorities, as provided for under section 31 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009.

The operation of the Rent Supplement scheme is a matter for the Minister for Social Protection. The Department of Social Protection published a review of the maximum rent limits under the Rent Supplement scheme on 27 March 2015 and this review is available on that Department's website. In the context of the implementation of HAP, my Department works closely with the Department of Social Protection, and closely monitors data gathered by HAP pilot authorities in relation to this issue. This data is important in the context of the further roll out of HAP and the maximum rent limits that may apply in local authorities where HAP is operating will be kept under review in this context.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

215. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of persons on the local authority housing list in County Monaghan; the capital funding for house building, allocated to Monaghan County Council for each of the years 2015 to 2017; the number of housing units to be constructed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23976/15]

216. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of persons on the local authority housing list in County Cavan; the capital funding for house building allocated to Cavan County Council for each of the years 2015 to 2017; the number of housing units to be constructed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23977/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 215 and 216 together.

The most recent Summary of Social Housing Assessments, carried out as at 7 May 2013, identified 741 households on the waiting lists of the Cavan housing authorities at that time, and 696 households on the waiting lists of the Monaghan housing authorities. The full results of the 2013 Summary are available on my Department's website at the following link:<http://www.environ.ie/en/PublicationsDocuments/FileDownload,34857,en.pdf>.

With regard to funding and targets for the delivery of social housing, on 1 April last I announced targets for all local authorities to 2017. As part of this announcement, Monaghan County Council has been set a target of 205 social housing units, supported by €11.5m of investment, while Cavan County Council has a target of 240 units, supported by €12.5m of investment. This funding is being invested in a combination of building, buying and leasing schemes by the local authorities to accommodate people on the housing waiting lists.

On 5 May 2015 I announced a major social housing construction programme involving €312m of investment, comprising some 100 projects and 1,700 housing units, including new build projects in Counties Cavan and Monaghan. Full details, including the individual projects, the funding allocated and the number of units to be delivered across all local authorities, are available on my Department's website at the following link:<http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/News/MainBody,41340,en.htm>.

I stated at the time that this announcement was part of the first phase of direct-build projects under the Government's Social Housing Strategy and that further assessments of build proposals are being carried, which will result in the approval of additional projects, details of which

will be announced in due course.

Climate Change Policy

217. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update regarding climate change legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23989/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill 2015 was published on 19 January 2015. The Bill provides a statutory basis for the national objective of transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by the year 2050. In doing so, it also gives a solid statutory foundation to the institutional arrangements necessary to enable the State to pursue and achieve that national transition objective.

The Bill completed Second Stage in Dáil Éireann on 25 March 2015 and completed Committee Stage in Dáil Éireann on 9 June 2015. I intend to seek an early date for the taking of Report Stage in Dáil Éireann.

Air Pollution

218. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he has carried out any research into the effect of chemtrails or contrails, and their effect on the environment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23993/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department has not carried out any research into what are sometimes called chemtrails, as these are not a scientifically recognised phenomenon.

Neither has my Department carried out any research into the effect of contrails. However, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), is currently funding a PhD study on contrails and their potential effect on climate as part of its STRIVE research programme. The study titled Cloud cover and radiation balance changes over Ireland due to aircraft induced contrails is due to be completed later this year.

My Department has previously been informed by Met Éireann that vapour trails are formed through the emission of exhaust gases from jet engines of aircraft in the upper troposphere and that the main component of these gases is water vapour. Ambient air temperature at jet cruising altitudes is often below -500C. Under these conditions, water vapour cools and condenses and the particles act as ice nuclei, leading to the production of ice crystals; these ice crystals are what are visible from the ground as a linear cloud of condensation.

Depending upon atmospheric conditions, these vapour trails can rapidly dissipate or remain for some time, gradually spreading horizontally into an extensive thin cirrus cloud layer. Water in the atmosphere commonly evaporates to become water vapour. As a general rule, the drier the air the more effective this evaporation process will be. Under more humid conditions, there will be less effective evaporation and so contrails will generally last longer in more humid air. Contrail formation is also influenced by wind speeds, with higher winds disrupting and breaking up contrail formation.

Contrails do not adversely impact ambient air quality in Ireland. Met Éireann advises that there is some evidence that contrails can influence climatology but they have little impact on

day-to-day weather. The purported reason for the former is that the contrails (or consequent cirrus cloud) will trap outgoing long-wave radiation, thus leading to warming in the atmosphere, and that this effect is greater than the reflection of short-wave radiation from the sun.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

219. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will remove an estate (details supplied) from consideration under the Homeless Action Plan, in view of the regeneration project planned between Dublin City Council and the Gaelic Athletic Association. [24031/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): On 4 December 2014, I hosted a special Summit on Homelessness to reaffirm the Government's commitment to end involuntary long-term homelessness by the end of 2016. A number of actions arising from the Summit were then formalised into an Action Plan to Address Homelessness which was noted by the Government at its meeting on 9 December 2014. Included among the measures in the Plan was a re-examination by Dublin City Council of its vacant properties scheduled for demolition with a view to refurbishing suitable units on a temporary basis to address the immediate need.

Subsequently, the City Council identified possible options, including the refurbishment of residential blocks at Croke Villas, and my Department confirmed funding approval for this purpose. The progression of this refurbishment proposal is a matter for Dublin City Council. However, I have made it clear to the Council that should this refurbishment proposal not proceed it is essential that they progress concrete, tangible solutions to alleviate the temporary accommodation needs of families currently accommodated on an emergency basis in hotels and B&B arrangements. Similarly, the progression of discussions with the GAA in relation to a road-widening project at Sackville Avenue and other development works in the environs of Croke Park is a matter for Dublin City Council and in which my Department has had no formal involvement.

Waste Management

220. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide, in detail, the maximum weight per bag which waste company operators are permitted to collect, in the context of environmental and workplace regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24054/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Waste Management (Collection Permit)(Amendment) Regulations 2015 provide that household kerbside waste only be collected in approved reusable receptacles (such as bins/caddies) from 1 July 2016, with the exception of the collection of such waste in areas designated by local authorities as being only suitable for the collection of such waste in non-reusable receptacles, such as bags. This means bags are being phased out other than in very limited circumstances and in areas specifically designated by local authorities as having a need for continued bag collection services (due to accessibility issues etc), household kerbside waste cannot be collected in bags beyond 1 July 2016.

Waste legislation does not set out a maximum weight per waste receptacle collected. The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) has overall responsibility for the administration and enforcement of health and safety at work in Ireland. They monitor compliance with legislation at

the workplace and are the national centre for information and advice to employers, employees and self-employed on all aspects of workplace health and safety.

Building Regulations

221. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the supports his Department will provide to the residents of an area (details supplied) in County Kildare, in respect of health and safety issues, in all aspects possible, in view of the very concerning survey reports that residents are receiving; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24076/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): I fully appreciate and acknowledge the extremely difficult and distressing situations that homeowners face when they find that the homes in which they have invested may not be completed to the required acceptable standards.

However, primary responsibility for compliance with the requirements of the Building Regulations rests with the designers, builders and owners of buildings. Implementation and enforcement of the building control system is a matter for the relevant building control authority. In addition, local authorities have extensive powers of inspection and enforcement under the Fire Safety Act 1981 and the Planning and Development Acts, both of which can also be relevant in relation to fire safety arrangements in residential buildings.

In this context, I am aware that Kildare County Council in its capacity as Fire Authority has previously been engaged with the Owner Management Company and with owners of some individual apartment units in the development concerned to resolve a number of problems that became apparent on and from 2013. I am also aware that, following the recent fire incident affecting a number of units in the development concerned, Kildare County Council engaged the services of a Fire Safety Consultant to assess compliance with fire safety requirements in a number of vacant housing units and a report has been prepared in the matter.

I understand that at a recent meeting between the residents and Minister Kelly, many residents raised concerns in relation to fire safety in their homes. These issues are now under active consideration in my Department and I understand that Minister Kelly will be responding to the residents very shortly.

Planning Issues

222. **Deputy Seán Conlan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is liable for breaches of the Planning and Development Acts by Monaghan County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24108/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): Local authorities are independent statutory bodies with democratically elected councils and their own management systems and structures and are, accordingly, responsible for their own actions.

Departmental Funding

223. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community

and Local Government the reason funding under the scheme to support national organisations allocated in May 2015 has decreased from a total figure of €1.4 million in 2014 to the current figure of €1.32 million; his views that this cut will impact on these vital services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24111/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): The funding Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) in the community and voluntary sector aims to provide multi-annual funding to national organisations towards core costs associated with the provision of services. Applications for a new round of funding, which commenced on 1 July 2014, were subject to an appraisal process. 55 applications were approved for funding totalling approximately €8 million for the two-year period from 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2016. A number of previously funded organisations were not approved for funding on this occasion. On 18 July 2014, it was announced that bridging funding of €1.4 million would be allocated for a twelve month period to thirty-two previously funded health, disability and other organisations that were not approved for funding under the new scheme, pending the carrying out of a review of the public funding of national organisations in the health and disability sector.

On 25 May 2015 I announced that funding will be provided from 1 July this year to 30 June 2016 following a review in relation to the impact of the cessation of their current funding on 30 June 2015. This funding is being provided to thirty of the thirty-two organisations previously in receipt of bridging funding, including all health and disability organisations. This further support will be based on current levels of funding to the organisations in question and is being provided through a Developmental Scheme to Support National Organisations (DSSNO). The funding, totalling €1.32 million, to be provided to each organisation is set out in the table below, and each organisation is allocated the same amount of funding over the 12 months from 1 July 2015 under DSSNO as provided in the 12 months to 30 June 2015 under bridging funding.

It is envisaged that the new Scheme to Support National Organisations will be advertised in early 2016 and groups funded under the 2014-2016 Scheme to Support National Organisations and the recently announced Developmental Scheme to Support National Organisations will be required to apply for funding under the single SSNO Scheme and meet the criteria required for funding.

Funding allocated under Developmental Scheme to Support National Organisations 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016	€
Arthritis Ireland	53,882
Asperger Syndrome Association of Ireland Ltd	41,448
Asthma Society of Ireland	41,448
Breaking Through Limited	58,028
Chronic Pain Ireland Limited	37,304
Dyslexia Association of Ireland	62,172
Genetic and Inherited Disorders Organisation Ltd	16,580
GROW in Ireland	16,580
Huntington's Disease Association of Ireland Limited	19,066
Irish Deaf Society The National Association of the Deaf Limited	62,172
Irish Heart Foundation	41,448
Irish Mountain Rescue Association	58,028
Irish National Council of Attention Deficit Disorder Support (INCADDS)	33,158
Irish Stammering Association	24,868
Migraine Association of Ireland Ltd	29,014
Motor Neurone disease Association	24,868

Funding allocated under Developmental Scheme to Support National Organisations 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016	€
MOVE Ireland	41,448
Muintir na Tíre	70,462
Muscular Dystrophy Ireland	37,304
National Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Ireland Limited	37,304
New Communities Partnership (NCP) Ltd	74,606
Peter Bradley Foundation Limited	41,448
Post Polio Support Group Limited	24,868
Safe Ireland	74,606
Show Racism The Red Card Limited	29,014
The Alzheimer Society of Ireland	62,172
The Carers Association Limited	62,172
The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Ireland	49,738
The Neurological Alliance of Ireland	49,738
The Union of Voluntary Organisations of People with Disabilities	45,592

Homeless Accommodation Provision

224. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to provide an update regarding the provision of a National Asset Management Agency hotel to accommodate homeless persons including the location of the hotel and the date it will open; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24124/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): As originally identified in the December 2014 Action Plan to Address Homelessness, my Department has been liaising with South Dublin County Council regarding a NAMA property which will provide 65 units of accommodation and a single assessment centre for homeless families. The 65 units of standard residential accommodation were considered to have greater long-term potential than a hotel property. These units have now been purchased through the NAMA Special Purpose Vehicle NARPS. An approved housing body has been selected to manage and operate the units in association while support for families will be provided through Focus Ireland. The facility is expected to be operational imminently. The units will, in the first instance, be used to provide more appropriate accommodation on a temporary basis for families currently accommodated in hotels, prior to securing more long-term sustainable tenancies.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

225. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update regarding the implementation of the Social Housing Strategy 2015 to 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24125/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Since the publication of the Social Housing Strategy 2020 in November 2014 positive progress on the implementation of the measurable actions and targets to increase the supply of social housing and reform delivery arrangements has been made. A clear governance structure has been put in place, which Minister of State Paudie Coffey and I personally oversee, to ensure delivery of all actions. Dedicated groups have been established in Dublin and Cork with a lead role in driving increased delivery of social housing in these important areas.

In the context of the delivery of new social housing units, ambitious targets have been set for local authorities for the period 2015 – 2017 with the announcement on 1 April 2015 of over €1.5 billion to be invested in a combination of building, purchase and leasing schemes, to accommodate 25% of those currently on the social housing waiting lists. Full details of the targets and provisional allocations for each local authority are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/News/MainBody,41016,en.htm>.

On 5 May 2015, I announced funding of €312 million for the first tranche of the local authority direct-build social housing programme under the Strategy. This announcement covers over 100 separate housing projects, providing 1,700 units across all 31 local authorities and details are available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/News/MainBody,41340,en.htm>.

Further announcements of new unit delivery under the Capital Assistance Scheme and the broader social housing investment programmes will be made in the coming weeks and months.

The implementation of HAP has been progressing at increased pace. There are now over 2,200 households in receipt of HAP across the country and by the end of June HAP will be available in 13 local authority areas including South Dublin with HAP available in respect of homeless households in all Dublin local authorities.

The dedicated Finance Working Group, with appropriate membership from within my own Department, the Department of Finance, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Housing Finance Agency, has commenced Work on Public Private Partnership proposals. Engagement between the NDFA is on-going and a site selection process is at an advanced stage.

Proposed legislative changes to Part V provisions have been set out in the Urban Regeneration and Housing Bill 2015 which was published on 5 June. In future, the focus of Part V will be on the delivery of completed social housing units, with a requirement for up to 10% social housing in developments of 10 or more units. The Bill also proposes a more concerted focus on the delivery of completed Part V units instead of, for example, the making of cash payments instead, being discontinued.

Research into off-balance sheet and more sustainable forms of funding, including the development of a new Strategic Housing Fund, are also currently being assessed. A protocol was put in place in March 2015 under the auspices of the Finance Work Stream to facilitate individuals and entities seeking to engage with the State to provide investment for the delivery of social housing. A single point of contact for submitting proposals has been established - the Social Housing Proposals Clearing House Group - which operates through my Department, under the oversight of the Finance Work Stream. Interested parties are invited to contact the Clearing House at newfundingmodels@environ.ie.

As part of the process, I held a conference in March 2015 entitled 'Financing and Delivering Ireland's Social Housing Strategy' in Dublin. The conference was attended by more than two hundred domestic and overseas financiers and investors as well as developers, voluntary housing associations, local authorities, Government departments and public bodies.

The powers of local authorities to deal with anti-social behaviour and the repossession of local authority dwellings were significantly enhanced with the commencement of Part 2 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 on 13 April 2015.

It is recognised that the Social Housing Strategy sets out ambitious targets for the delivery and reform of social housing and I am determined to see all the targets and measures fulfilled

and implemented.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

226. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the housing targets that each of the Dublin local authorities has to achieve for the Social Housing Strategy 2015 to 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24126/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Social housing is a key priority for this Government, as evidenced by the additional €2.2 billion in funding announced for it in Budget 2015 and the publication of the Social Housing Strategy 2020 in November 2014. The total targeted provision of over 110,000 social housing units, through the delivery of 35,000 new social housing units and meeting the housing needs of some 75,000 households through the Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Scheme, will address the needs of the circa 90,000 households on the housing waiting lists. Social housing targets have been set for each local authority out to 2017 and are available on my Department's website, along with the provisional funding allocations, at the following link:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/News/MainBody,41016,en.htm>

Homeless Persons Supports

227. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the action being taken to ensure the welfare of children and pregnant women who are homeless or in emergency accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24128/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): A range of measures are being taken to secure a ring-fenced supply of accommodation for homeless households and mobilise the necessary supports in order to deliver on the Government's target of ending involuntary long-term homelessness by the end of 2016. These measures have been identified in the Government's Implementation Plan on the State's Response to Homelessness (May 2014) and in the Action Plan to Address Homelessness (December 2014). These Plans represent a whole-of-Government approach to dealing with homelessness and the implementation of measures identified in these plans is being overseen by a group of senior officials drawn from key State agencies dealing with homelessness, housing, welfare, healthcare and related services including the Departments of Health and Children and Youth Affairs, Tusla (the Child and Family Agency) and the Health Service Executive.

Appropriate measures with regard to healthcare and child welfare are included among the actions. Progress in implementing these plans is reported through the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform. The plans and progress reports are available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/SpecialNeeds/HomelessPeople/>

Housing Data

228. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local

Government if he will provide, in tabular form, a breakdown of the cost to the State of providing the rental accommodation scheme, the housing assistance payment and social leasing schemes in 2014 and to date in 2015. [24164/15]

229. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown of the current number of recipients under the rental accommodation scheme; the housing assistance payment; and social leasing support. [24165/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 228 and 229 together.

The information requested in relation to the cost of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SCHEP) and Rental Accommodation Scheme for the year 2014 and to date in 2015 is set out in the following table.

Scheme	2014	2015
Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)	€394,472.90	€2,824,827.78 (end of May 2015)
Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SCHEP)	*€34,844,781	*€6,345,473 (end of May 2015)
Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)	€133,512,889	**€32,626,562.72 (end of March 2015)

* This excludes capital advances under the Capital Advanced Leasing Facility (CALF). Under CALF, €4,827,997 was advanced in 2014 with a further €1,010,838 to the end of May 2015.

** Rental Accommodation Scheme figures available to end of March only.

There are now more than 2,200 households in receipt of HAP across the local authority areas taking part in the statutory pilot scheme.

As of 31 May 2015, under the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP), previously referred to as the leasing programme, 6,085 units are deemed operational with the units tenanted or in the process of being tenanted. A further 1,698 units have received full funding approval and are at the point where legal agreements and negotiations are being finalised. A range of types of units are sourced under the programme. My Department holds statistics on units sourced for the programme but does not hold statistics on the number of persons in receipt of housing support by programme.

From the commencement of the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) in late 2005 to 31 March 2015, some 52,529 households have been transferred from Rent Supplement to RAS and other social housing options. My Department does not hold information on the number of households in RAS at any given time. Numbers in RAS constantly vary as contracts end, tenants move on to other properties, landlords withdraw from the Scheme, new tenancies are allocated or vacancies in contracted units are filled. However, according to returns from individual local authorities, it is estimated that there were approximately 20,473 RAS tenancies in place on 31 December 2014.

Local Authority Housing

230. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of local authority houses built in each of the past ten years by the local authority responsible. [24166/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department collates and publishes a wide range of housing statistics that inform the preparation and evaluation of policy. Data on number of local authority houses built are included within this range, and are available on my Department's website at <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/StatisticsandRegularPublications/HousingStatistics/FileDownload,15291,en.xls>, by clicking on the "LA housing output and commenced (1994 +)" tab under the "Social Housing Supports" heading.

Housing Issues

231. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an estimate of the total housing need, both public and private, currently and for the next ten years. [24167/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Housing Agency estimates the future housing supply requirements for the period 2014 to 2018 at just under 80,000 dwellings across 272 urban settlements nationally, an average of 16,000 units per annum over the five years. It estimates that 47% of total supply over the period is required across the Dublin Region. The Agency notes that 57% of all households in the Dublin region over this period will be for one and two persons, while a further 18% will be for three person households.

Analysis by the ESRI has estimated that, in coming years, increases in population will result in the formation of at least 20,000 new households each year, each requiring a separate dwelling. In addition, a number of existing dwellings will disappear through redevelopment or dilapidation. The results suggest an on-going need for at least 25,000 new dwellings a year over the coming fifteen years.

In response to this projected demand, the Government's published Construction 2020 in May 2014. This strategy is aimed at addressing issues in the property and construction sectors to ensure that any critical bottlenecks that might impede the sector in meeting the forecasted residential demand are addressed.

A key action under Construction 2020 is a commitment to put in place a National Framework for Housing Supply, ensuring a balanced approach in which the supply of housing is matched with projected demand, and in which emerging imbalances can be identified and rectified at an early stage.

A core aspect of the National Housing Framework is the analysis of supply and projected demand data, broken down on a national and local basis, with information on housing types and sizes a key feature. This action also includes a commitment to publish an annual National Statement of Projected Housing Supply and Demand. The Housing Agency, in consultation with my Department, is leading on delivery of this action and I expect the first of these Statements to be finalised in the coming weeks. On receipt of the final Statement, I will consider its contents, in the context of future housing policy development.

In terms of social housing need, the latest summary of social housing assessments, which was carried out as of 7 May 2013, showed that there were 89,872 households on local authority waiting lists at that date. The full 2013 results are available on my Department's website at:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload,34857,en.pdf>

In addition, the Housing Agency carried out an analysis of the results of the 2013 summary of social housing assessments and on the basis of certain assumptions, and taking account of housing support mechanisms, including the progressive roll-out of HAP over the years ahead, identified a need for an additional 35,000 properties for social housing.

In this regard, the Government's Social Housing Strategy 2020, published in November 2014, targets the provision of over 110,000 social housing units, through the delivery of 35,000 new social housing units and meeting the housing needs of some 75,000 households through the Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Scheme. This will address the needs of the 90,000 on the housing waiting list in full, with flexibility to meet potential future demand.

Moreover, in order to ensure that the most up to date and comprehensive data is available relating to the numbers applying for social housing support, the Strategy includes a commitment to increase the regularity of the summary of social housing assessments by undertaking it on annual basis from 2016 onwards.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

232. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide the portion of the capital budget intended for social housing builds in 2015. [24168/15]

233. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of local authority houses to be built in each of the years 2015 to 2017. [24169/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 232 and 233 together.

Under my Department's Social Housing Capital Investment Programme, funding is provided to housing authorities to increase their supply of social housing stock through the construction and acquisition of houses and apartments. This year €171.825 million has been made available for the capital delivery of additional social housing units by local authorities, of which €43.039 million will be self-funded by certain local authorities through local property tax receipts.

On 5 May 2015, I announced a major Social Housing construction programme with €312m investment, comprising over 100 projects and 1,700 housing units. Full details, including specifics of the projects to be progressed, the funding allocated and the number of units to be delivered across all local authorities, are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/News/MainBody,41340,en.htm>.

I stated at the time that this announcement was part of the first phase of direct-build projects under the Government's Social Housing Strategy and that further assessments of build proposals are being carried which will result in the approval of additional projects, details of which will be announced in due course.

It should also be borne in mind that the local authority building programme is just one of a range of mechanisms through which social housing need is to be met. Social housing targets have been set for each local authority out to 2017 and are available on my Department's website, along with the provisional funding allocations, at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/News/MainBody,41016,en.htm>.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

234. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of applicants on the housing list, as of May 2015. [24170/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Summary of Social Housing Assessments 2013 identified 89,872 households assessed by local housing authorities as being eligible and in need of some form of social housing support as at 7 May 2013, and these results are the most up-to-date figures available on the number of households qualified for support. The Social Housing Strategy 2020, published in November 2014, includes a commitment to increase the regularity of the summary of social housing assessments by undertaking it on annual basis from 2016 onwards.

Private Rented Accommodation Price Controls

235. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the average private rent in each local authority area in 2014 and 2015. [24171/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): In May 2013, the PRTB launched a national rent index available at <http://www.prtb.ie/landlords/rent-index-dec-2014>. Compiled by the Economic and Social Research Institute and based on the PRTB's own register of over 300,000 tenancies, this valuable source of information indicates the actual rents being paid for rented properties throughout the State. The rent index is updated quarterly and shows the percentage change in rents over the previous quarter and over the previous twelve months. The PRTB website also contains an Average Rent Dataset which enables people to check the average rent being paid for five different categories of dwelling types throughout the country, in both urban and rural areas. Using a drop down menu, an individual can select up to five different property types (semi-detached, apartment etc.) and year from 2007 onwards to see the average rent for the selected location.

The dataset is available at http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/pssn/prtb/homepagefiles/rent_index_statbank.asp.

Housing Data

236. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the total number of private house builds in 2014, and scheduled to be built in 2015 and 2016. [24172/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department collates and publishes a wide range of housing **statistics** that inform the preparation and evaluation of policy. Data on number of private house completions are included within this range, and are available on my Department's website at <http://www.envron.ie/en/Publications/StatisticsandRegularPublications/HousingStatistics/FileDownload,15293,en.xls>, by clicking on the "Qrtly house completions by sector 1970 to date" tab under the "House Building" heading. While my Department expects an increase in completions in 2015/2016, it is not possible to predict exact completion rates for the wider housing market for that time period.

Homeless Persons Data

237. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the average number of persons in emergency accommodation in 2014 and to date in 2015; and if he will provide a breakdown detailing the type of accommodation provided. [24173/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Data on homeless households in emergency accommodation is provided through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). Monthly reports from lead housing authorities, which identify the number of people utilising State-funded emergency accommodation on a regional and county basis, are published on my Department's website as soon as they are available. These reports are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/SpecialNeeds/HomelessPeople/>.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

238. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a list of all types of emergency and sheltered accommodation currently provided by the State, including local authorities; the moneys allocated to the funding of this accommodation; and the gap between funding and demand. [24174/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I understand that the question refers to accommodation arrangements that may be put in place by housing authorities to assist in cases of homelessness. My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities; accordingly 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.

Housing authorities may provide a variety of emergency accommodation arrangements from placements into private emergency accommodation to facilities operated by non-governmental service providers. Details of the homeless services funded by housing authorities are available in quarterly financial reports which are published on my Department's website and are available at the following link:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/SpecialNeeds/HomelessPeople/>.

While it is clear that a proportion of funding must be used to provide sufficient bed capacity to accommodate those in need of emergency accommodation, it is equally important that resources are channelled to deliver more permanent responses in a more focused and strategic way.

Details of the 2015 regional funding allocations are set out hereunder. The needs of the various regions will be kept under review on an ongoing basis.

Area	Amount
Dublin	€37,160,470

Area	Amount
Mid-East	€934,267
Midlands	€794,972
Mid-West	€3,499,898 *
North-East	€977,737
North-West	€387,643
South-East	€2,394,619 *
South-West	€5,000,686
West	€1,698,834

* Following the amalgamation of North and South Tipperary County Councils into Tipperary County Council in 2014, the re-alignment of Tipperary County Council into the Mid-West Region is pending.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Data

239. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of houses estimated to have been sold by local authorities since the introduction of the tenant purchase scheme. [24175/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): National tenant purchase schemes have been in place since the early 1970s, enabling local authority tenants the opportunity to purchase their homes. The most recent schemes have been the 1995 Tenant Purchase Scheme for existing local authority houses and the 2011 Fixed-Term Tenant Purchase Scheme for long-standing tenants, which closed in June 2014 and June 2013, respectively. There are incremental purchase schemes currently in operation for the sale of newly-built local authority houses and existing local authority apartments, which came into operation in June 2010 and January 2012 respectively.

The most recent returns from local authorities indicate that 24,439 houses were purchased by tenants under these schemes to the end of 2014.

Part 3 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 provides for a new tenant purchase scheme for the purchase of existing local authority houses along incremental purchase lines, similar to the schemes currently operating. The Government's Social Housing Strategy 2020 includes a commitment to make the Regulations necessary for the scheme's introduction, in the second quarter of 2015, which will set out the full details involved. It is expected that the new scheme will commence at the earliest possible date following the making of the Regulations which are at an advanced stage of drafting.

Housing Data

240. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of houses categorised as buy-to-let houses. [24176/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): While my Department publishes a wide range of housing statistics to inform policy, available at: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/StatisticsandRegularPublications/Housing-Statistics/>, the information requested is not collected by my Department.

Water Conservation Grant

241. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the expected cost to Government of paying the water conservation grant in 2015 and 2016, including the payments to be made to the Department of Social Protection for acting as an agent on the Government's behalf in administering this grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24186/15]

242. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the current cost to the Exchequer of the set-up costs and the administrative costs associated with the water conservation grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24187/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 241 and 242 together.

An allocation of €130m for the grant scheme has been provided in my Department's Estimate for 2015 which is intended to cover grant payments and all administration costs including staffing. The Department of Social Protection will administer the grant on behalf of my Department.

The Department of Social Protection has estimated, on the basis of the scoping work done to date, that the once-off costs, together with the operational costs for 2015, will amount in total to approximately €6 million. This includes the development and implementation of ICT systems, ICT infrastructure and various customer support and communications services. Following the conclusion of a number of public procurement exercises by that Department, the budget will be finalised. As expenditure in forthcoming years will be limited to operational costs, it should be considerably less, resulting in overall administrative costs being within 2% to 3% of scheme costs.

The overall estimated requirement based on an estimate of up to 1.3 million households applying for the grant. This estimated level of demand for 2015 takes account of the number of primary residences recorded in Census 2011 as well as experiences with other demand-led schemes. The provisions required in future years will be determined as part of the annual budgetary process, having regard to the take-up of the scheme and forecast growth in household numbers.

The grant will be paid in one instalment to all eligible households from September 2015 and on an annual basis thereafter. During late August and September all households that have registered with Irish Water on or before the 30 June 2015 will receive a notice from the Department of Social Protection on how to apply for the Water Conservation Grant. A dedicated website www.watergrant.ie has also been established which provides information in relation to the grant.

Water Conservation Grant

243. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the exceptions that will be made to charity supported housing organisations with regards to paying water conservation grants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24188/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kel-

ly): To promote sustainable use of water and to enhance water conservation in households, the Department of Social Protection will administer, on behalf of my Department, a €100 water conservation grant for households (principal private dwellings) that complete a valid response to Irish Water's customer registration process. It is proposed that the grant will be paid in one instalment to all eligible households beginning in September 2015 and on an annual basis thereafter. My Department is liaising with the Approved Housing Body sector to ensure that vulnerable persons residing in supported accommodation in the sector are facilitated in applying for and receiving the grant.

Local Authority Funding

244. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide funding to finish the insulation of the remaining 183 homes in Ballymun in Dublin 11. [24201/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I recently announced the provision of €20 million of funding to local authorities under the Energy Retrofitting Programme for the improvement of local authority houses to make them more energy efficient. Under the programme Dublin City Council has been allocated €1.3 million and it is a matter for the local authority to determine the works to be completed within this allocation.

Regeneration Projects Funding

245. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to reinstate the cut to the social regeneration fund in Ballymun in Dublin 11 for 2015 and future years, as the regeneration is not complete and this cut is having severe consequences to services in the area. [24202/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): While the physical regeneration element of Ballymun is largely completed, my Department is providing continued support to social regeneration programmes. Last year, funding of €2 million was provided by my Department to Dublin City Council in respect of these programmes. My Department is currently actively engaging with Dublin City Council in respect of the required funding for Ballymun Regeneration for 2015, following which the allocation in respect of the various requirements, including provision for the social regeneration programmes, will be determined.

Broadband Service Provision

246. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide details on the way a person (details supplied) in County Cork can best attain a broadband connection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23984/15]

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.

Last November I published a national high speed coverage map for 2016. This map is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. The areas marked BLUE represent those areas that will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016. The AMBER area shows the target areas for the State intervention and includes the area of Moneycusker, County Cork. All premises within the AMBER areas will be included in the State's intervention.

Eircom recently announced an investment that may address a further 300,000 premises with fibre-to-the-premises technology by 2020. My Department will be rigorously examining the assurances from Eircom in relation to these new plans, which is a requirement for all operators, and will review how this impacts the proposed intervention area. Intensive design and planning work is underway in my Department to produce a detailed intervention strategy for the AMBER area. Following a public consultation process on the draft Intervention Strategy this summer, I hope to move to formal procurement phase towards the end of this year in order to select a preferred bidder or bidders. I expect the physical build of the network to begin in late 2016, and it will take 3-5 years to fully complete – depending on the details of the bid or bids selected.

Broadband Service Provision

247. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the way a person (details supplied) in County Cork may attain a broadband connection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24018/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The National Broadband Plan is delivering high speed broadband to every home and business in Ireland regardless of its location. This is being achieved through a partnership between Government and commercial telecommunications companies.

Last November I published a national high speed coverage map for 2016. This map is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. The map shows Ireland with two colours, BLUE and AMBER. The areas marked BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers plan to deliver high speed broadband services by end 2016. The AMBER area on the map shows the target areas for the State intervention. All premises within the AMBER areas will be included in the State's intervention.

Based on information provided by commercial operators, 69% of Carrigadrohid will be covered by the commercial sector. The remaining 31% of Carrigadrohid will be part of the State intervention. Members of the public should consult the map to establish for themselves the precise location and status of their individual premises.

Intensive design and planning work is underway in my Department to produce a detailed intervention strategy for the AMBER area. Following a public consultation process on the draft Intervention Strategy this summer, I hope to move to formal procurement phase towards the end of this year in order to select a preferred bidder or bidders. I expect the physical build of the network to begin in late 2016, and it will take 3 - 5 years to fully complete – depending on the details of the bid or bids selected. This complex and ambitious project is a key priority for Government and aims to conclusively address current broadband connectivity issues in mainly rural parts of the country.

The Commission for Communications Regulations (ComReg), which regulates the market, operates a website www.callcosts.ie which allows users to identify and compare marketed broadband services offered by competing services providers within any county. The website also includes contact details for the competing services providers which allows users to confirm

whether any listed service is available at any particular location within a county. Other commercially operated websites provide similar services. Alternatively ComReg can be contacted at *consumerline@comreg.ie* or by phone at 01 804 9668 or 1890 229668 to request information.

Renewable Energy Projects

248. **Deputy Anne Ferris** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide a detailed overview of any cost-benefit analysis or long-term value for the money process undertaken by the Coillte-Electricity Supply Board consortium for its proposed wind farm development at Raheenleagh in County Wicklow; the results of any such process; the economic and commercial risks assumed; the level of renewable energy feed in tariff programme support and energy prices assumed over the lifetime of the proposed facility; the budgeted capital cost per megawatt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24036/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): This is an operational matter for the consortium involved and not a matter in which I, as Minister, have any function.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

249. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources further to Parliamentary Question No. 1114 of 9 June 2015, if he will expand on the point made in his reply as to the potential role communities can play in aggregating demand for broadband services in their areas, which can lead to acceleration of the deployment and adoption of such services; the way he expects communities will aggregate demand if high speed broadband services are not available in certain communities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24096/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): As I outlined to the Deputy in my recent reply to him, my Department has been active in engaging with as many stakeholders as possible during the planning phase for the state intervention under the National Broadband Plan. This includes many community and voluntary groups as well as Local Authorities and various agencies tasked with promoting regional development. All have been very supportive of plans to bring high-speed broadband to rural communities. It is likely that the procurement process for the State intervention will seek to establish from prospective bidders specific demand stimulation measures. Communities can also play a role in encouraging adoption of technology and identifying areas where there is an aggregated demand that could facilitate early deployment of services.

Broadband Service Expenditure

250. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the Exchequer spending on broadband provision to homes and businesses by his Department in each year from 2011 to 2014 and in 2015 to date; the number of connections achieved each year; the broadband speeds achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24179/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The State only becomes involved in investing in the provision of broadband services in in-

stances of clear market failure such as in the case of the National Broadband Scheme. Such interventions require EU clearance to ensure that the State's investment does not adversely distort competition.

Under the former National Broadband Scheme (NBS), which expired in August 2014, some 58,000 premises availed of a basic broadband service from 3 Ireland. The minimum specifications of the NBS mobile wireless service improved over the duration on the contract and with effect from October 2012 offered minimum download and upload speeds of 2.3Mbps and 1.4Mbps respectively, subject to a maximum contention ratio of 18:1. The NBS satellite service, which was utilised in a small number of cases for technical reasons associated with the location of the premises, offered minimum download and upload speeds of 3.6Mbps and 384 kbps respectively, subject to a maximum contention ratio of 48:1. The total payments to 3 Ireland under the National Broadband Scheme between 2011 and 2014 were €9.65m.

With the completion of the NBS, Ireland achieved the first of the milestones set down in the EU's Digital Agenda for Europe i.e a basic broadband service to be available to all citizens by 2013. The focus is now on fast tracking the roll out of high speed services through the National Broadband Plan (NBP). The Government's NBP intervention will ensure the availability of quality future proofed broadband services to all other parts of the country.

This Plan aims to ensure that high speed broadband will be available to all citizens and businesses. The Plan will deliver on targeted areas by leveraging investment from both private and public sectors.

In 2012, when the NBP was first published, industry had committed to providing next generation access connectivity to some 1 million addresses by 2015. This target has already been significantly exceeded. The draft Intervention Strategy will be published for public consultation next month and I hope to move to formal procurement towards the end of this year in order to select a preferred bidder or bidders. I expect the physical build of the network to begin in late 2016, and it will take 3-5 years to fully complete – depending on the details of the bid or bids selected. This complex and ambitious project is a key priority for Government. It aims to conclusively address current connectivity challenges

National Broadband Plan Expenditure

251. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on a matter regarding sufficient funding to deliver high speed broadband to a region (details supplied) by 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24216/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The Government recognises that access to high quality, high speed broadband is important for businesses and households throughout Ireland and is critically aware of the issues raised by IBEC in the Midwest and Kerry region and elsewhere in Ireland. 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 proposed State intervention under the National Broadband Plan (NBP) represents a potentially very significant capital investment project for the State and the Government is firmly committed to delivering this investment, as evidenced in the National Broadband Plan itself and

in the Programme for Government, the Action Plan for Jobs and the Statement of Government Priorities.

The commercial telecommunications sector is currently investing approximately €2.5 billion in network upgrades and enhanced services. 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. 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. All premises within the AMBER areas will be included in the State's 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. It is anticipated that speeds of at least 30Mbps will be also delivered through the Government's intervention and the network will be designed to cater for future increased demand from consumers and business.

Eircom recently announced an investment that may address a further 300,000 premises with fibre-to-the-premises technology. My Department will be rigorously examining the assurances from Eircom in relation to these new plans, which is a requirement for all operators, and will review how this impacts the proposed intervention area. More generally, I can confirm that next generation broadband services have been rolled out to 123,474 premises to date in the Mid West and Kerry region comprising Limerick, Clare, Tipperary and Kerry with a further 56,073 premises expected to be served over the next 18 months. The remaining 160,850 premises in the Mid West and Kerry Region are the target for the proposed State intervention under the National Broadband Plan.

Intensive design and planning work is underway in my Department to produce a detailed intervention strategy for the AMBER area. Following a public consultation process on the draft Intervention Strategy this summer, I hope to move to formal procurement phase towards the end of this year in order to select a preferred bidder or bidders. I expect the physical build of the network to begin in late 2016, and it will take 3-5 years to fully complete – depending on the details of the bid or bids selected. This complex and ambitious project is a key priority for Government. It aims to conclusively address current connectivity challenges in Ireland such as those identified by the IBEC Midwest and Kerry Regional Executive.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

252. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if, in anticipation of the 2030 European Union effort-sharing decision on transport emissions reductions, he will outline the specific proposals by his Department on ensuring the domestic fleet of cars, vans and lorries adapt to ensure the meeting of new standards; the policy measures proposed in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23839/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Negotiations are currently underway at EU level to agree greenhouse gas (GHG) mitigation targets for the period from 2021 to 2030. To ensure that Ireland can effectively and equitably contribute to this process, a low-carbon development strategy is being developed for the period to 2050. As part of this strategy, a National Policy Position was published in April 2014 and a Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill is currently progressing through the Dáil.

The National Policy Position clarifies the level of GHG mitigation ambition envisaged for Ireland and the legislation sets out proposed statutory obligations in relation to the development of a National Mitigation Plan. The Plan will incorporate four key sectors - electricity generation, the built environment, transport and agriculture. These sectors will contribute to the commitment in the National Policy Position to achieve an aggregate emissions reduction of 80% by 2050. Similarly, the anticipated Effort Sharing Decision in respect of 2030 will provide for an aggregate reduction across these sectors. There will not be a specific target for each sector individually.

In relation to meeting standards, I presume the Deputy is referring to EU legislation that sets mandatory emission reduction targets for new cars. This law requires that new cars must not emit more than an average of 130 grams of CO₂ per kilometre by 2015. By 2021, phased in from 2020, the fleet average to be achieved by all new cars is 95 grams of CO₂ per kilometre. As standards are regulated at EU level and the compliance rests with manufacturers, there is no requirement to provide measures at a national level for meeting these standards. However, the policy objective to reduce CO₂ emissions is reflected in our charging system for private vehicle motor tax and VRT, which will continue to differentiate in favour of the most environmentally friendly vehicles.

Cycling Facilities Provision

253. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when planning permission was sought by the National Transport Authority for a cycle route between Dublin and Leixlip in County Kildare; if submitted, the current status of the application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23994/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): This project is part of the Dublin to Galway Greenway. As the National Transport Authority is an agency under the aegis of my Department I have forwarded your question to them for direct response.

If you have not received a response within 10 working days please contact my private office.

Cycling Facilities Provision

254. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when funding for greenways is next likely to become available; if all funding currently available for same is committed until the end of the 2015 calendar year or the 2016 calendar year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23995/15]

255. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if multinationals, based locally, have been approached within the context of the provision of additional funding for greenways, with particular reference to the proposed Dublin to Leixlip, County Kildare cycle route; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23996/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 254 and 255 together.

Cycleways/greenways across the country are, generally speaking, delivered by Local Authorities either using their own resources; from funding awarded to local authorities under my Department's funding calls; or through a mixture of both. Opportunities can also arise for Authorities to secure funding under EU Programmes such as the EU Structural Funds Programme

2014-2020, Interreg and the Rural Development Programme. Smaller local projects may access funding from the LEADER Programme.

To date no consideration has been given by my Department to multinational companies making any contribution towards the delivery of cycling infrastructure, including the route mentioned by the Deputy. However, large employers are encouraged to develop Work Place Travel Plans which would involve incentivising staff to cycle to and from work through engagement in the Cycle to Work Scheme and provision of on site bike parking and shower facilities.

All current funding available to my Department for the delivery of cycleways/greenways is fully committed up until 2016. Details of all projects funded under the recent tranche of the National Cycle Network funding programme and the Government Stimulus package can be viewed on www.smartertravel.ie. Given the success of the projects delivered to date, it is possible that funding may become available from other sources over the coming years, including the programmes mentioned above. However, I am currently not in a position to comment with any certainty on future funding.

Sports Events

256. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he continues to liaise with the various international sporting bodies, with a view to attracting major sporting events to this country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24037/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): The hosting of major sports events can deliver additional international visits and helps to put Ireland onto travel itineraries as a holiday destination. The hosting last year of the Giro d'Italia on an all-island basis showed that the island of Ireland can successfully host such events and the FAI and Dublin City Council also recently won their bid to host part of the UEFA Euro 2020 tournament at the Aviva stadium.

Accordingly, I am supportive of the ongoing efforts of the Tourism Agencies and the National Governing Bodies of Sport, where appropriate in conjunction with their colleagues in Northern Ireland, to attract international events, subject, of course, to an assessment of the costs/benefits involved.

The Government assisted the IRFU in its successful bid to host the Women's Rugby World Cup in 2017 and, as the Deputy is aware, the Government and the Northern Ireland Executive announced our support last December for the preparation of a joint bid for the Rugby World Cup in 2023. The bid has the full support of both Governments and we will be working very closely with the IRFU to ensure that the best possible bid is lodged with World Rugby to bring the Rugby World Cup to Ireland in 2023.

Our tourism and sporting infrastructure are amongst the finest in Europe and are well capable of providing the modern facilities required by participants and spectators alike. We will continue to look for opportunities to both grow tourism and develop sport in Ireland by hosting major events with real overseas revenue-generating potential.

Road Network

257. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the

extent to which he and his Department continue to monitor deficiencies in the national road network system, with particular reference to identifying under-capacity on motorways, including the M50, with a view to initiating remedial measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24038/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual national road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects (including the monitoring of motorway network capacity) is a matter in the first instance for the NRA in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Projects

258. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he is mindful of the requirements for the upgrading of the Naas - Newbridge - Sallins bypass and the Osberstown interchange - Monread Road roundabout in County Kildare, with a view to addressing the issue in the short term, in view of the likely economic benefit to the immediate area and the country at large, in terms of the alleviation of traffic congestion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24039/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding regarding the national roads programme. The construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads is a matter for the National Roads Authority under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007, in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. With regard to the Osberstown interchange and the Sallins bypass the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources, supplemented by State road grants. The reality is that the available funds do not match the amount of work that needs to be done to maintain existing road infrastructure or address demands for new road improvement projects.

Funding this year is around €730 million for the national, regional and local road network. Unfortunately, the current financial realities are such that the budgets proposed for my Department for 2016 and 2017 indicate that capital funding will continue to be very tight, and my ability to progress new projects is limited. I acknowledge it is important to restore over time capital funding for the transport sector to ensure that infrastructure is maintained but, as of now, I am not in a position to give a commitment in regard to funding of the projects in question, although I acknowledge their national and local importance.

Tourism Promotion

259. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he and his Department continue to promote Ireland as a conference venue, in view of the likely economic benefit, including job creation and tourism; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [24040/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The matter raised is an operational matter for the Board and management of Fáilte Ireland in the first instance, working with Tourism Ireland, which promotes the island of Ireland as a visitor destination overseas including through its network of overseas offices. I have referred the matter to Fáilte Ireland and, in relation to activities in overseas markets, Tourism Ireland, for direct reply to the Deputy. Please contact my private office if replies are not received within ten working days.

Sports Events

260. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he and his Department continue to promote the hosting of the Rugby World Cup in this country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24041/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Government and the Northern Ireland Executive announced our support last December for the preparation of a joint bid for the Rugby World Cup in 2023. The IRFU, with support of both Governments, soon after commenced work on compiling the bid. In that context, the Irish Government, the Northern Ireland Executive and the IRFU announced the appointment of the Chairman, Vice Chairman, Bid Ambassador and a number of board members to the RWC 2023 Bid Oversight Board on 14th May last. The Oversight Board will approve bid strategy, oversee progress, liaise with the IRFU and both Governments, and ensure the delivery of a ‘world class’ bid to host RWC 2023 in Ireland.

Dick Spring, former Tánaiste and Irish rugby international, has been appointed as Chair, and Dr. David Dobbin, Group Chief Executive, Dale Farm has appointed as Vice-Chair. The Bid Ambassador will be former Ireland rugby captain, Brian O’Driscoll. Other board members include Hugo MacNeill, former Irish rugby international and Chair of the cross-border RWC working group, Philip Browne, Chief Executive of the IRFU, Páraic Duffy, Director General, GAA and Shane Logan, CEO Ulster Rugby.

The Chair, Vice chair and other nominees met on 10th June to agree its schedule of meetings and work programme. Further appointments to the Board will be made over the coming months. The bid has the full support of both Governments and we will be working very closely with the IRFU to ensure that the best possible bid is lodged with World Rugby to bring the Rugby World Cup to Ireland in 2023.

Public Transport Review

261. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which commuter rail services are available to the majority of towns and villages, the residents of which may expect to commute daily to larger centres, where there are greater job opportunities; if the existing services are adequately tailored to meet their needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24042/15]

262. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which a study has been done of the public transport sector in County Kildare, with particular reference to the need to address any deficiencies in respect of the daily frequency of rail and bus services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24043/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 261 and 262 together.

The issues raised are matters for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with the transport providers 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.

Regional Airports Closures

263. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he expects regional airports to continue to play a major role in providing the required level of connectivity on transatlantic, European, or other routes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24044/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): With the development in recent years of the major interurban roads programme and improvements to the rail network providing domestic connectivity, regional airports are now being viewed as being important because of the level of international connectivity they bring to a region for the tourism and business sectors. That connectivity, which is primarily European in nature, is seen as being a significant contributory factor underpinning Ireland's economic recovery and sustainable development into the future. In relation to transatlantic routes, the two PSO air services from Donegal and Kerry Airports to Dublin Airport offer a possible link to transatlantic routes from that Airport and I am also aware that a transatlantic charter service will operate into Ireland West Airport Knock this August. Ireland's National Aviation Policy, which I expect to publish before the summer recess, confirms that the regional airports at Donegal, Knock, Kerry and Waterford are being given the opportunity to grow to a viable, self-sustaining position, particularly considering the contribution they make to their regional and local economy. As a result, the Policy provides that Exchequer support (OPEX and CAPEX) for the regional airports will be continued, where appropriate. Such supports will be in accordance with the 2014 EU Guidelines on State aid to airports and airlines and Ireland's 2015 - 2019 Regional Airports Programme. It is up to those airports being supported to exploit all opportunities to expand their level of connectivity to other regions.

Transport Infrastructure Provision

264. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he continues to study the best means of providing transport infrastructure, with particular reference to the funding of major projects, whether by public private partnership or otherwise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24045/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The evaluation of transport infrastructure investment, including how best to fund the provision of infrastructure, is a constant process within my Department and its agencies. This work is a vital aspect of ensuring value for money is achieved. As an aid to developing capital investment plans, work on an evidence-based framework to guide key land transport investment decisions has been undertaken. This work, which will be set out in a forthcoming report "Investing in Our Transport Future" considered the issue of potential alternative sources of funding.

The most important source of non-Exchequer transport funding to date has been through Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Programmes and the Exchequer already has significant forward commitments relating to the road network in the form of availability payments to remu-

nerate private investment in PPP projects that are not tolled. Consideration of additional use of the PPP mechanism must be cognisant that any such further commitments will reduce the funding available in the future to meet basic infrastructure maintenance and upkeep requirements and will limit future potential for investment in necessary capacity development.

Alternative funding sources will, of course, continue to be used as appropriate, such as in the case of European Investment Bank funding which is providing a loan to part-fund the current Luas Cross City Project, and every effort will be made to maximise draw-down from EU funding programmes and to access EIB loans although such alternative, additional sources of funding are likely to be limited in the short to medium term. Furthermore, “Investing in Our Transport Future” emphasises that a major part of our funding challenge is with regard to maintenance requirements which are more challenging to fund through alternative mechanisms.

Tourism Industry

265. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the full extent of growth within the tourism sector, with particular reference to the total number of persons employed, and the scope for further development resulting in employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24046/15]

266. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he and his Department continue to identify expansion opportunities for the tourism sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24048/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 265 and 266 together.

CSO overseas tourism figures for 2014 show that there were over 7.6 million overseas visits to Ireland, an increase of 9% on 2013 and the fourth successive year of growth. Figures for early part of 2015 show this strong performance continuing with good growth being recorded in visit numbers and revenue from all of our main overseas markets. In terms of employment, the most recent CSO Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) data shows that, in the final quarter of 2014, the seasonally adjusted number of persons employed in the accommodation and food services sector was 135,600. This represents 23,000 additional jobs compared with the same period in 2011, when this Government took office. This 20% increase in employment shows the success of the measures introduced by the Government to support the tourism sector, including the 9% VAT rate, the setting of the air travel tax to zero, initiatives like the Gathering, and major investments such as the Wild Atlantic Way.

Of course, the overall level of employment in the tourism sector is wider than accommodation and food service, with employment in transport, visitor attractions, tour operators, and retail all benefitting from higher levels of overseas and domestic tourism. Fáilte Ireland estimates that the total level of employment in the tourism sector is in the region of 200,000.

The Government’s Tourism Policy Statement “People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025”, as published earlier this year, contains three key goals to be achieved by 2025. Specifically:

- there will be 250,000 people employed in tourism;
- Ireland will welcome ten million overseas visits compared with 7.6 million in 2014; and
- overseas visitor revenue, net of any inflation effect, will be €5 billion compared with €3.5

billion in 2014.

The Tourism Policy Statement set out a range of policy objectives to achieve these targets. I will shortly announce the members of a Tourism Leadership Group who will oversee the preparation of a three-year Tourism Action Plan that will set out specific actions required in the period up to 2018 in order to achieve the policy objectives.

Sport and Recreational Development

267. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding funding for football (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24081/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Irish Sports Council, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the promotion, development and co-ordination of sport, including the allocation of funding for the National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) which includes the Football Association of Ireland. As this question is a matter for the Irish Sports Council, I have referred it to the Council for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

Departmental Correspondence

268. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when a final reply will issue further to an interim response (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24110/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A full response to the representations has been issued from my office this week.

Transport Infrastructure Provision

269. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update regarding the north Dublin transport study; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24117/15]

270. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update regarding plans to increase public transport access between Dublin city centre and Dublin Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24118/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 269 and 270 together.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) have been carrying out technical reviews of all the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) public transport projects, including those for the Airport-Swords corridor, and I am awaiting delivery of their report and recommendations. The NTA anticipate delivering this work by the end of June.

Following receipt and assessment of the documentation, I will then make my decision regarding public transport investment priorities in the GDA by the end of the summer.

Road Safety

271. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to further roll-out the red light camera system in Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24119/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware I launched Ireland's first automated red light camera system at the Blackhall Place-Benburb Street junction in Dublin 7 on 4 June. The new system will see motorists who break the red traffic lights and put themselves, and passengers and drivers of passing Luas trams at huge risk, automatically receive three penalty points for commission of the offence. The matter of a further roll-out of the Red Light Camera System in Dublin is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) which has statutory responsibility for the implementation and development of infrastructure projects in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), including Luas light rail projects.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within ten working days.

Light Rail Projects

272. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to upgrade some of the older DART trains; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24120/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and the overall funding of public transport.

Responsibility for the development of public transport infrastructure and services in the Greater Dublin Area, including the upgrading of DART trains, is a function of the National Transport Authority (NTA). Noting this I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Public Transport

273. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to combat anti-social behaviour on Dublin Bus routes and to ensure the safety of drivers and passengers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24121/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The safety and security of drivers and passengers including arrangements to deal with anti-social behaviour on Dublin Bus is a matter for Dublin Bus in conjunction, as appropriate, with the Garda Síochána and I have forwarded the Deputy's Question to Dublin Bus for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Sports Funding

274. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on the amount of the State funding to the Football Association of Ireland that is ring-fenced for junior leagues and on spending to develop the sport among young persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24206/15]

275. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on the amount of the State funding to the Football Association of Ireland that is ring-fenced for the League of Ireland through prize money and grants to clubs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24207/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 274 and 275 together.

The Irish Sports Council, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the promotion, development and co-ordination of sport, including the allocation of funding for the National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs). This includes funding to the Football Association of Ireland.

As this question is a matter for the Irish Sports Council, I have referred it to the Council for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

Sports Funding

276. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the conditions his Department puts on payments to the Football Association of Ireland and other sporting bodies when awarding grants from the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24209/15]

277. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide in tabular form the amount of State funding to the Football Association of Ireland in each of the past seven years. [24210/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 276 and 277 together.

Current, which includes programme, expenditure grants to the FAI from my Department's Vote are allocated by the Irish Sports Council. The Council, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the promotion, development and co-ordination of sport, including the allocation of funding for the National Governing Bodies of Sport and associated governance procedures.

Insofar as it relates to current expenditure grants by the Irish Sports Council, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Council for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply on that element of his question is not received within 10 days.

Under the Sports Capital Programme the FAI received allocations from the Department for equipment in 2008, 2010, 2012 and 2014 of €400,000, €500,000, €220,000 and €360,000 respectively, totalling €1,480,000. The terms and conditions of the SCP include requirements including the submission of three quotations, paid invoices, proof of payment of invoices in the form of bank statements, and tax clearance certificates for the grantees and the suppliers.

Beit Collection

278. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will intervene to avoid the loss of artworks to Ireland and to intervene in the sale of five masterpieces (details supplied) left in trust for the benefit of the Irish people by Sir Alfred and Lady Beit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23975/15]

280. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on the recent press report regarding the Alfred Beit Collection (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24019/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 278 and 280 together.

The issue in relation to the sale of artworks referred to in the Questions are matters for the committee of management of the Alfred Beit Foundation which owns and operates Russborough House. My Department has no function in relation to the administration or sale of these artworks.

However, I did meet last night with the Chair of the Alfred Beit Foundation and two other Trustees. I asked the Chair if it would be possible to delay the sale, or to consider withdrawing the paintings from auction, to provide some time to explore all other possible options that would involve my Department and the Office of Public Works. The Trustees declined to either delay or cancel the sale, citing the fact that they would incur a liability of £1.4 million for breaking an agreement with the auction house handling the sale, with which they entered a contract several months ago.

I was only informed last month of the decision in relation to the sale - several months after the Foundation had entered into an agreement with the auction house to have the paintings sold. The fact remains that my Department does not have the discretionary funds necessary - believed to be in the order of €12 million - to buy the paintings. I will continue to see if any other possible options can be explored. This, however, will be very difficult given that the sale is to proceed next month.

Departmental Funding

279. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her Department will help fund a project (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23988/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department has not received any proposals relating to the project referred to by the Deputy and it is not possible, therefore, to assess precisely what is involved. Whilst it is recommended good practice to conduct studies of the type referred to before contemplating works to a site of this nature, I regret that all funding available to my Department for these purposes in 2015 is, in any event, already committed to other priority work. I am not, therefore, in a position at present to offer assistance to any other projects.

Question No. 280 answered with Question No. 278.

Departmental Funding

281. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she has considered a small capital scheme for arts venues; if so, when details of the scheme together with the announcement will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24061/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am considering a small capital grant scheme for 2015 along the lines of those which operated in previous years. I hope to announce details shortly.