

## Written Answers.

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

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*Questions Nos. 1 to 10, inclusive, answered orally.*

### **National Roads Authority Projects**

11. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will seek to have the N20 motorway upgrade between Limerick and Cork included in the Government's forthcoming capital plan; and if he views this upgrade as a national priority. [31940/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads, is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual national road projects is a matter for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Due to the national financial position, there have been very large reductions in roads expenditure over the past number of years. Funding in 2008 was €2.3 billion while funding this year is around €764 million for the national, regional and local road network. The reality is that available funds fall well short of the amount of work that could be undertaken.

Taking into account our obligations under the EU fiscal rules, capital budgets are expected to continue to be tight for the next number of years and this will limit the scope for progressing new projects over and above the PPP programme currently under way. While, therefore, I know that it is important to restore capital funding for the transport sector to ensure that land transport infrastructure is maintained, and renewed to support economic development, I recognise that it will take some years for capital funding to build back up from the current constrained level to more appropriate levels.

### **State Bodies Property**

12. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he received any correspondence containing concerns or queries as to the manner in which the sale process of the CIE site at Tara Street, Dublin 2, was conducted; if he has received any correspondence from third parties in relation to same; his contact with the board of CIE in relation to this correspondence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31955/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Property dis-

posals are a matter for CIE who are required to dispose of property in accordance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. As part of her annual report to me under the Code of Practice, the CIE Chair reports to me on the carrying out of all appropriate procedures for asset disposals by CIE. The last report was received by me on 30th April last.

As to specific correspondence relating to the property mentioned, I have received no correspondence from third parties relating to this issue. In the case of CIE, I do receive regular summaries of decisions made and important issues discussed at CIE Board meetings. In the summary record received of the Board meeting of 1 July 2015, a decision was reported on the identification of a successful bidder in respect of the Tara Street site.

### **Rail Network**

13. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update on any plans to upgrade public transport from Dublin city centre to Dublin airport and Swords, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31953/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I refer the Deputy to my response to Priority Question No. 1.

### **Harbour Authorities**

14. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the activities for which the Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company must seek consent before engaging in; if he is satisfied that the company acts within both the letter and the spirit of the law in terms of seeking consent and consulting with him; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31918/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Harbours Acts require port companies to seek my consent for certain activities including the establishment of any subsidiary company, investment in undertakings (other than a subsidiary) greater than €1.27m, and borrowings.

In addition, 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 (the State Body) ... engages” and also, where any joint venture is proposed.

My Department has been consistently clear with the Company that it should seek Ministerial consent both under the Harbours Acts and the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies in respect of any intended action which would extend or change significantly the nature, scope or scale of the activities in which it engages, and, in relation to borrowings it proposes to undertake.

### **Transport Regulation**

15. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to provide regulations for the operation of non-traditional private for hire transport, such as Uber or rickshaws, in towns and cities here given recent local and international concerns about the security of passengers and the standards applied to such services. [31948/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I have been advised by the National Transport Authority (NTA) that Uber is licensed as a taxi dispatch operator, which is essentially a booking service. I understand that Uber has given an assurance to the NTA that it will use only licensed vehicles and licensed drivers and the NTA will monitor this position. On this basis the NTA are satisfied that the Uber model in Ireland is compliant with the prevailing legislation.

At present, there is no legislation in place to regulate the carriage of passengers by rickshaws. Rickshaws fall within the definition of ‘pedal cycle’ for the purposes of the Road Traffic Acts, as defined in section 3 of the Road Traffic Act 1961. As such, they are obliged to obey the Road Traffic Acts and any regulations made under them, in the same way as other cyclists.

Rickshaws by their nature operate at a local level. Local authorities regulate many activities at local level through bye-laws made under local government regulation. In response to concerns, primarily health and safety, Dublin City Council (DCC), following a consultation process with relevant stakeholders, have prepared draft bye-laws under the Local Government Act 2001 to regulate the operation of rickshaws. It is my understanding that DCC, subject to receipt of certain legal clarifications, intend to bring the draft bye-laws, which would provide for a licensing regime for rickshaws, before the next meeting of the Strategic Policy Committee of the Council for their consideration.

### **Hotel Accommodation**

16. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on the increasing cost of renting hotel rooms; if he intends to address these increased costs given their possible negative impact on tourism figures and given the special low rate of value added tax for the hospitality industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31807/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The improved viability of the hotel sector is very welcome not least because it is a large employer and significant contributor to the economy. Giving the tourist a good value for money product has been key to the turnaround in tourism performance. Having survived difficult times, accommodation providers are entitled to a fair return on investment and, overall, Fáilte Ireland analysis indicates that our hotel prices still compare favourably to those of our international competitors. However, increasing returns must be done at an appropriate rate and in a sustainable way that visitors perceive as reasonable and does not jeopardise the recovery.

The Government has introduced a range of measures to enhance and sustain Irish tourism’s competitiveness and help regain our reputation internationally as a good value destination. Encouragingly, Fáilte Ireland research shows a very significant improvement since 2010 in overseas visitors’ perception of value for money in Ireland. However, we cannot become complacent about this improvement in the tourism sector and in hotel performance.

It took the combined efforts of Government and the tourism industry to rebuild competitiveness and consequently grow business. We must be constantly aware of how badly our visitors’ view of value for money deteriorated over the past decade. To keep on growing in a sustainable way, we must continue to offer memorable, good quality, good value hospitality to our tourists. If the sector does not strive to remain competitive and offer value to the visitor, it will not only risk losing the gains it has made but also make it very difficult for Government to continue to support tourism the way it has, when so many other sectors also seek support.

As regards recent rises in room rates, the hotel industry is no different to other sectors regarding the economics of supply and demand. Rates tend to rise at times of high demand, when supply is constricted, whereas the best value tends to be secured off-peak, mid-week or when booking well in advance. In this context, I am aware of emerging accommodation capacity constraints, in particular in Dublin, which will need to be addressed over the coming years if we are to remain competitive.

### **Road Network**

17. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he recognises the great socio-economic benefits that would derive from the construction of the new N22 Cork-Kerry road; if he is aware of the appalling rate of fatalities and serious injury on the stretch of road in need of replacement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31920/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads, is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual national road projects is a matter for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Due to the national financial position, there have been very large reductions in roads expenditure over the past number of years. Funding in 2008 was €2.3 billion while funding this year is around €764 million for the national, regional and local road network. The reality is that available funds have fallen well short of the amount of work that could be undertaken.

The Government will publish a new Capital Plan shortly. This Plan will take into account the maintenance and strengthening needs of the national, regional and local road network in order to ensure that the existing network is fit for purpose in meeting the needs of the travelling public and of industry and businesses. It will also take account of the need to upgrade certain roads to improve access to poorly served regions, for large scale employment proposals, to complete missing links and to address critical safety issues. I am happy that the Plan will represent a positive response to meeting these various needs.

### **Military Aircraft Landings**

18. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport in relation to the exemptions granted by his Department regarding civil aircraft used by foreign militaries under the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973, if his Department undertakes any particular measures to ensure that, with regard to aircraft which secure exemptions to carry unloaded weapons on board, any weapons carried on board are indeed unloaded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31811/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** About 90% of the exemptions granted under the 1973 Order in 2014 were granted to US commercial airlines for flights carrying the unloaded personal weapons of the US troops on board. From time to time exemptions are also granted to European airlines for flights carrying the personal weapons of European troops on board. When applying for such exemptions the airlines specify that the weapons are unloaded at all times and that there is no ammunition on board the aircraft.

The airlines concerned and the defence forces using such aircraft have strict rules regarding the carriage of weapons, which specify that they must be unloaded at all times.

I have no reason to doubt that these rules are being complied with by these airlines. Any information that suggests otherwise should be brought to the attention of the appropriate authorities.

### **Rail Network**

19. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for the interconnect rail link between Dublin airport and Dublin city centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31938/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I refer the Deputy to my response to Priority Question No. 1.

### **Irish Airlines Superannuation Scheme**

20. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he or his officials have been briefed or have been party to any formal or informal meetings with either trade unions or the management of the Dublin Airport Authority regarding problems with the newly established defined contribution pension scheme following the closure of the Irish airlines superannuation scheme, a process in which his Department had been involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31810/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** In accordance with Section 32(1) of the Air Navigation and Transport (Amendment) Act 1998 (as amended), my Department conveyed my approval, with consent from the Minister of Public Expenditure and Reform, to daa for the establishment of a new defined contribution scheme.

My Department receives periodic briefings from daa and these sometimes include matters in relation to pensions. My officials were informed of some challenges that the Trustee Board is encountering in concluding the required standard procurement processes for an investment adviser to the trustees which has regrettably delayed the selection of new investment strategies and funds. I understand that the Trustee is working with daa and the unions to resolve this matter.

Ultimately, the resolution of any issues in relation to the scheme referred to by the Deputy is a matter for the Trustees, daa and the scheme members.

### **Bus Éireann Services**

21. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on the new Bus Éireann buses, which reportedly cannot navigate some streets of a major Irish town and have led to concerns by staff and trade unions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31808/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Bus Éireann is in the process of upgrading its fleet with more modern and higher capacity vehicles, across the route network. Some of the new double deck coaches are slightly longer than older fleet, and

provide additional capacity and legroom for passengers, over existing coaches.

These new High Capacity LD 300 Double Deck Coaches are part of an overall €25m investment project, funded by the National Transport Authority (NTA). To date, 12 of these buses have been purchased for use on services in the East, and were added to the fleet earlier this year.

I am advised by Bus Éireann that the company regularly carries out route risk assessments with new vehicles, to identify any hazards or pinch point locations where new buses will be operating and that these assessments have been carried out on Route 133 Wicklow/Dublin route and Route 109 Dublin – Navan – Kells - Cavan. Further route assessments on the remaining commuter corridors are also taking place.

The company has confirmed to me that contrary to recent media reports, the new high capacity coaches are suitable for operation on these routes.

Bus Éireann recently commenced driver training with these vehicles, and the coaches will be introduced on routes across the Greater Dublin Area in the coming weeks.

### **Rail Network**

22. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on his decision to abandon plans to progress the DART underground project for Dublin; if he will provide an explanation of the reason he favours the Luas connection to the airport over alternative rail projects; the details of the business case for this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31943/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I refer the Deputy to my response to Priority Question No. 1.

### **Rail Services**

23. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to deal with overcrowding on the DART during peak times; if Irish Rail has looked for more funding to provide more trains and carriages during peak times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31954/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I understand that the National Transport Authority and Iarnród Éireann are actively examining a proposal to increase the DART frequency to 10 minutes in the peak commencing early in 2016 to improve the service to customers and that the necessary funding issues involved are being considered at present. I would point out that I have secured additional funding for rail both this year and last year. For the first time since 2008, the level of PSO funding for rail services is being maintained in 2015 at the same level as in 2014. I was also able to secure an additional €101 million in funding for our public transport companies in a Supplementary Estimate at the end of last year, which included €45 million for Irish Rail's network renewal investment. In July this year, I also announced an additional €100 million for my Department's capital programme. Of this, €29m will deliver much needed maintenance on rail rolling stock and a further €9m is being allocated towards the Rail safety programme.

I will continue to seek necessary PSO funding and increased investment in our rail network to enhance the customer experience.

## State Airports

24. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the positive effect the national aviation policy will have on Shannon Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31802/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The National Aviation Policy (NAP) sets out a range of actions aimed at enhancing connectivity and promoting the growth and development of the aviation sector in Ireland. The policy recognises the geographic and infrastructure characteristics that differentiate the respective roles of the three State airports, and the differing challenges and opportunities that exist for them. Specifically in relation to Shannon, the NAP confirms that the role of Shannon Airport as a tourism and business gateway to its region, particularly with regard to the development of key niche markets, will be supported by my Department.

In addition, the development of the International Aviation Services Centre, which is already being progressed by Shannon Group, will be encouraged. Shannon is also designated as a 'Centre of Excellence' for Business Aviation.

While the NAP has identified many opportunities for Shannon, it is a matter for the airport itself to attract new business in partnership with the relevant regional, tourism and industry bodies. I believe that the NAP provides a progressive framework for the development, growth and enhancement of Shannon Airport and indeed our entire aviation sector.

## Road Projects Status

25. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the long-awaited new N22 Cork-Kerry road will be prioritised for construction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31919/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads, is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual national road projects is a matter for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act. Due to the national financial position, there have been very large reductions in roads expenditure over the past number of years. Funding in 2008 was €2.3 billion while funding this year is around €764 million for the national, regional and local road network. The reality is that available funds have fallen well short of the amount of work that could be undertaken.

The Government will publish a new Capital Plan shortly. This Plan will take into account the maintenance and strengthening needs of the national, regional and local road network in order to ensure that the existing network is fit for purpose in meeting the needs of the travelling public and of industry and businesses. It will also take account of the need to upgrade certain roads to improve access to poorly served regions, for large scale employment proposals, to complete missing links and to address critical safety issues. I am happy that the Plan will represent a positive response to meeting these various needs.

## Rail Services

26. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will

provide an update on the development of plans for the DART project; if he will confirm if this will remain under the auspices of Dublin Bus beyond 2018; and if not, if he will provide the rationale for this. [31952/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The National Transport Authority (NTA) is finalising its preparation of a draft Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) to cover the period 2015 to 2035 in line with its statutory remit. The draft Strategy will provide a framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services in the GDA for the next two decades and it is understood the draft Strategy will include consideration of BRT routes and bus priority measures. I understand that the NTA intends to publish the draft Strategy for public consultation shortly.

With regard to the operation of any BRT service in the GDA, I understand that Dublin Bus will undertake the operation of any new BRT services that may become operational during the period of its public service contract which expires in December 2019.

### **Tourism Project Funding**

27. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is aware of the lack of amenities for tourists in the Malin Head, Errigal and Dún Luiche areas of County Donegal, as well as in other scenic areas in County Donegal; the support he will provide to enable the development of lay-bys, toilets, seating, and rubbish facilities for visitors along scenic routes across County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31947/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring):** While my Department provides the capital funding for investment in tourism propositions such as the Wild Atlantic Way, it is not directly involved in developing or managing these, as this is an operational matter for the Board and management of Fáilte Ireland. That said, the provision of basic public facilities such as lay-bys, toilets, seating and rubbish facilities, is primarily the responsibility of Local Authorities rather than Fáilte Ireland. Indeed, the recent tourism policy statement “People, Place and Policy: Growing Tourism to 2025” highlights the central role of local authorities in developing tourism in their areas, as much through such core services as through development of tourism infrastructure.

The Government is fully committed to the development of tourism in Donegal, which forms an integral part of the Wild Atlantic Way. In addition to the funding already invested in signage on the route and in discovery points such as Sliabh Liag, I recently announced an allocation of €299,000 by Fáilte Ireland to the Commissioners of Irish Lights to develop a new visitor facility building on a site adjacent to Fanad Head Lighthouse. The project will incorporate a new car park as well as facilities for visitors, a ticket desk and an interpretation area. Fáilte Ireland is also in discussion with Donegal County Council as to the future development of facilities at Malin Head as a signature discovery point on the Wild Atlantic Way.

### **Haulage Industry**

28. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will engage with the French authorities to seek compensation for Irish hauliers who suffered losses as a result of strike action in the port of Calais in France; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31939/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Hauliers have



faced considerable difficulties and delays in Calais and Dover in recent months, due to attempts by migrants in Calais to board vehicles to the UK, which was exacerbated by industrial action at the Port of Calais over the summer. The industrial action was settled in September, but I am aware that Irish hauliers still face challenges in Calais. I have raised the issue of the Calais situation with the UK Minister for Transport, the French Minister for Transport and the Commissioner with responsibility for transport. My colleagues, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Justice, have also been liaising with their UK, French and Commission colleagues on the wider issues of migration to the EU.

My Department has liaised with the relevant Member State authorities so that measures are in place to ensure the highest level of security for Irish drivers caught up in delays and also that appropriate measures are taken by UK and French authorities to ensure that enforcement of drivers hours regulations take account of the delay circumstances on both sides of the Channel, and that drivers are not penalised for circumstances beyond their control.

The Irish Road Safety Authority has also stated that it will take a flexible approach to enforcement of drivers' hours where they can prove that they have been delayed in Calais.

I understand that Irish hauliers' representatives are considering seeking damages from the French. This is a matter for the hauliers and my officials will keep the matter under review. I do not intend to lobby the French Government on that specific issue.

### **Community Development Projects**

29. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress to date on the development of the section of the inter-urban greenway between Athlone and Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31921/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, a structured consultation process is ongoing between representatives of the project team tasked with the delivery of the Western section of the Dublin to Galway Greenway and landowners affected by the current preferred route. The consultation process is being led by representatives of Galway County Council and I am expecting a report on this process to be submitted to me by the end of September. I hope that some resolution can be found around the issues that are concerning a number of the affected landowners.

In pursuing this project, the Department is seeking to create a valuable tourism and leisure product, one that is likely to bring significant benefit to all members of the community along the route. The objective of the consultation is to achieve consensus around addressing the concerns of affected landowners and the wider farming community.

Once I have received the report, I will consider the associated findings and, together with my officials, we will ascertain if there is indeed potential for developing the remainder of the greenway to Galway. I will communicate the findings to you and other local representatives in due course.

### **Public Transport Initiatives**

30. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the projected capacity and frequency for the proposed Luas link to Swords, County Dublin via Dublin Airport; if such capacity and frequency levels are appropriate for a region where the

population is expected to increase by 400,000 and given that Dublin Airport intends to dramatically expand passenger numbers; his views on concerns that the route, as presently envisaged, does not interchange with the Connolly-Blanchardstown rail line; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31957/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Decisions in relation to public transport infrastructure to serve the Swords/North Dublin corridor will be announced shortly in the context of the Government's new Capital Plan. This will include a major programme of transport investment for the coming years. In particular, the Plan will set out a comprehensive response to the public transport needs of the Greater Dublin Area, based on the updated analysis carried out by the National Transport Authority over the past year or so, including the North Dublin Transport Study.

It is imperative that we invest in our transport system to ensure that we can meet growing demand and tackle congestion to support economic growth. It is also important that in planning our investment strategy, we plan appropriately so that areas which will see major development and population growth in the future such as Fingal will be properly served by public transport. I am confident that the new capital plan will provide the investment required to meet these objectives.

### **Military Aircraft Landings**

31. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide details of any discussions he has had with the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Justice and Equality and-or Defence in relation to the system of oversight regarding the landing at Shannon Airport of civil aircraft used by foreign militaries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31812/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order, S.I. 224 1973, as amended, provides that no munitions or weapons of war may be carried by an aircraft in Irish airspace without an exemption granted under the Order. The Order applies to civil aircraft. Where such a civil aircraft is being used to carry munitions or weapons of war the airline is required to apply for such an exemption under the order.

For all such applications my Department seeks the views of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in relation to foreign policy issues and the Department of Justice in relation to security issues. If the munitions involved are also classified as 'dangerous goods' the views of the Irish Aviation Authority are sought in relation to aviation safety issues. Should any of these bodies object, an exemption will generally not be granted. A copy of the application is also sent to the Department of Defence for information.

In addition my Department would be in contact with these Departments from time to time in relation to policy and administration matters related to the 1973 Order.

Most recently my Department liaised with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in relation to the petition before the Oireachtas Petitions Committee regarding the use of Shannon Airport and Irish airspace by the US military. Both I and the Minister for Foreign Affairs addressed hearings of the Committee earlier this year and outlined clearly our respective roles in relation to the matter.

## National Roads Authority Projects

32. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport in consideration of the welcome allocation of €4 million in funding this year, the reason for the delays in upgrading and realigning the N59 between Oughterard and Maam Cross; and if he will outline the level of consultation he has had with the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the National Roads Authority. [31924/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), (formerly the National Roads Authority) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to the TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

## Swimming Pool Projects

33. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the provision of a public swimming pool for Kildare North, particularly considering the long delays to date and the recent closure of the pool at the National University of Ireland Maynooth; his views that all efforts need to be made to provide sporting facilities, such as public swimming pools, to local communities to encourage a more active lifestyle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31806/15]

**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.

At a recent meeting with Kildare County Council and local representatives, Kildare County Council agreed to write to me in this matter.

I certainly believe that encouraging and supporting participation in sport for all is most important and have a proud track record on investing in facilities.

## Tourism Policy

34. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to encourage and develop historical tourism interest, focusing on the revolutionary periods of Irish history during and following on from the 1916 Easter Rising centenary year. [31950/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The role of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport in relation to tourism lies primarily in the

area of national policy. The development of historical tourism is an operational matter for the Boards and managements of Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. Accordingly, I have asked the Agencies to reply to the Deputy directly in this regard. Please contact my private office if you do not hear from them within ten working days.

The development of the national commemorative programme in 2016 is the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and I am acutely aware of the commemorative, solemn and respectful nature of many of these events. I believe that it is fundamental to ensure that this is not compromised. However, given the wealth of events planned, many of which will be of interest to international visitors, Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland will work closely with the 2016 Project Office to integrate information about appropriate events into their promotion activities and make them accessible to overseas tourists, as well as identifying further opportunities to work together where appropriate. This will ensure that visitors to Ireland are well informed of the opportunities to experience these events.

### **Coast Guard Station Closures**

35. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will support the reinstatement of the Coast Guard Unit Cliff Rescue Service in An Bun Beag; the other supports he will make available to communities along the Wild Atlantic Way to ensure a high standard of safety is established within the tourism sector, as tourist numbers are set to increase in County Donegal and other counties along the Wild Atlantic Way; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31946/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Coast Guard, a Division of my Department, has monitored the level of cliff rescue call outs responded to by the Bunbeg Coast Guard Unit (CGU). Since the establishment of a cliff rescue service in the late 90s, the Unit has not been called upon to intervene in any lifesaving cliff recovery incident. This level of response does not justify the maintenance of a cliff rescue service, having regard to the risk associated with this activity.

Within County Donegal three volunteer CGUs are trained and equipped to provide cliff rescue services. While in Co. Mayo, the Coast Guard is working with the Office of Public Works with a view to commencing construction of a new purpose built Station in Westport in early 2016, and active consideration is being given to the construction of a new station to replace the existing CGU in Ballyglass. In addition, the Sligo based Coast Guard helicopter is equipped to provide a day and night response to coastal emergencies, in addition to RNLI capabilities.

I am aware of local concerns, on the matter of Bunbeg and of the welcome growth of tourism and the increased level of adventure activities in the area. However, you will appreciate that where a rescue service is provided; every effort must be made to ensure that the benefits outweigh the risks. It is in this context that the maintenance of a cliff rescue team has been deprioritised. The primary duty to ensure the safety of people taking part in adventure activities rests with the provider of these activities.

The Bunbeg Unit continues to be a well-resourced unit and is well equipped to fulfil its designated roles as a shoreline search team and rescue boat unit. I should also clarify that while the Coast Guard will use its best endeavours to coordinate the response to any coastal emergency, the remit of the volunteer Coast Guard service does not extend to being a designated safety provider to adventure and risk taking sports or commercial providers of such services.

## Tourism Policy

36. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is satisfied that Tourism Ireland and Bord Fáilte are promoting all tourism areas equally; his views that a fresh approach should be taken to highlight some of the less well known areas of natural beauty, particularly our offshore islands, in conjunction with the usual tourist hot spots; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31937/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I have no direct role in this matter. These are decisions for Tourism Ireland Limited as the body responsible for promoting the island of Ireland as a visitor destination overseas and Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority, and are not subject to my approval.

I have referred the Deputy's Questions to both agencies, Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

### Public Transport

37. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the report on Transitioning to a Wheelchair Accessible Licensed Bus Sector; if it has been published; and if he has an indicative timeframe for consideration of the report's recommendations. [31923/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the licensing of the Bus and Coach sector under the Public Transport Regulation Act 2009. The NTA recently finalised a report on Transitioning to a Wheelchair Accessible Licensed Bus Sector and submitted it to me. The recommendations of the report are currently being considered by my Department.

### Road Network

38. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport with regard to the proposed N4 Collooney to Castlebaldwin scheme, which is at an advanced stage of planning, if the previously agreed reintroduction of the good will payment will be retrospectively applied to landowners for works already carried out along this route, such as on the N4 Ardloy scheme; and his views that this Deputy is advised by both Sligo County Council and the National Roads Authority that this is ultimately a ministerial decision. [31936/15]

**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 implementation of individual road projects, including communication with landowners, is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), (formerly the National Roads Authority) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to the TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

### Road Network

39. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he expects to be in a position to provide the necessary resources to upgrade

local road networks, in line with the requirements set out by the various local authorities; the degree to which he expects to be in a position to meet a substantial part of such requirements in the current year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31926/15]

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

In February this year, my Department announced the €294m investment programme for regional and local roads. These grants are mainly focused on the maintenance of the existing road network and it is open to Councils to prioritise its works programme each year.

In July this year, an additional €24 million in Stimulus funding was announced for road maintenance. This additional funding will potentially see a further 280kms of regional and local roads improved/maintained in the current year under the Restoration Programme. Local authorities were also permitted to use up to 10% of their additional allocation for Local Improvement Schemes and 20% towards Community Involvement Schemes if they so wish.

All available funding for this year has now been allocated and no further funding is available. It is a matter for the local authority concerned to prioritise works and to select projects that are in line with available resources.

### **Traffic Management**

40. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the proposals of the National Transport Authority and Dublin City Council, contained in the Dublin city transport study, to restrict access to private cars and reduce the number of parking spaces in Dublin city centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31941/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I refer the Deputy to my response to Priority Question No. 1.

### **Public Transport**

41. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the resulting increase in vehicle emissions arising as a result of the cancellation of the Dublin Area Rapid Transit underground has been estimated; if it will factor in to his Department's ongoing preparation of its contribution to the national mitigation plan under the forthcoming climate action and low carbon development act; his views that his Department can possibly meet its proportionate emissions reduction objective in the time frame envisaged; if he will publish the advice he has received on this matter to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31956/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** My Department is fully committed, as part of a national policy and legislative programme, to ensuring that Ireland can effectively and equitably contribute to EU emissions reduction objectives.

As the Deputy will be aware, it is proposed to address greenhouse gas emissions through a National Mitigation Plan, which will incorporate input from the key sectors of electricity gen-

eration, built environment, agriculture and transport. Further to early stakeholder engagement in 2014 and an information exchange with stakeholders in May 2015, my Department is currently examining a suite of measures aimed at delivering cost effective emissions reduction in the transport sector.

These measures will have 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. Public transport projects and investment will be considered within the wider context of developing a multi-faceted, mitigation response from the sector. However, the responsibility for emissions reduction is a collective one and, when all sectoral inputs have been co-ordinated, the draft Plan will be available for extensive public consultation before being submitted for approval to Government.

In relation to the publication of advice on emissions, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) compiles and publishes Ireland's annual greenhouse gas emission inventories and projections. This helps to inform policy development and to allow the Government to assess progress in terms of meeting key targets.

### **Road Network**

42. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he accepts the vital beneficial economic impact of the proposal in respect of the Naas-Newbridge bypass-Newhall interchange-Sallins bypass-Osberstown interchange with a view to early approval, thereby facilitating a vital economic hub, alleviation of traffic congestion and improved health and safety features; if he expects to be in a position to respond favourably in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31925/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads, is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual national road projects is a matter for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Due to the national financial position, there have been very large reductions in roads expenditure over the past number of years. Funding in 2008 was €2.3 billion while funding this year is around €764 million for the national, regional and local road network. The reality is that available funds have fallen well short of the amount of work that could be undertaken.

The Government will publish a new Capital Plan shortly. This Plan will take into account the maintenance and strengthening needs of the national, regional and local road network in order to ensure that the existing network is fit for purpose in meeting the needs of the travelling public and of industry and businesses. It will also take account of the need to upgrade certain roads to improve access to poorly served regions, for large scale employment proposals, to complete missing links and to address critical safety issues. I am happy that the Plan will represent a positive response to meeting these various needs.

### **Redundancy Payments**

43. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the po-

sition regarding entitlement to statutory redundancy in the case where somebody leaves the workplace due to illness or occupational injury; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32442/15]

44. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding entitlement to statutory redundancy in the public service where an employee is retiring due to occupational injury or ill health; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32443/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 43 and 44 together.

The purpose of the redundancy payments scheme is to compensate workers, under the Redundancy Payments Acts, 1967 to 2011, for the loss of their jobs by reason of redundancy. Generally, a redundancy situation arises where an employee's job ceases to exist, and he or she is not replaced for such reasons as rationalisation/reorganisation, not enough work available, the financial state of the firm and company closure. In such circumstances providing certain conditions are met, eligible employees may be entitled to a statutory redundancy payment.

Where an individual employee ceases employment due to illness or occupational injury this is not a redundancy situation. Therefore, there is no entitlement to statutory redundancy in such cases.

### **Carer's Allowance Payments**

45. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the reason payment of carer's allowance has been reduced for a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32342/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** Carer's Allowance (CA) is a social assistance payment made to persons who are providing full-time care and attention to people with disabilities who require full-time care and attention and whose income falls below certain limits.

When an applicant is getting certain social welfare payments and providing full-time care and attention to another person, they can keep their main social welfare payment and get a half-rate CA as well.

The person concerned was awarded a State Pension contributory from 21 August 2015 of €204.00 weekly and an increase for a qualified adult of €186.00 weekly. Accordingly, CA was reduced to half-rate of €119.50 weekly.

### **Illness Benefit Appeals**

46. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an appeal for illness benefit by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32382/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The person concerned was in receipt of illness benefit from December 2008 to August 2013 when he was found capable of work. He appealed the decision and in the meantime received Jobseeker's Allowance up to August 2015. As he did not attend an examination by a Medical Assessor as required as part of the appeal process, the appeal was withdrawn.



A new claim to illness benefit was received on 7 September 2015 in respect of work incapacity from 11 August 2015. It has been decided to award this claim and payment has been made to the date of the latest medical evidence received.

The appeal of the person concerned for the period from August 2013 has been re-opened and the relevant departmental papers have been requested. On receipt of same, the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

### **State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility**

47. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the reason the year that a person turns 66 years of age is not included in the calculations for the yearly average contribution condition for the State pension; the reason a person is charged contributions during this year when they are not reckonable for the State pension; in the event that someone has paid contributions to their 66th birthday which cannot be taken into account, if they can be refunded; whether these contributions can be taken into account where a person requires them to qualify under the yearly average condition; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32383/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** State pension (contributory) entitlement is calculated by the ‘yearly average’ system, where the total number of contributions paid or credited are divided by the number of years of the person’s insurance record. The maximum rate of pension is payable where a person has a yearly average of at least 48, and there are banded entitlements below that.

In calculating the yearly average, the number of full-rate contributions paid and/or credited are counted up to the end of the tax year before reaching pension age (66), and this total is divided by the number of years in their record up to that point. For example, if someone’s record was from 1971, and they turned 66 on 1 July 2015, it would be the contributions they paid or were credited in the period to 31 December 2014, divided by 44 years (i.e. every year from 1971 to 2014). Taking the subsequent period into account to calculate the yearly average could only increase their contributions by a maximum of 26 contributions, and if their yearly average was already higher than that, this would have the effect of reducing their yearly average, rather than increase it, as the amended total would be divided by 45. Given the fact that in most cases, this would result in a lower rather than a higher yearly average, it is to most people’s advantage that the rule should apply as it does now. However, the contributions can still be used to satisfy other contribution conditions (notably the ‘contributions paid’ rule in State pension contributory).

It should be remembered that PRSI does not just fund the State pension contributory and enable people to qualify for that payment, but also working age benefits before they retire. The PRSI system does not make refunds in respect of contributions which do not end up being used to qualify for various payments. To do so would reduce the sustainability of the PRSI system, and require an increase in the rate of contributions, and/or a reduction in the level of payments it funds.

Work is under way to replace the ‘yearly average’ system with a ‘total contributions approach’. Under this approach, the number of contributions recorded over a work life will more closely reflect the rate of pension payment received. It is expected that the total contributions approach to pension qualification will replace the current average contributions test for State pension (contributory) for new pensioners from 2020, although that date is subject to change,

as this is a very significant reform with considerable legal, administrative, and technical challenges to be overcome in its implementation. When proposals are agreed, legislation will be brought forward to underpin the necessary changes.

### Disability Allowance Eligibility

48. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will examine and expedite a disability allowance review in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry, as all relevant medical information has been submitted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32384/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Department routinely reviews ongoing entitlement to all its schemes. The continued eligibility for disability allowance (DA) of the person concerned is currently under review.

In order to complete the medical review, a form will be issued to him within the next few days for completion by his doctor. Once completed by his doctor, the form should be returned to this department for consideration by a deciding officer. It is important that all relevant details and evidence in relation to the person's medical condition and how it affects him is submitted for consideration at this point. It is open to the person in question to submit any evidence that he feels to be relevant. In the meantime, pending completion of the review, the person concerned will continue to receive payment of DA.

### Social Welfare Benefits Waiting Times

49. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide in tabular form the current waiting times for each social welfare payment for the processing of applications by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32385/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** A breakdown of the average time, where available, to award claims during August 2015 is detailed in the following tabular statement.

It should be noted that processing times vary by scheme reflecting the differing requirements to satisfy conditions such as income/means limits and medical eligibility. The processing times provided in the table also incorporate the impact of overall processing times of the appeals process.

#### Average Time to Award Claims August 2015

Scheme	Average Time to Award Claims(Weeks)
Jobseekers Benefit	3
Jobseekers Allowance	3
One-Parent Family Payment	9
State Pension Contributory (Domestic)	4
Widow, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory Pension	2
State Pension Non-Contributory	20
Household Benefits	3

Scheme	Average Time to Award Claims(Weeks)
Free Travel	3
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	1
Family Income Supplement (New Claims)	3
Child Benefit (Domestic and FRA)	2
Child Benefit (EU regulation)	29
Carer's Allowance*	35
Disability Allowance*	32
Domiciliary Care Allowance	15
Invalidity Pension*	21
Illness Benefit	1

\* The average time to award state pension non-contributory, disability allowance, carers' allowance and invalidity pension applications at the end of August was 20, 32, 35 and 21 weeks respectively. New applications for state pension non-contributory are currently decided upon inside 14.5 weeks, disability allowance are currently decided upon inside 9.7 weeks, carer's allowance are currently decided upon inside 16.5 weeks on average and invalidity pension claims are currently decided upon within 3.8 weeks of receipt. The overall average processing times reflect appeals in the system.

### Social Welfare Schemes

50. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her plans to reintroduce the cost of education allowance for back to education allowance students. [32407/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) is designed to support second chance education. It enables social welfare customers in receipt of certain payments to pursue full-time education courses and to continue to receive income support in the form of an allowance. The BTEA is paid for the duration of the course of study, subject to the customer continuing to meet the conditions of the allowance and remaining eligible for a DSP payment. The allowance is paid weekly and replaces the customer's qualifying payment. In general, most customers will also have certain registration and related college fees paid by SUSI.

The operation of the BTEA has been comprehensively revised over the past two years and I have no plans to further revise the current arrangements. Some €150 million has been provided in 2015 to meet the cost of allowances paid by the Department of Social Protection which represents a considerable investment in supporting some 23,000 customers in the past year to acquire skills to re-enter the labour market.

### Long-Term Illness Scheme Applications

51. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the position regarding long-term illness benefit in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32410/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The person concerned is currently in receipt of the maximum personal rate of disability allowance (DA) and this rate has not changed since October 2013. If the circumstances of the person in question

have changed, he should contact the Department as soon as possible so his entitlement may be reviewed.

### **Rent Supplement Scheme Payments**

52. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if and when rent allowance will be restored in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 8; if any documentation remains outstanding in this instance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32415/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The additional information that was sought from the person concerned has now been provided. Consequently all payments of rent supplement that are due to the person concerned have been processed and will now be issued.

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

53. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her plans to allow discretion on the 15-hour week employment exemption under the carer's allowance scheme where it has no impact on the level of care provided; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32420/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** A key qualifying condition for the payment of carer's allowance is that the person receiving care is medically assessed as needing care on a full-time basis, while a person in receipt of carer's allowance can engage in employment, self-employment, training or education outside the home for up to 15 hours per week and still qualify for the payment.

I am satisfied that this strikes a reasonable balance which allows the carer to engage in activity outside the caring environment while still satisfying the need to provide care and attention on a full time basis, and so I have no plans to make any changes in this area.

### **Disability Allowance Payments**

54. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when arrears will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal in respect of a disability allowance claim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32430/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** Disability allowance arrears issued to the person in question by his chosen payment method on 21 September 2015.

### **Invalidity Pension Applications**

55. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be made on an application for invalidity pension by a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32436/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** Invalidity pension

(IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The department received a claim for IP for the person concerned on the 8 September 2015. The claim will be processed as quickly as possible and the person in question will be notified directly of the outcome.

### **Carer's Allowance Applications**

56. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) in County Clare has been refused payment of carer's allowance (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32473/15]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** I confirm that on 19 August 2014 the department received from the person concerned an application for carer's allowance (CA) in respect of two care recipients. The application was refused in respect of both care recipients on the grounds that person concerned was self-employed outside the home for more than 15 hours per week.

He was notified on 5 March 2015 of these decisions, the reasons for it and of his right of review and appeal. The person concerned has appealed this decision to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). All the necessary papers have recently been submitted to the Social Welfare Appeals Office for determination. The SWAO will be in touch with the person concerned in relation to the progress of the appeal.

### **Property Tax Exemptions**

57. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance in relation to home owners living in pyrite effected homes, if he will outline the class of home owners who are entitled to tax exemptions or reliefs; if he will outline in detail any such tax exemptions or reliefs available, and specifically for a person (details supplied); and when the person will be granted any tax relief due. [32475/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that Section 10A of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) provides for a temporary exemption of at least three years from the charge to Local Property Tax (LPT) for residential properties that have been certified under Regulations made by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (S.I. No 147 of 2013) as having "significant pyritic damage".

I am further advised that Revenue administers applications for exemption from LPT for residential properties that have been certified as having "significant pyritic damage". The property owner is specifically required to support a claim for the exemption by submitting a certificate, to Revenue, issued by a competent person as detailed in I.S. 398 Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material Part 1: Testing and categorisation protocol, published by the NSAI. This is the only type of certificate that is relevant under current legislation. Revenue have no discretion to apply an exemption from LPT on foot of any other type of supporting documentation.

A review of the operation of LPT was recently submitted to me by Dr Don Thornhill and is currently being considered by my Department. The review primarily had regard to recent residential property price developments, the overall yield from LPT and the desirability of achiev-

ing relative stability in LPT payments. However it also addressed a number of matters relating to the administration of LPT, including the operation of the pyrite exemption provisions. Any recommendations that are included in the review findings in regard to pyritic damage will be considered in the context of the upcoming Budget. Until then Revenue has no alternative but to apply the eligibility criteria as currently set down.

A resolution to the pyrite issues may necessitate a change in the relevant provisions of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) and/or the Finance (Local Property Tax) (Pyrite Exemption) Regulations 2013. If legislative change is required, then I will examine the possibilities for its advance application on an administrative basis with the Revenue Commissioners.

### **Tax Data**

58. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a list of all documents requested by the European Parliament's TAXE Committee of his Department or of the Revenue Commissioners and in each case to specify if the request was acceded to or refused, with an explanation for each refusal. [32367/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I wish to inform Deputy that the European Parliament's TAXE Committee has not requested any documents from my Department or of the Revenue Commissioners. However, in April of this year, the Chairman of the Committee wrote to Ireland's Permanent Representative to the European Union requesting certain tax information concerning Ireland and I understand that a similar letter was issued to all other EU Member States.

Ireland has issued a detailed response to the Committee's letter which provides information in relation to:

- actions to increase transparency, including arrangements for the exchange of information on cross-border rulings in accordance with EU Directives and proposals to implement the OECD recommendations on country by country reporting,
- changes made to Ireland's rules on company residence in last year's Finance Act,
- Ireland's support for, and participation in, the OECD discussions on BEPS,
- Revenue administrative practice on the issuing of advance opinions, including copies of Revenue's published guidelines in this regard, and
- Ireland's double taxation treaties, including a list of the 72 countries with which Ireland has signed a double taxation treaty.

While the Committee requested details of all tax rulings provided to companies in the period since 1991, Ireland was not in a position to provide this information as taxpayer information is confidential under Irish law and Revenue is prohibited from disclosing specific taxpayer information to third parties. I understand that, for similar reasons, other Member States were also not in a position to provide the Committee with details of rulings provided to specific companies. Ireland advised the Committee that, in responding to the Commission State Aid enquiries in relation to tax ruling practice, with which the Irish authorities have fully cooperated, Revenue had identified that the total number of advance opinions issued to companies on corporation tax was 99 in 2010, 128 in 2011 and 108 in 2012.

In response to the Committee's request for details of information shared with other Member States since 2010 under Article 9 of Council Directive 2011/16/EU on administrative cooperation, the Committee was informed that Ireland had spontaneously exchanged information with other Member States in 29 cases but that we were not in a position to provide details of the information exchanged in each case as this is specific taxpayer information which is confidential under Irish law.

Finally, in response the Committee's request for information in regard to the maintenance of a national list of non-cooperative tax jurisdictions, the Committee was informed that Ireland does not maintain such a list but that, as a member of the Global Forum on Transparency and Information Exchange, Ireland does not seek double taxation treaties with jurisdictions that do not meet the international global standard on transparency and information exchange.

### **Property Tax**

59. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding moneys due for household charges in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32376/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by Revenue that Section 156 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 converted any arrears of Household Charge (HHC) that was still outstanding on 1 July 2013 to a Local Property Tax (LPT) liability of €200 per property and made Revenue responsible for collecting the tax.

Prior to 1 July 2013 collection of HHC was the responsibility of the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) on behalf of the Local Authorities.

I am further advised that any queries in regard to domestic rates, which ceased to apply in 1978, are a matter for the person in question and the relevant Local Authority and Revenue has no role to play in this regard. Also the payment or otherwise of domestic rates has no bearing on the payment of Local Property Tax (LPT) or HHC, both of which are provided for by the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended).

Revenue has confirmed to me that, while the person in question has part paid his HHC liability, there is still a balance outstanding. I am informed that Revenue will make contact with the person in the coming days to discuss the outstanding HHC amount. The Deputy will understand however that it will not be possible for Revenue to offer any advice in regard to domestic rates, or accept any possible historic overpayments against the liability.

### **VAT Rate Reductions**

60. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost to the Exchequer of reducing the VAT rate by 1% and 2%, respectively. [32392/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** As the Deputy is aware, there are a number of VAT rates in operation in Ireland. I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that information on estimated costs of changes to all of the VAT rates can be found in the pre-Budget 2016 Ready Reckoner on the Revenue Statistics webpage: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/ready-reckoner.pdf>.

While the Ready Reckoner does not show all of the specific costings requested by the Deputy, other changes can be estimated on a pro-rata basis with those displayed in the Reckoner. For

example, the full year cost of reducing the 23% VAT rate by 1% is estimated to be €286 million. Further decreases can be estimated on a straight line basis. The figures for the other VAT Rates are included in the Ready Reckoner.

### **Financial Services Regulation**

61. **Deputy Áine Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the regulations which govern the sale of loan-mortgages from an Irish based bank to institutions outside the State. [32408/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** The Deputy will no doubt be aware that borrowers whose loans are sold are protected by the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015 which was enacted in July this year. The purpose of the Act is to ensure that consumers retain the protections they had prior to the sale of their loan. The Act requires entities dealing with the consumer to be authorised by the Central Bank and subject to its Codes of Conduct. Dealing with the consumer is credit servicing and the definition of credit servicing is broad. Owners of loan books who deal directly with consumers, that is, who are servicing their own loan books, will be regulated. Otherwise they can have the loan book serviced by a regulated credit servicing firm.

All consumer and relevant SME loans sold by regulated financial institutions are covered by this Act. Borrowers are therefore restored to the protections they previously had, such as the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA), the Consumer Protection Code and the Code of Conduct for Business Lending to Small and Medium Enterprises. Borrowers who previously had access to the Financial Services Ombudsman also have this right restored by this legislation.

The Central Bank is currently undertaking a consultation process on the Authorisation Requirements and Standards for Credit Servicing Firms and Consequential Amendments to its Codes which closes on 30th September. Included in its proposals are provisions which will ensure that a regulated lender who sells loans subject to the 2012 Consumer Protection Code to an unregulated transferee must, ahead of that sale, identify the firm who will provide the regulated activity of credit servicing for those loans post the sale and provide the requisite notification of their details to the Central Bank and the customer in accordance with Provision 3.11 of the Code.

In addition, it should be noted that the transfer of a loan from one entity to another does not change the terms of the contract or the borrower's rights and obligations under the contract. If a borrower considers that an attempt to change the terms of the contract unilaterally is being made, they should consider seeking independent legal advice. In addition or alternatively, they could make a complaint to the regulated lender or regulated credit servicing firm as appropriate and progress to the Financial Services Ombudsman if the complaint is not resolved to their satisfaction.

### **Flood Risk Insurance Cover**

62. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance the reason insurance companies are permitted to exclude cover for flood damage by using a technology for geo coding-flooding mapping, which results in premises being denied cover which they previously had despite no history of flooding; and the steps he proposes to take to deal with the industry. [32413/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** In my role as Minister for Finance, I have responsibility for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. The provision of insurance cover, the level of premiums charged and the policy terms applied are a matter for individual insurers. Insurance companies make commercial decisions on the



provision of insurance cover based on their assessment of the risks they would be accepting and adequate provisioning to meet these risks. As a matter of course, insurance companies carry out reviews of the risks against which they are prepared to insure and they consider these risks when determining their policies.

The EU framework for insurance expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval or provide systematic notification of certain matters, including general and special policy conditions and scales of premiums.

My officials have consulted with Insurance Ireland regarding the particular issue which the Deputy has raised. Insurance Ireland advised that insurers differentiate between risks by using various tools and data such as geocoding, their own individual company claims data, flood modelling data, secondary data, and the existence of adequate flood defences, etc. Insurers then decide whether to offer cover at normal terms, charge a higher premium, impose a higher excess or exclude flood cover. Insurers make their own individual decisions on whether to offer cover or what terms to apply.

Insurance Ireland operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to obtaining insurance. This service can be contacted at 01 6761914 or by email at [info@insuranceireland.eu](mailto:info@insuranceireland.eu).

### Tax Yield

63. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of Government revenue, on an annual basis, raised by the vehicle registration tax for both domestic and imported motor vehicles since 2004; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32422/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the annual yield from Vehicle Registration Tax in respect of new and used imported vehicles for the period 2004 to 2014 is as follows:

Year	New Vehicles	Used Vehicles	Total
-	€m	€m	€m
2004	889.3	56.7	946.0
2005	1,043.6	105.2	1,148.8
2006	1,135.1	152.3	1,287.4
2007	1,231.8	174.2	1,406.1
2008	927.4	193.4	1,120.8
2009	239.0	136.4	375.4
2010	290.8	92.7	383.5
2011	298.5	89.8	388.4
2012	289.6	89.8	379.3
2013	312.0	125.3	437.3
2014	409.5	132.6	542.1

### Tax Reliefs Eligibility

64. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance whether, to qualify for the foreign earnings deduction, the employee concerned must be employed by an Irish incorporated company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32425/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** Section 823A of the Taxes Consolida-

tion Act 1997 provides for relief from tax on emoluments of certain individuals who are resident in the State for tax purposes but who spend significant amounts of time carrying out the duties of their employment in a relevant state, as defined in that section. It is not a requirement that an employee be employed by an Irish incorporated company in order to avail of the relief.

### **Insurance Industry Regulation**

65. **Deputy Eamonn Maloney** asked the Minister for Finance to indicate the person or body who regulates car insurance charges; the process for granting an increase; his views on whether it is reasonable that a motor insurance company which offers customers a deferred method of payment option over a ten month period, for which it charges administration and interest charges, can also deem it to be a rating factor, like engine size or driving experience; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32440/15]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** In my role as Minister for Finance, I have responsibility for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. The Central Bank of Ireland regulates non-life insurers; however, it does not approve car insurance premiums.

The provision of insurance cover and the price at which it is offered is a commercial matter for insurance companies and is based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept and adequate provisioning to meet these risks. As a matter of course, insurance companies carry out reviews of the risks against which they are prepared to provide insurance and they consider these risks when determining their policies, including insurance premiums.

The EU framework for insurance expressly prohibits Member States adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval or provide systematic notification of certain matters, including general and special policy conditions and scales of premiums.

My officials have consulted with Insurance Ireland regarding the particular issue which the Deputy has raised. Insurance Ireland advised that motor insurers make their own individual decisions on whether to offer cover or what terms to apply. They use a combination of rating factors in doing this such as the age of the driver, the type of car, claims record, driving experience, number of drivers, how the car is used, etc. Insurers do not all use the same combination of rating factors and prices vary across the market.

Insurance Ireland operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to obtaining insurance. They may be contacted at Insurance Ireland, 5 Harbourmaster Place, IFSC, Dublin 1, Telephone +353 1 6761820.

### **Freedom of Information Remit**

66. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will address a matter (details supplied) with regard to the Freedom of Information Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32353/15]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin):** It has been long-standing Government policy that, in general, commercial state bodies should not be subject to FOI requirements. The rationale for this approach is the risk of the uneven competitive market environment that would be created in circumstances where commercial state bodies operating in a competitive market were subject to FOI but their privately-owned market competi-

tors were not. This would be expected to have an adverse impact on the commercial position of the state body in question, which would not be in the public interest or consistent with the need to safeguard the State's economic and financial interests.

Substantial information is, in any event, available on the activities of these commercial companies reflecting their obligations under company law, the information they provide to Government Departments and relevant sectoral regulators which is available for release under FOI or otherwise.

While the FOI Bill was progressing through the Oireachtas, I came to the view, however, having consulted with my Government colleagues, that the rationale for excluding commercial state bodies generally from FOI, as set out above, did not apply to the same extent to certain State Companies which operate in a monopoly market. On that basis, I made amendments to the FOI Bill to provide that Irish Rail and the energy network businesses of ESB Networks, Gas Networks Ireland and EirGrid would be subject to FOI. Those amendments were accepted and provision was made for FOI to apply to those companies under the FOI Act 2014. FOI already applied to Irish Water on the same basis under the 1997 Act and continues to apply.

As the energy network companies and Irish Rail received significantly less advance notice that they were to be made subject to FOI than other bodies who were being made subject to FOI for the first time under the 2014 Act, I agreed that the maximum lead-in time provided for under the Act could be allowed in respect of these bodies to allow them sufficient time to make the necessary administrative arrangements required. I have, therefore, provided by Ministerial Order that FOI will apply to these companies with effect from 14 October 2015.

### **Public Sector Pay**

67. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to set out his plans to legislate for the proposed changes to the pension-related deduction or pension levy, as provided for in the Lansdowne Road agreement; when and the way in which he intends to provide for these changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32364/15]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin):** The proposals for the Lansdowne Road Agreement, which were recently ratified by the Public Services Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, contain a number of measures to reduce the effect of the pay cuts which were imposed on public servants from 2009 to 2013 in response to the financial crisis. These measures include adjustments to the application of the public service Pension-related Deduction (PRD) to the pay of pensionable public servants.

I expect to bring forward legislation shortly to amend the Financial Emergency in the Public Interest Acts 2010 - 2013 to implement the Lansdowne Road Agreement changes. The planned PRD adjustments will be included in this legislation.

### **Flood Risk Assessments**

68. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will arrange for the Office of Public Works to investigate and carry out remedial works to the river (details supplied) in County Kerry to alleviate and eliminate the recent flood incidence which severely damaged business premises; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32371/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Si-**

**mon Harris):** The river concerned does not form part of any Arterial Drainage Scheme which would fall under the remit of the Office of Public Works (OPW) under the 1945 Arterial Drainage Act. The OPW therefore has no responsibility for the maintenance of the channel, nor any authority to carry out works there.

Tralee is one of 300 locations nationwide that is being assessed under the OPW's Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme the purpose of which is to implement the EU Floods Directive and national flood policy. The Programme involves the production of predictive flood risk and hazard mapping for each location, developing preliminary flood risk management options and producing flood risk management plans. Under the Shannon CFRAM Study, draft predictive flood maps for Tralee have been produced and were the subject of a Public Consultation Day in Tralee on 24 March 2015. Data on the recent flood incidence in Tralee will be considered by the Study's engineering consultants before the flood maps are finalised following a national public consultation scheduled to be held later in 2015. Preliminary flood risk management options are being developed for Tralee and will be the subject of a Public Consultation Day in Tralee on 1 October 2015. Further information is available on the Shannon CFRAM website [www.shannoncfрамstudy.ie](http://www.shannoncfрамstudy.ie).

Local flooding issues are a matter, in the first instance, for each Local Authority to investigate and address, and Kerry County Council may carry out flood mitigation 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](http://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.

OPW has recently approved funding of €44,936 to Kerry County Council under this scheme for flood works in Tralee.

### **Flood Risk Assessments**

69. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will arrange for the Office of Public Works to examine the recent recurrence of flood damage to a property (details supplied) in County Kerry; if he will ensure that emergency remedial work is carried out to prevent this recurring; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32375/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris):** The river concerned does not form part of any Arterial Drainage Scheme which would fall under the remit of the Office of Public Works (OPW) under the 1945 Arterial Drainage Act. The OPW therefore has no responsibility for the maintenance of the channel, nor any authority to carry out works there.

Local flooding issues are a matter, in the first instance, for each Local Authority to investigate and address, and Kerry County Council may carry out flood mitigation works using its own resources.

Glenflesk is one of 300 locations nationwide that is being assessed under the OPW's Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme the purpose of which is to implement the EU Floods Directive and national flood policy. The Programme involves the production of predictive flood risk and hazard mapping for each location, developing prelimi-

nary flood risk management options and producing flood risk management plans. Under the South Western CFRAM Study, draft predictive flood maps for Glenflesk have been produced and were the subject of a Public Consultation Day in Glenflesk on 21 October 2014. Data on the recent flood incidence in Glenflesk will be considered by the Study's engineering consultants before the flood maps are finalised following a national public consultation scheduled to be held later in 2015. Preliminary flood risk management options are being developed for Glenflesk and will be the subject of a Public Consultation Day in Glenflesk early in 2016. Further information is available on the South Western CFRAM Study website [www.southwestcframstudy.ie](http://www.southwestcframstudy.ie).

### Office of Public Works Expenditure

70. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to outline the expenditure incurred by the Office of Public Works for the years 2011 to 2015 on drainage works in County Cavan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32447/15]

71. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to outline the details of funding provided by the Office of Public Works to Cavan County Council to carry out drainage works for the years 2011 to 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32448/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 70 and 71 together.

The Office of Public Works (OPW) has incurred expenditure on drainage works in County Cavan in the period in question in respect of both its ongoing programme of maintenance of watercourses and channels under Arterial Drainage Schemes carried out by it in the county and in respect of funding provided to Cavan County Council for works undertaken by the Council under the OPW's Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme.

In relation to arterial drainage maintenance, total expenditure of €1.174m has been incurred on the OPW Boyne, Glyde & Dee and Inny drainage scheme between 2011 and 2015 to date. The yearly breakdown of expenditure is as follows:

Year	€m.
2011	0.293
2012	0.303
2013	0.145
2014	0.255
2015 (to date)	0.178

In 2012 the Office of Public Works approved funding of €110,700 to Cavan County Council for drainage works in County Cavan under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme for projects in Mullagh and Butlersbridge. The Council fully drew down this funding in that year. OPW has incurred no expenditure under the Minor Works Scheme for drainage works in the county in 2011 and 2013-2015.

### Herd Numbers

72. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding an application for a changeover of title on a herd number in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Limerick. [32432/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Regional Veterinary Office has no record of receiving an application form (ER1) for the transfer of a herdnumber from the person concerned. A blank application form has now been issued to her.

### **Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme**

73. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) in County Galway is not receiving the top rate of payment under the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32437/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** My Department has not received an application under any of the TAMS I or TAMS II schemes for the person mentioned.

### **Rural Environment Protection Scheme Payments**

74. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) in County Galway has not received their payment under the rural environment protection scheme for the past two years of the scheme; if this will affect their payments in respect of the green low-carbon agri-environmental scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32438/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** My Department is currently examining approximately 400 cases that submitted invoices from one particular company to verify and support claims under the non-productive capital investment action of AEOS. It is known that in some cases the invoices submitted were for greater amounts than actually paid by the participants. Funding provided under the scheme comes partly from the EU and partly from the National Exchequer. There is a requirement and obligation to ensure that the expenditure claimed by scheme participants reflects the reality of what took place. For that reason my Department wrote to participants requesting alternative proof that the amounts claimed were in fact the amounts paid.

The person named was written to on 11 June 2015, regarding the non-productive capital investment claim submitted. This letter requested submission of alternative verifiable proof for one of the invoices included in the claim. My Department officials are now examining this case on foot of the reply received. A decision on this case will issue to the person named shortly.

To date no approvals have been issued for applications under GLAS.

### **Herd Numbers**

75. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon will be issued with a herd number; the reason for the delay in same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32441/15]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Processing of the application for a flock number from the person concerned will be completed shortly and a letter will issue to him with details of same early next week.

## Air Corps Equipment

76. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Defence the consideration that has been given by his Department to additional replacement and further modernisation of the Air Corps fleet. [32390/15]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The equipment priorities for the Army, Air Corps and the Naval Service will be considered in the context of the lifetime of the recently published White Paper. The White Paper recognises that there are several new and or enhanced platforms to be procured.

In the context of the Air Corps fleet, this includes the replacement of the Cessna fleet with three larger aircraft suitably equipped for Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance tasks. The two CASA 235s Maritime Patrol Aircraft are due for replacement in 2019. The CASA's will be replaced with consideration of their replacement with larger more capable aircraft to enhance maritime surveillance and to provide a greater degree of utility for transport and cargo carrying tasks. The existing Pilatus PC9 aircraft are not due for replacement until 2025.

The current EC 135 and AW 139 helicopter fleet in the Air Corps will continue to deliver the required Defence Forces support and other support capabilities over the lifetime of the White Paper.

## Naval Service Operations

77. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Defence the reason the Navy Service turned down a request from An Garda Síochána to assist in a search operation (details supplied) in County Mayo; the reason the Naval Service is not automatically involved in every search mission at sea; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32450/15]

78. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Defence the number of fishing patrols undertaken by the Naval Service off the North Mayo coast to date in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32451/15]

79. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Defence the number of occasions the Naval Service was deployed in relation to work associated with the Corrib Gas Project from 2005 to date in 2015. [32452/15]

80. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Defence the locations the Irish Naval ships were deployed from 12 September 2015 to 18 September 2015; the person or body who makes the decision in relation to deployment; the circumstances that are taken into account; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32453/15]

81. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Defence the number of divers who are attached to the Irish Naval Service; the protocols they follow when deployed to a dive site, including the time they take to travel to the site; the communications they undertake with emergency services in charge of the site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32454/15]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 77 to 81, inclusive, together.

It should be noted that the primary responder for search and rescue in the State is the Irish Coast Guard (IRCG). The primary role of the Naval Service Diving Section is to support Naval

and other Defence Forces operations. However, the Naval Service makes every effort to deploy to assist in maritime search operations following a request from the IRCG or from An Garda Síochána.

On the afternoon of Tuesday, 15 September last the Naval Service received an Aid to the Civil Power (ATCP) request from An Garda Síochána for assistance in the search for the missing person in question. The Naval Service was unable to respond immediately due to the unavailability of divers at the time of the request. However, An Garda Síochána was advised that the Naval Service would keep the matter under review and on the morning of Thursday, 17 September, a diving team was dispatched to the area. The team has supported the search since then until it was stood down yesterday when it was determined in consultation with An Garda Síochána and the Irish Coast Guard and in light of the weather conditions, that divers could no longer provide a meaningful contribution to the search. However, the matter is being kept under review.

The Naval Service has undertaken 118 days on fishery patrols off the North Mayo coast up to 21 September 2015. It undertook 64 operational days associated with the Corrib Gas Field in the 10 years from 2005 to 2015. However, the vast majority of these operations were in the earlier part of this period.

During the period 12 to 18 September 2015 three vessels were deployed while a fourth was deployed from 14 September 2015. The ships were deployed on fishery patrols, Aid to the Civil Power and on an overseas mission. Decisions in relation to the deployment of Naval vessels are made on an ongoing basis by Naval Operations Command, in consultation with Operations and Plans Branch in Defence Forces Headquarters, having regard to, inter alia, the security environment, resource availability, patrol plans, weather conditions and any requirements arising from the various roles assigned to the Defence Forces.

While there are 46 qualified divers in the Naval Service, 10 are dedicated to the Naval Service Diving Section. The remaining 36 divers fill various regular (non-diving) appointments in the Naval Service. These personnel are not available on a dedicated 'call-out' basis. It may also be noted, that for a variety of reasons, 11 of the 46 personnel are not currently available to participate in diving operations. These reasons include divers undertaking training courses abroad, those deployed in military roles outside of the Naval Service and persons currently unfit for diving duties. The NSDS can deploy to a dive site on a Naval vessel, or, as was the case in this instance, by road. The time to travel to a dive site is dependent on a number of variables. When deployed in an Aid to the Civil Power capacity, naval divers remain under the operational control of the lead Naval Service officer but maintain close liaison with representatives of An Garda Síochána and the Irish Coast Guard.

### **Immigration Status**

82. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if permission can be facilitated to remain in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32337/15]

**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 mentioned by the Deputy is present in the State on foot of a Working Holiday Authorisation which expired on 31 August 2015: this person should have left the State following the expiration of this permission.



I understand that a comprehensive letter issued to this person on 19 August 2015 which mentioned the immigration options which are available to enable this person to remain legally in the State. It was open to this person to explore these options if they wished to remain here. No further application for permission to remain has been received from this person to date.

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

### **Garda Operations**

83. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the Garda Commissioner intends to create a dedicated full time stolen bike unit within An Garda Síochána; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32346/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel and resources, among the various Garda Regions, Divisions, and Districts; and I as Minister have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keep this distribution under continuing review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

I have requested the information sought in relation to a dedicated full time stolen bike unit, and I will write directly to the Deputy on receipt.

### **Immigration Status**

84. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current status of an application for leave to remain in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32348/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person in question was registered in the State as a student from 1 October 2002 to 31 October 2009. I understand that they remained in the State without permission until an application was received from them in May 2012 seeking to regularise their illegal status in the State. To date this person does not appear to have made further contact with INIS and has not informed them of a change of address. This person should be advised to contact the Residence Division, INIS regarding their current immigration status.

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

### **Residency Permits**

85. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and/or expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32350/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred to is the subject of a Deportation Order made on 4 May 2010 and therefore has no entitlement to residency in the State.

Representations were received from the person concerned pursuant to Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), to revoke the Deportation Order. The Deputy might wish to note that any such decision will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Order. In the meantime, the Deportation Order remains valid and in place.

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

### **Residency Permits**

86. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and/or expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 22; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32351/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned has submitted written representations.

These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement, in advance of a final decision being made.

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

### **Residency Permits**

87. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and/or expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 22; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32354/15]

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

With regard to residency status, the Deputy is reminded that protection applicants are issued with a temporary residence permission pending a final decision on their application. In the event that an applicant is finally determined not to be in need of protection, consideration is then given to whether the person should be granted leave to remain in the State on humanitarian grounds.

### **Naturalisation Applications**

88. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and/or expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 6; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32361/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy, who currently has permission to reside in the State until 9 February 2016, is ongoing and the case will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

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

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. While most cases are now generally processed within six months, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases will take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time.

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

### **Penalty Points System Offences**

89. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 508 of 14 July 2015, if she will provide the figures from certain District Courts (details supplied) where the use of poor boxes in penalty points cases is still in operation. [32366/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The Deputy will be aware that under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service and I have no role in the matter. Section 4(3) of the

1998 Act provides that the Courts Service is independent in the performance of its functions, which includes the provision of information on the courts system. However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have made enquiries and the information is currently being compiled and verified. I shall arrange for the information requested to be forwarded to him shortly.

### **Alcohol Sales Legislation**

90. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to introduce the Sale of Alcohol Bill. [32388/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The position is that the Government Legislation Programme provides for future publication of the Sale of Alcohol Bill. Unfortunately, due to the complex nature of the proposed Bill, I am not in a position to state when it will be published. However, it is my intention to proceed quickly with enactment of the legislation following publication.

### **Bench Warrants**

91. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of bench warrants currently outstanding in the Garda R district as of 14 September 2015. [32389/15]

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

### **Syrian Conflict**

92. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the preparations for the reception of refugees from Syria; if refugees coming here are already in the EU or are applicants for EU refugee in status countries bordering the war zone of the former Syrian republic, or if refugees entering here will be a mixture of both dispossessed populations. [32394/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As part of the Government's response to the migration crisis, I brought proposals to Government which were considered and agreed at a special Cabinet meeting on 10th of September. A multi-faceted approach is being adopted including the following measures:

- establishing the Irish Refugee Protection Programme which will provide international protection for up to 4,000 persons overall under Resettlement and Relocation Programmes. It is expected that these numbers will be augmented by further family reunifications. The first arrivals under the Programme are expected by year end. The number of persons in need of international protection will be kept under review;

- establishing a new cross-departmental Taskforce, chaired by my Department, to deal with the operational and logistical aspects of the support programme. The Taskforce which has already had its first meeting, will adopt a whole of Government approach and will work with NGOs, religious bodies, local authorities and the Red Cross to implement the Government's response to this crisis;

- engaging with the public on their pledges of support. The Red Cross will lead this task;
- establishing a network of Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres for the initial reception of those arriving under the relocation programme;
- introduce the International Protection Bill as a major priority; and
- providing an additional package of processing resources to deal with major increases in asylum and other immigration cases, including the relocation measure, preparation for the Single Protection application process and increased enforcement across a number of areas, including removals.

Ireland is participating in both Resettlement and EU Relocation programmes. The resettlement programme for 520 people mainly coming from Lebanon and predetermined as refugees by the UNHCR has already commenced and the first Syrian refugees have arrived.

At the emergency Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting on 14 September 2015, the Council formally adopted the measure to relocate 40,000 and Ireland has agreed to take a total of 600. I attended a further emergency meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council yesterday at which agreement was reached on the relocation of a further 120,000 asylum seekers from countries in Southern Europe. Our contribution under this measure is likely to be a little less than 2,000.

### **Garda Strength**

93. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the personnel strength of An Garda Síochána each year since 2009; her views that An Garda Síochána has sufficient personnel at present in each Garda division; and her future plans in this regard. [32395/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Regions, Divisions, and Districts; and I as Minister have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keep this distribution under continuing review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

This Government is committed to the ongoing recruitment of trainee Gardaí, and to this end the first intake since 2009 of new recruits commenced training at the Garda College, Templemore, in September of last year. To date there has been four intakes of Garda Trainees into the Garda College, giving a total intake of 400. A further 150 recruits will enter college by year end, bringing total recruitment of Garda Trainees to 550. So far 290 of the new Garda Trainees have attested as members of An Garda Síochána. On attestation, new Probationer Gardaí are assigned to Garda stations throughout the country by the Garda Commissioner, where they are assigned to mainstream uniform policing duties. I am assured by Garda management that the needs of all Garda Divisions are fully considered when determining the allocation of newly attested Gardaí.

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the strength of An Garda Síochána, including Garda Reserve and civilians, for each year from 31 December 2009 to 31 December 2014 and up to the 31 July 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available, are as set out in the following table:

#### **An Garda Síochána strength 2009 - 2015**

Year	Strength	Reserve	Civilian
31/12/2009	14,547	478	2,105
31/12/2010	14,377	700	2,098
31/12/2011	13,894	877	2,074
31/12/2012	13,424	991	2,028
31/12/2013	13,093	1,164	2,071
31/12/2014	12,799	1,112	2,054
31/07/2015	12,828	1,032	2,010

### Courts Staff

94. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding staff resources within the Courts Service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32400/15]

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

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that due to a staff vacancy in the Office of the Examiner and pressure of other work, it has not been possible for the remaining staff to process applications for self-adjudication in bankruptcy matters as well as performing their other duties. The Courts Service has advised that they are currently in the process of filling this vacancy.

It should be noted that High Court bankruptcy sittings are not held during August or September. The Courts Service envisages that the filling of the staff vacancy will facilitate the listing of applications that have been lodged in the Examiner's Office for dates during the coming law term.

### Courts Staff

95. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality in view of the fact that the position of county registrar in County Sligo has not been filled since the retirement of the previous holder in December 2009, her plans to replace this position in Sligo courthouse in the near future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32423/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The Deputy may wish to be aware that, in recent years the number of serving County Registrars has been reduced to 17 as a result of re-organisation and the introduction of efficiency measures by the Courts Service. Specifically, the reduction has been made possible by reorganising the work of the courts including the establishment of multi-jurisdictional combined court offices which encompassed the transfer of management functions previously exercised by County Registrars to Courts Service management personnel.

The Courts Service has advised my Department that the position of County Registrar in Sligo has not been filled since the retirement of the previous holder in December 2009. Since then the duties of the County Registrar in Sligo have been exercised by County Registrars from adjoining counties particularly the County Registrar for Donegal. The Courts Service have advised that this arrangement, which also applies in relation to cooperation between County

Registrar functions for some other counties, has operated satisfactorily and has not resulted in any diminution of services in Co. Sligo. However I can tell the Deputy that I am currently reviewing issues relating to Country Registrar capacity in conjunction with the Courts Service.

### **Immigration Controls**

96. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the Irish naturalisation and immigration process; the way permission to remain in the State may be secured on the basis of parentage of an Irish citizen child; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32444/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that applications for a right of residency, accompanied by a right to work in this State, are considered in respect of Non-EEA parents of an Irish citizen child at the Minister's discretion, subject to statute and relevant case law.

The Deputy will appreciate that applications are considered on a case by case basis having regard to the particular individual circumstances, including, inter alia, information and supporting documentation setting out the role the applicant plays in the Irish citizen child's life.

The Deputy may be interested to know that INIS has recently developed a new application form for these type of applications. The form has been widely circulated and, from 1st October 2015, applications will only be accepted on the designated application form.

Further information on the application process, including guidelines for completing the form, can be found on the INIS website [www.inis.gov.ie](http://www.inis.gov.ie).

### **Paramilitary Groups**

97. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she has received a report from the Garda Commissioner in relation to paramilitary activity on this island; if there are paramilitary organisations still in existence on this island; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32467/15]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The Deputy will appreciate that I am briefed on a regular basis by the Garda Commissioner with regard to the security situation.

It is the Garda assessment that there continues to be a real and persistent threat from the activities of so-called 'dissident' republican groups. These groups remain resolutely opposed to peace and are prepared to use violence to achieve their aims and, indeed, to support their lifestyles. They reject the democratic will of the overwhelming majority of people on this island which was so resolutely expressed in support for the Good Friday Agreement. I know the Deputy will agree with me that the people of this island want to move on and forge a better future for themselves and their children. These groups are stuck in a past that everyone else wants to leave behind and they should simply stop.

An Garda Síochána is constantly engaged in intensive operational efforts against these groups and will continue to target them. Co-operation with the PSNI is central to these efforts and, I am happy to say, that co-operation has never been closer. There is a strong and resolute commitment on the part of the two services to work together and nowhere is this more

important than in the area of security co-operation. Constant contact is maintained between anti-terrorist officers on both sides and intelligence is shared in both directions with a view to making arrests and ensuring successful prosecutions of those involved in terrorist activity. The House can rest assured that, with the Government's support, the Gardaí will take all appropriate measures, within the rule of law, to defeat these groups.

It might be helpful to add that the position with regard to this jurisdiction in relation to the Provisional IRA has been made clear in statements issued by me and by the Garda Commissioner at the end of August and it is consistent with the assessments of the Provisional IRA provided previously by the Independent Monitoring Commission. In the light of recent developments in Northern Ireland An Garda Síochána is maintaining close liaison with the PSNI in respect of the investigation into the murder of Mr. McGuigan and I have asked the Garda Commissioner, in light of any new evidence emerging from that investigation, to let me have a fresh assessment of the status of the Provisional IRA.

The Deputy will be aware that in the context of the current discussions between the parties in Northern Ireland and the Irish and British governments, the British Government has arranged for an assessment to be made of paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland, which will include an assessment in relation to loyalist paramilitary activity.

### **Social Workers Recruitment**

98. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of social worker posts currently vacant; and his plans to ensure all posts are filled immediately. [32391/15]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly):** My officials have requested the information from the Child and Family Agency and I will forward the reply to the Deputy once I have been furnished with it.

### **Inter-Country Adoptions**

99. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the most recent occasion that his Department held a meeting with the Russian Embassy regarding inter-country adoption. [32470/15]

100. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the outcome of the last meeting his Department held with the Russian Embassy regarding inter-country adoption; and the strategy to advance same. [32471/15]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 99 and 100 together.

The Adoption Act 2010 provides for adoption of children into Ireland from countries that have signed and ratified the Hague Convention and from countries where a bilateral agreement on adoption is in place. The Hague Convention is a landmark in regard to inter-country adoption and provides an international architecture that prioritises the best interests of children.

While it has signed the Convention, the Russian Federation has not ratified the treaty. This has prevented recent adoptions from Russia into Ireland. Over the last number of years efforts have been ongoing to try and reach a bilateral agreement with the Russian Federation on inter-country adoption.



Since its establishment, my department has carried forward this work but significant issues remain in the way of an agreement. For example the Irish Constitution is very clear on the integrity of the family unit here and Russian requirements for post placement reports on adopted children pose a difficulty in that regard.

My department has been working with the Irish Embassy in Moscow in seeking progress towards a bilateral.

In 2013 officials from the Russian Federation travelled to Ireland for a meeting. Officials from my department had considered going to Russia earlier this year., however this meeting was deferred. The Irish Embassy in Moscow has been assisting in liaising with the Ministry of Education and Science, which is the responsible department in Russia.

I recently met with the Russian Irish Adoption Group to advise them on the current situation. Members of the group have adopted Russian children in the past, prior to the current arrangements, and many seek to adopt a sibling also from Russia. At the meeting I was deeply conscious of this reality and members of the RIAG gave a powerful presentation of the sensitivities involved.

I and my department take the view that it is essential to give clear, frank information about the likely time scale potentially involved in trying to secure an agreement with the Russian Federation. Families must have an accurate assessment of the time scales involved in order to allow fully informed decision making. I advised the RIAG representatives that in practical terms, even in the event of bilateral being finalised, it could take a further couple of years before adoptions with Russia could take place.

My Department is engaged in an extensive work programme across a wide range of issues with a clear central theme; to work in the very best interests of children and young people, protecting and enhancing their lives. The issue of the negotiation of a bilateral agreement with Russia must be considered in the context of the overall priorities of the Department in relation to adoption and the general focus of Ireland in regard to countries of origin for Inter Country Adoption.

Work on the bilateral has not ceased and it remains the aim of the Department to finalise a bi-lateral agreement on inter-country adoption with the Russian Federation. However it will not be possible to finalise this agreement in the short-term.

### **Home Help Service Data**

101. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of increasing the number of home help hours from 10.3 million to 11.5 million; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32345/15]

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

### **Orthodontic Service Provision**

102. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding orthodontic treatment for a child (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [32347/15]

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

### Medical Card Applications

103. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for a medical card by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32352/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

### Hospital Waiting Lists

104. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that a person (details supplied) is granted a date for their knee replacement operation at Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore, County Offaly, without further delay. [32374/15]

**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 Services

105. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase the

number of beds in the epilepsy monitoring unit at Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9. [32386/15]

**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.

### **European Investment Bank Loans**

106. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the total amount of investment funding received by the Health Service Executive from the European Investment Bank in the years 2012, 2013, 2014 and to date in 2015; and the detail of the projects for which this funding was sought [32387/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** No EIB investment funding was received by the HSE in 2012, 2013, 2014 or to date in 2015. The National Development Finance Agency sought EIB funding for the primary care centre PPP project. In April 2015, the EIB announced that it had approved, in principle, a loan of up to €70m for this project.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

107. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if and when an CT colonography procedure will be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32414/15]

**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 Investigations**

108. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the number of critical incidents in the University Hospital Galway maternity unit in each year to date in 2015 since the death of a person (details supplied); the steps taken to address each incident; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32418/15]

**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.

## **Services for People with Disabilities**

109. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that personal assistant hours will be increased in budget 2016 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32433/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** Work is currently underway in the Department of Health in relation to the preparation of budget estimates for 2016. As part of this process, the Health Service Executive (HSE) has submitted an estimate of its proposed expenditure for 2016, including health and personal social services for people with a disability. As discussions on budgetary issues are ongoing within the Department of Health, with the HSE and with the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform, I am not in a position to comment on the outcome of the process at this stage.

## **Vaccination Programme**

110. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the use of the anti-cervical cancer vaccine, Gardasil; if he will investigate the cases of the several school-going children experiencing health problems after receiving the vaccine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32474/15]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Immunisation is regarded as one of the safest and most cost-effective of health care interventions. International studies and scientific assessments suggest that the best way to prevent most disease due to human papillomavirus (HPV) is to vaccinate as many girls and women as possible. The HPV vaccine protects girls from developing cervical cancer when they are adults. It is available free of charge from the HSE for all girls in 1st year of secondary school. This is in accordance with the recommendation received from the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) which indicated that the HPV vaccine should be offered on an annual basis to all girls aged 12. The advice, based on public health considerations and supported by the cost-effectiveness analysis, is that HPV vaccines confer maximum benefit both individually and on a population basis if administered prior to HPV exposure.

In Ireland, the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is the regulatory authority for medicines in Ireland. Gardasil® is a medicinal product which has been authorised for use across the European Union since September 2006 following a positive opinion from the Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP) at the European Medicines Agency (EMA). With this authorisation, the vaccine can be marketed in all EU Member States. Since first authorisation the HPRA has continuously monitored the safety of Gardasil®. This monitoring includes a review of global safety data in addition to national experience with use of the vaccine. The EMA is responsible for the scientific evaluation of medicines developed by pharmaceutical companies for use in the European Union.

While no medicine (including vaccines) is entirely without risk, the safety profile of Gardasil® has been continuously monitored since it was first authorised both nationally and at EU level. This is done by both monitoring of individual adverse reaction reports received by competent authorities across Europe (including the HPRA) and Periodic Safety Update Reports (PSURs) submitted by the Marketing Authorisation Holder (i.e. license holder) for the vaccine on a regular basis. The most recent EU review of cumulative global safety update data completed in December 2014 concluded that the benefit/risk profile for Gardasil® remains positive and concluded that no updates to the product information (Summary of Product Characteristics

(SmPC) and Package Leaflet (PL)) were considered necessary.

Up to the 15 July 2015, the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) has received 901 reports of suspected adverse reactions/events notified in association with the use of HPV vaccines (Gardasil® 899 and Cervarix® 2). National monitoring experience has been consistent with the expected pattern of adverse effects known to occur with the vaccine, as outlined in the approved product information (Summary of Product Characteristics (SmPC) and Package Leaflet (PL)) for Gardasil®. The majority of the reports received to date involved events/reactions related to injection site reactions, malaise, headache, myalgia, fatigue, gastrointestinal symptoms and skin reactions. Vaccination related events such as dizziness and syncope (fainting) was also reported and would not be unexpected in this patient population.

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) is to evaluate data from a new epidemiological study on the safety of human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccines, Gardasil® and Cervarix®. The study conducted jointly by the French medicines agency (ANSM) and the French national health insurance fund (CNAMTS) compared the incidence of autoimmune conditions in girls given HPV vaccines with the incidence in girls not given the vaccines. In the meantime, the EMA have advised healthcare professionals that available data does not warrant any change to the use of these vaccines. Healthcare professionals should therefore continue using Gardasil® and Cervarix® in accordance with the current product information.

### Passport Services

111. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the reason a mother's passport cannot be taken into account in the case of an application for a passport by person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32362/15]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Passports Act, 2008 (the Act) provides, among other things, that only Irish citizens are entitled to be issued with Irish passports. Each application received by the Passport Service must, therefore, demonstrate that person's entitlement to Irish citizenship before a passport can issue to him/her. The child in question was born in the State in 2008. Her entitlement to Irish citizenship is, therefore, subject to the terms of section 6A of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, 1956 as amended (the 1956 Act). This provides that a person, born in the State on or after 1 January 2005, where neither parent is an Irish or British citizen or otherwise entitled to reside in the State or Northern Ireland without restriction at the time of that person's birth, may claim citizenship by birth in the State (and thereby establish eligibility for an Irish passport) only where a parent has been lawfully resident in the State for three years of the four years preceding that person's birth. Two previous passport applications for this child have been refused under the Act by the Department on the grounds that her mother's lawful residence was insufficient to demonstrate her entitlement to Irish citizenship.

The current and third application includes an Irish passport for the child's mother. This passport was issued on 21 May, 2015 after she was naturalized on 10 April, 2015. This establishes that she was not an Irish citizen in 2008 when her daughter was born and means that the child's entitlement to Irish citizenship is still subject to section 6A of the 1956 Act.

However, in view of the child's lawful residence in the State since 2008 and given that her mother is now an Irish citizen, her parents can seek to establish their daughter's eligibility under the naturalization category of Irish citizenship. To do this, they should contact the Department of Justice and Equality for information on applying. If the child's application is successful, she

will be issued with a certificate of naturalization. This certificate would serve to demonstrate her entitlement to Irish citizenship in any future passport application.

### **Migrant Issues**

112. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he or his officials have discussed the refugee crisis in Hungary with the Hungarian authorities. [32396/15]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The plight of refugees fleeing conflict and upheaval in the EU's southern and eastern neighbourhoods is of deep concern to us all, and one demanding a comprehensive and coordinated response from the EU. Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Ministers have primary responsibility for matters related to immigration/asylum and refugees, into and within the EU.

In April this year, the Foreign Affairs' Council and the Justice and Home Affairs Council met in joint session to discuss the situation facing migrants, particularly those trying to cross the Mediterranean. Ministers confirmed a strong commitment to act so as to prevent further tragedies.

I meet my Hungarian counterpart at the regular Foreign Affairs Council meetings, the last one of which took place in July. My officials also meet their Hungarian opposite numbers regularly in different fora. The next Foreign Ministers' meeting is scheduled for 12 October. While the agenda has not yet been agreed, I expect there will be ample opportunity for an exchange of views on the events of recent days and weeks which demand a comprehensive and united EU approach.

### **Human Rights Issues**

113. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the use of tear gas, water cannon and other crowd control measures by the Hungarian authorities on Serbian territory. [32397/15]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** We have all been shocked and deeply saddened by the tragic human cost of the migration crisis – which continues to develop dramatically. Such is the scale, complexity and evolving nature of the crisis, that identifying and implementing workable solutions is a challenge for us all. While some other EU partners and neighbouring States have had to face disproportionate pressures, all actions by the authorities in any Member State should respect and reflect the high human rights standards we in Europe expect and require of each other, and I will be expressing that view to my EU colleagues of that when we meet next month.

### **Immigration Policy**

114. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions he has had with European Union counterparts on the refugee crisis. [32398/15]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The plight of refugees fleeing conflict and upheaval in the EU's southern and eastern neighbourhoods is of deep concern to us all, and one demanding a comprehensive and coordinated response from the EU. Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Ministers have primary responsibility for matters related to immigration/asylum and refugees, into and within the EU. In April this year, the Foreign Affairs'

Council and the Justice and Home Affairs Council met in joint session to discuss the situation facing migrants, particularly those trying to cross the Mediterranean. Ministers confirmed a strong commitment to act so as to prevent further tragedies. The June the Foreign Affairs Council followed up with the launch of EUNAVFOR Med, the EU's naval operation to disrupt the dangerous activities of people smugglers in the Mediterranean, which have tragically resulted in the loss of many lives. As the Deputy will know, the crews of the L.E. Niamh and Eithne have done sterling work in saving many lives.

In recent weeks the focus has shifted to the deepening crisis in southeast Europe, and the Government recently decided accept up to 4,000 asylum seekers and refugees as part of the European Commission's comprehensive plan to address the migration crisis. The Commission has set out a comprehensive set of proposals to address the crisis, from its root causes through to the immediate humanitarian needs. JHA Ministers met again on 22 September and there is a Special Meeting of the European Council today (23 September) to advance the EU's response to this complex and demanding set of issues.

### **Foreign Conflicts**

115. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the recent clashes between Palestinians and the Israeli police force in occupied East Jerusalem. [32399/15]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Rising tensions and continual violence in varying degrees in occupied East Jerusalem have been matters of serious concern for over a year now. These concerns have been expressed by the European Union in Conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council, by the UN Security Council and by moderate Arab leaders, including King Abdullah of Jordan who retains a special role in relation to the Holy Places.

I support and echo the call of the UN Security Council which "called for the exercise of restraint, refraining from provocative actions and rhetoric and upholding unchanged the historic status quo at the Haram al Sharif – in word and in practice".

### **Departmental Funding**

116. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to the recent visit of the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall to County Sligo, a visit which was another major stepping stone towards improving further the process of reconciliation between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom, his views on Sligo County Council's special request for financial assistance from his Department with paying for some of the costs incurred due to the profile of the visit, given that this council is in a difficult financial position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32421/15]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I can confirm that my Department has received a request from Sligo County Council in relation to the visit by the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall. This request is receiving attention and will of course be considered on its own merits.

### **Site Acquisitions**

117. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will

provide an update on the procurement of a permanent site for a planned new school (details supplied) in County Cork and also on the provision of temporary accommodation to be in place for the planned school opening in Autumn 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32341/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The Deputy may be aware that I signed a Memorandum of Understanding between my Department and the County and City Managers’ Association (CCMA) in 2012. This Memorandum of Understanding fosters increased levels of cooperation and formalises the Local Authorities’ part in identifying and securing sites for educational use.

In that context, my Department has worked closely with Cork County Council towards acquiring a permanent site to meet the needs of the school to which the Deputy refers. The acquisition of the site in question is currently being progressed. Given the commercial sensitivities associated with land acquisitions generally I am not in a position to comment further at this time. I can, however, assure the Deputy that the acquisition of a new site for the school is a priority for my Department and the patron body will be informed of the location for the school as soon as it is possible to do so.

To facilitate the commencement of the school in September 2016 the Department has identified a suitable property for temporary use and officials from my Department will be meeting shortly with the patron body to discuss arrangements in relation to this.

### **School Funding**

118. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of funding her Department has provided to a school (details supplied) in Dublin 9 in the years 2012, 2013 and 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32344/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** I wish to advise the Deputy that some €1.37 billion will be spent in support of children with Special Educational Needs this year, which represents approximately 15% of my Department’s budget.

The investment which is being made to support children with special educational needs is an area of spending which has been prioritised above most other areas by this Government.

We now have the highest level of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support, Resource Teaching allocations and Special Class provision that we have ever had, which will ensure that children with special educational needs can continue to participate in education and be supported in a manner appropriate to their needs.

This funding also provides for the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), enhanced levels of capitation in Special Schools and Special Classes, specialist transport arrangements for pupils with disabilities, additional teacher training, a Home Tuition scheme providing a compensatory educational service and assistive technology support, where required.

All special schools receive enhanced pupil teacher ratios ranging from 6-1, to 12-1, depending on the disability categorisation of pupils attending. These enhanced ratios are provided because pupils attending special schools have very significant special educational needs. Special schools also receive very high levels of Special Educational Needs Assistant staffing support as well as enhanced capitation levels.

A breakdown of the grant payments made to the school in question for the period 2012 to



2014 is set out below. This does not include salary costs of teachers and SNAs in the school.

2012 Grants paid to St. Paul's Special School

<b>Description</b>	<b>Amount paid</b>
CAPITATION GRANT	€27,675.86
ANCILLARY SERVICES GRANT C50	€28,212.50
STANDARDISED TESTING GRANT	€239.70
ONCE-OFF GRANT FOR AUTISTIC UNIT	€6,500.00
SCHOOL BOOKS GRANT	€660.00
CAPITATION GRANT	€11,604.30
ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY	€430.00
ADDITIONAL ACCOMMODATION 2012-70%	€3,780.00
ESCORT RECONCILIATION 2011/12 & ADV 2012/13	€49,418.35
SUPERVISION GRANT	€1,994.55
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>€130,515.26</b>

2013

<b>CAPITATION GRANT</b>	<b>€28,655.90</b>
ADDIT ACCOMM 2012 FINAL INSTAL- MENT 30%	€1,620.00
ANCILLARY SERVICES GRANT C50	€31,265.00
STANDARDISED TESTING GRANT	€275.40
SCHOOL BOOKS GRANT	€660.00
CAPITATION GRANT	€18,378.10
ESCORT RECON 12-13 & ADV 13-14	€87,360.05
JULY PROGRAMME 2013 - TEACHERS	€1,051.85
JULY PROGRAMME 2013 - NTS	€2,460.07
SUPERVISION GRANT	€2,102.36
MINOR WORKS GRANT 2013/14 EN- ROLMENT	€3,996.00
MINOR WORKS GRANT 2013/14 FLAT RATE	€5,500.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>€183,324.73</b>

2014

<b>CAPITATION GRANT</b>	<b>€32,319.00</b>
ANCILLARY SERVICES GRANT C50	€31,265.00
STANDARDISED TESTING GRANT	€275.40
SCHOOL BOOKS GRANT	€660.00

<b>CAPITATION GRANT</b>	<b>€32,319.00</b>
CAPITATION GRANT	€13,851.00
ESCORT REC 13/14 & ADV 14-15	€74,820.77
Minor Works Grant 2014/15 - Flat Rate	€5,500.00
Minor Works Grant 2014/15 - Enrolment	€3,996.00
POD IMPLEMENTATION GRANT	€90.00
TOTAL	€162,777.17
Total paid 2012 to 2014	€476,617.16

### School Transport Administration

119. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills with reference to the primary school transport scheme document on her website, if children in junior and senior infants whose school day finishes an hour earlier than the other children in the school and who avail of school transport can wait in the school for this hour until their bus picks them up based on point five of an agreement between her Department and Bus Éireann, which states an eligible child will not have to wait more than 1.5 hours per day (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32359/15]

120. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her Department's policy regarding the supervision of children in junior and senior infants who avail of school transport and who finish an hour earlier than the other children in the school; if the school is obliged to provide supervision for this hour; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32363/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 119 and 120 together.

One of the main objectives of the School Transport Scheme is to ensure that, as far as possible, eligible children have a reasonable level of service while at the same time, ensuring that school transport vehicles are fully utilised in an efficient and cost effective manner.

In this regard, Bus Éireann generally plan and timetable school transport services for children who are in attendance for the full school day.

Children in infant classes may have a school day that is one hour shorter than the length of the normal school day. This is a concession in the interests of young children and allows for a perceived inability on their part to sustain the work of the full day. It is a matter for the Board of Management of a particular school to decide whether the concession should be applied in the case of the school or not. It is also a matter for the managerial authorities to arrange adequate supervision for children while they are on the school premises.

### Skills Shortages

121. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which skill requirements in this workplace continue to be met by jobseekers; if particular initiatives are contemplated to address any deficiencies or emerging issues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28627/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** My Department has a number of strategies and initiatives in place to ensure that education and training meets the skills

requirements of the workplace. SOLAS, with the assistance of relevant experts such as the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), employers and local and national organisations, have published a five year strategy for the further education and training sector which provides us with a strategic roadmap for this crucial element of the education and training system. The strategy includes a vision of a flexible, quality-driven, labour market-relevant, integrated and responsive sector that supports learner progression, transitions into employment and personal development. The higher education system is also going through a process of transformation through structural change arising from the Higher Education Strategy. The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN), which is funded by my Department, advises the Government on current and future skills needs of the economy. It has a central role in ensuring that labour market needs for skilled workers are anticipated and met. The expert group's membership is broad and specifically includes representation from enterprise. Its research provides an input to the development of course curricula and informs the selection of new targeted programmes designed to tackle the skills shortages in particular elements of the economy, such as Momentum, Springboard and the ICT skills conversion programme. As part of the Action Plan for Jobs 2015, my Department has committed to review the National Skills Strategy. The review will provide an opportunity to determine the volume, type and mix of skills required to meet the Government's goal of full employment by 2018 and the challenges to be addressed to achieve this. Direct engagement between employers and education and training providers is also critical to ensuring that programmes are aligned to changing skills needs. As well as the actions that are being implemented across the education and training system as part of the Further Education and Training and Higher Education reform programmes to enhance links with enterprise and prepare learners for the different roles they will have over their working lives work is also underway in the context of the Skills Strategy review to develop the regional and national infrastructure for engagement between education providers, employers and other enterprise stakeholders, in communicating and addressing skills needs. You will also be aware of the increase in apprenticeship registrations in existing trades and the progress we are making in introducing new apprenticeships, focusing initially on the 25 priority proposals identified by the Apprenticeship Council through their public call.

### **Student Grant Scheme Eligibility**

122. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to reverse the reductions in the family income thresholds to qualify for the Student Universal Support Ireland grant scheme. [32401/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** The eligibility criteria for student grants including the income thresholds is reviewed annually in my Department and approved by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. No changes to the thresholds were included in Budget 2015. As the Deputy will be aware, all proposals made in relation to education expenditure, including changes to income thresholds, will be considered in the context of the Budget 2016.

### **Student Grant Scheme Expenditure**

123. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to make changes to the adjacency rates for the Student Universal Support Ireland grant scheme to reduce the burden of attending third level institutions 24 to 45 kilometres from home. [32402/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** The current qualifying dis-

tance for the higher non-adjacent rate of student grant, at 45 km, takes into account a reasonable radius within which students may commute on a daily basis. There are no plans at present to revise the distance criteria.

### **Student Grant Scheme Eligibility**

124. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans reintroduce grant supports for students engaged in postgraduate studies. [32403/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** In the context of the necessary but difficult expenditure reduction measures announced in Budget 2012, new students entering postgraduate courses from the 2012/13 academic year onwards are not entitled to maintenance payments under the Student Grant Scheme. Those who do meet the qualifying conditions for the special rate of grant under the Student Grant Scheme are eligible to have their post-graduate tuition fees paid up to the maximum fee limit of €6,270. Alternatively, a postgraduate student may qualify to have a €2,000 contribution made towards the cost of their fees. The income threshold for this payment is €31,500 for the 2015/16 academic year, increasing relative to the number of family dependents. Tax relief is also available on postgraduate tuition fees. Details in relation to this relief are available from the Revenue Commissioners ([www.revenue.ie](http://www.revenue.ie)). In addition to this, the Student Assistance Fund will continue to be made available through the access offices of third-level institutions to assist students in exceptional financial need.

### **Student Assistance Fund**

125. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to increase the funds for the student assistance fund given the SAF funds in many third-level colleges are exhausted by Christmas. [32404/15]

126. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to extend the student assistance fund to Further Education and Post Leaving Certificate colleges. [32405/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 125 and 126 together.

The Student Assistance Fund is a component of the Third Level Access Measure which is managed on behalf of my Department by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and comprises two sub-priorities: the Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities. The determination of the allocation of this fund between the two sub-priorities is a matter for the HEA and involves balancing the needs of students with disabilities with that of students in more general, financial need. The HEA has commissioned an independent review of policy, guidelines and practice in relation to the Student Assistance Fund and any changes to the administration of the Fund will be considered when the review is completed.

### **Third Level Charges**

127. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to abolish the student contribution charge. [32406/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** As the Deputy will be aware the Student Contribution stands at €3,000 for the current academic year, 2015/16. It should be noted that some 50% of students who qualify for free fees funding have the Student Contribution paid on their behalf by the Exchequer under my Department’s Student Grant Scheme. An Expert Working Group chaired by Peter Cassells is currently preparing a report on future funding policy for higher education. The objective is to identify a range of approaches that, combined, will achieve a sustainable funding base to address the continual expansion of the sector while protecting the quality of education.

### **Residential Institutions**

128. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding persons who were institutionalised in the 1950s; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32416/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** On the 11th of May 1999, the Taoiseach, on behalf of the State, apologised to the victims of childhood abuse and announced a range of measures the Government intended to introduce to assist victims. In 2002, the Oireachtas enacted the Residential Institutions Redress Act in order to provide a means for making financial awards to assist people who as children were abused while resident in certain institutions in which the State had a regulatory function. In framing the legislation, the Government was conscious that a significant number of former residents who were eligible to make an application for redress in their own right, were in ill health or elderly and that it was probable that some victims would pass away before they would get the opportunity to finalise their application to the Residential Institutions Redress Board. With this in mind and in order to avoid a situation where a person’s application would fail on death, the Government decided to include Section 9 in the Redress Act. This enabled the spouse or children of a person, who was entitled to make an application but died after the 11th of May 1999 (the date of the Taoiseach’s apology) to make an application. Essentially, the legislation was applicable from the 11th of May 1999. As with every such scheme, there has to be a cut off point and the decision was taken to use the date of the Taoiseach’s apology as the cut off point. It is not intended to revisit the legislation.

### **Student Grant Scheme Eligibility**

129. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the discussions she has held with the Department of Social Protection regarding offsetting changes to payments from the Department of Social Protection that will restrict student eligibility for Student Universal Support Ireland grants as their income will be €100 over the limit; her plans to allocate additional funding for the student assistance fund. [32424/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The Deputy will be aware that my officials engage in ongoing consultations with key stakeholders such as the Department of Social Protection. These consultations with the Department of Social Protection subsequently informed decisions I made in terms of including a number of new income disregards in the 2015 Scheme. These new income disregards are no longer assessed as part of the reckonable income of applicants. They include the Exceptional Needs Payments, Household Benefits Package, Housing Assistance Payment, Jobseekers Allowance Transition (where paid to the applicant), Mortgage Interest Supplement, Rent Supplement and the Back to Work Family Dividend. In addition to the various income disregards, the student grant scheme includes a number of gradations in income thresholds which allow students on different income levels to access grants at

100%, 75%, 50% and 25%. These gradations act as a safety net to ensure that students whose reckonable income is slightly above the threshold, can still benefit from grant support. With regard to the Student Assistance Fund I can confirm that the HEA has commissioned an independent review of policy, guidelines and practice in relation to the Fund. Any changes to the administration of the Fund will be considered when the review is completed.

### **Special Educational Needs Staffing**

130. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of special needs assistants at a school (details supplied) in County Cork for the school year 2013-2014, 2014-2015 and the allocation for the 2015-2016 year; if there is currently an appeal for the allocation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32426/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to schools to support children with special educational needs. The NCSE operates within my Department’s criteria in allocating such support which are set out in my Department’s Circular 0030/2014. All schools were asked to apply for SNA support for the 2015/16 school year by 18th March 2015. The NCSE also continued to accept applications after this date in recognition that enrolments may not have been completed or where assessments were not completed. Details of SNA allocations to schools for 2015/16, including the school referred to by the Deputy, are now available on the NCSE website [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie). Details of SNA allocations for 2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/15 are also available on the NCSE website. The NCSE has set out details of the manner in which a school or parent may appeal the level of SNA allocation which has been made to support a child in school, to the NCSE, on its website [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie). All schools have the contact details of their local SENO, while Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child’s special educational needs, using the contact details available on [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie). As the consideration of appeals is an operational matter for the NCSE, I will arrange to have this element of the Deputy’s question referred to the NCSE for their consideration and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

131. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide an update on the status of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32431/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department has received a proposal for alternative accommodation from the school to which he refers. In order to fully consider the accommodation issues arising, my Department’s technical staff visited the school. Following this visit, the proposal is being considered further and my Department expects to be in a position to convey a decision to the school as soon as the assessment process has been concluded.

### **School Accommodation**

132. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 482 of 3 March 2015, if she will provide an update on the status of a school (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32434/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** I can confirm that my Department is in the process of acquiring a site for the school, referred to by the Deputy. As part of this acquisition process, a technical site visit was carried out in order to assess the site concerned. In addition, my Department is also considering the long term projected pupil enrolment position of the school, in question, and in that regard my Department will be in further contact with the school authorities.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

133. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills on the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004, if she will confirm if a child with special needs currently has a legal entitlement to an individual education plan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32435/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** I wish to advise the Deputy that a number of sections of the EPSEN Act have been commenced, including those sections establishing the National Council for Special Education and those providing for the inclusive education of children. In light of the very difficult economic situation and the significant costs involved in fully implementing the EPSEN Act, however, the previous Government deferred the full implementation of EPSEN. The EPSEN provisions concerning a statutory entitlement to an Individual Education Plans have therefore not yet been commenced. It is intended to bring into effect many of the good ideas contained in the EPSEN Act, on a non-statutory basis initially, through policy developments across a range of areas, in conjunction with NCSE policy advice. At present, all schools are encouraged to use Education Plans and receive guidance and support in order to do so. My Departmental Inspectorates’ advice is that the majority of schools are now using some form of individual education planning for children with special needs.

### **Student Universal Support Ireland Administration**

134. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the threshold for Student Universal Support Ireland Grant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32439/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The rates of grant and the income thresholds for the Student Grant Scheme are announced annually as part of the Budget. No changes to the rates or thresholds were included in Budget 2015. 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. 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. In addition to the scheme, students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances.

### **Professional Qualifications**

135. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will ensure

that teachers who wish to participate on the professional diploma in mathematics course in the University of Limerick who do not have a teaching contract at present are not deprived of the opportunity to pursue this course due to their present employment status; her views that the non-acceptance of such applicants onto the course is putting a further impediment in the way of these graduates obtaining a teaching position; the proposals she has to amend this anomaly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32472/15]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** As the Deputy may be aware, the Professional Diploma in Mathematics for Teaching is a blended learning, two year part-time programme. It is designed to assist practising ‘out-of-field’ teachers to acquire the extensive and complex integrated knowledge base, including mathematical and pedagogical knowledge, that is necessary for effective mathematics teaching at post-primary level. The programme makes special reference to Project Maths, the post primary mathematics curriculum. Since September 2012 the Diploma has been made available nationwide to improve the skills of such teachers of mathematics. Provision of the Diploma is led by the National Centre for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching & Learning (NCE-MSTL), based in the University of Limerick (UL). It is accredited jointly by UL and NUI Galway through their strategic alliance. To be eligible for the programme a candidate must: Be a qualified post primary teacher registered under Regulation Four of the Teaching Council [Registration] Regulations 2009 (but who is not qualified to teach mathematics);

Have a teaching contract at the time of application; Have a teaching contract at the time of course start date;

Be teaching post primary mathematics at Junior or Senior Cycle;

Have a commitment from their school that they will continue to teach mathematics in this employment.

### **Bituminous Fuel Ban**

136. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to extend the smoky coal ban to other towns here in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32338/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** The ban on the marketing, sale and distribution of bituminous fuel (or ‘smoky coal ban’ as it is commonly known) was first introduced in Dublin in 1990 in response to severe episodes of winter smog that resulted from the widespread use of smoky coal for residential heating. The ban proved very effective in reducing particulate matter and sulphur dioxide levels in Dublin. As well as bringing air quality levels into compliance with the then EU standards, the ban also had the effect of significantly improving human health in the capital. Research indicates that the ban in Dublin has resulted in over 350 fewer annual deaths. The ban was subsequently extended to other urban areas.

In August 2012, following a public consultation process, new solid fuel regulations were introduced with the aim of ensuring that the smoky coal ban remains fit for purpose in safeguarding air quality by limiting harmful emissions of air pollutants arising from the use of certain residential solid fuels. The ban now applies in 26 urban areas nationwide, including all towns with a population greater than 15,000 people, bringing the ban areas broadly into line with national EPA air quality management zones. My Department keeps the operation of the ban under regular review .



Air quality monitoring by the EPA has shown that air quality is poorer in towns where the smoky coal ban does not apply, although there is evidence that smaller smoky coal ban areas tend to be less effective. The further extension of the ban to smaller towns on an individual basis may not be the most effective solution to addressing the problem of emissions from residential solid fuel use in these areas. However, it is recognised that having different regulations between urban and rural locations is not ideal, as it results in different levels of environmental protection and clean air benefits for citizens in different locations.

Under the auspices of the North South Ministerial Council, and in conjunction with the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, my Department has commissioned a study to inform a discussion on policy options to further address emissions from residential solid fuel use on an all-island basis. The study includes-

- an assessment of the solid fuel market and barriers to the use of cleaner fuels;
- consideration of the role and impacts of biomass (primarily wood and wood-based products) and the links to climate policy; and
- an economic analysis addressing the potential positive and negative effects on the consumer, for example, resulting from potential fuel switching, the availability of smokeless fuels to supply an all-island market and job creation opportunities in the manufacture and supply of smokeless fuels.

A final report is expected to be presented to the North South Ministerial Council later this year. However, it should also be noted that I plan to engage in further consultation on the matter of clean air in the coming months, commencing with a 'Clean Air Conference' hosted by my Department and the EPA in Dublin on 28 September, which will examine and discuss current and future challenges for clean air policy.

### **Departmental Funding**

137. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his Department has reduced funding to the Environmental Protection Agency since 2007; if so, if he will provide an annual breakdown of the reduced funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32339/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** The financial allocations to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), comprising funding from both the Exchequer and the Environment Fund, for the years specified is set out in the table below. It should be noted that the figures do not include income generated by the EPA itself from licensing fees, etc.

Funding to the Agency increased between 2007 and 2009, owing to the assignment of additional functions to the Agency, such as monitoring and assessment under the Water Framework Directive and increased funding for research and development during the period.

Given the constraints on public funds in more recent times, funding for the Agency, akin to most bodies, was reduced in the period from 2010 to 2013. Notwithstanding this, the Agency continued to meet all critical national and international regulatory and other obligations, through careful management and prioritisation of resources, for which the Agency is to be commended.

The increase in funding in 2014 incorporated the funding hitherto provided separately to the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (RPII) by my Department, which was then provided

to the EPA following the merger of both organisations with effect from 1 August 2014. The funding allocated to the EPA for 2015 is higher than the outturn in 2014, reflecting the continued improvement in the national fiscal situation and the priority accorded to the role of the Agency.

#### **Environmental Protection Agency Funding 2007 – 2015 (€000)**

-	<b>Budget Outturn</b>
2007	39,659
2008	51,143
2009	51,531
2010	44,068
2011	46,783
2012	41,453
2013	41,496
2014	44,478
2015	45,278 *

\* *allocation for 2015*

#### **Housing Assistance Payments**

138. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when the Housing Assistance Payment will be implemented in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32349/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** The first phase of the statutory pilot for the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme commenced in September 2014 and has been introduced incrementally to 13 local authority areas to date - Limerick City and County Council; Waterford City and County Council; Cork, Louth, Kilkenny, South Dublin, Monaghan, Donegal, Offaly, Carlow, Clare, Tipperary County Councils; and Cork City Council.

Dublin City Council is also implementing the HAP pilot scheme for homeless households in the Dublin region on behalf of all four Dublin local authorities.

To date, there are almost 4,000 households supported by HAP across these local authority areas. While consideration is currently being given to the sequencing of a further cohort of local authorities to commence HAP in the coming months, the scheme is not expected to commence in County Laois until next year.

#### **Wind Energy Guidelines**

139. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he has a date for when the revised wind farm planning guidelines will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32365/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** In December 2013, my Department published proposed “draft” revisions to the noise, setbacks and shadow flicker aspects of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines. These draft revisions proposed:

- the setting of a more stringent day and night noise limit of 40 decibels for future wind energy developments,
- a mandatory minimum setback of 500 metres between a wind turbine and the nearest dwelling for amenity considerations, and
- the complete elimination of shadow flicker between wind turbines and neighbouring dwellings.

A public consultation process was initiated on these proposed draft revisions to the Guidelines, which ran until February 21 2014. My Department received submissions from 7,500 organisations and members of the public during this public consultation process.

It is intended that the revisions to the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines will be finalised as soon as possible. In this regard, account has to be taken of the extensive response to the public consultation in framing the final guidelines. Further work is also advancing to develop technical appendices to assist planning authorities with the practical application of the noise measurement aspects of the Wind Guidelines.

The revisions to the Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2006, when finalised, will be issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Planning authorities, and, where applicable, An Bord Pleanála must have regard to guidelines issued under Section 28 in the performance of their functions under the Planning Acts.

### **Air Quality**

140. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if Ireland is in full compliance with the European directives, 2008 Clean Air for Europe Directive, Directive 2008/50/EC and the Fourth Daughter directive, Directive 2004/107/EC of 15 December 2004; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32369/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** Air quality monitoring in Ireland is carried out to meet the requirements of EU Directive 2008/50/EC on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe, also known as the CAFE Directive. The Directive requires that certain minimum levels of monitoring are conducted for the purpose of assessment and management of air quality. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has responsibility for the monitoring of air quality in Ireland, and monitors a range of atmospheric pollutants, based on data obtained from monitoring stations that form the national ambient air quality network.

The EPA also publishes an annual report on air quality, based primarily on the monitoring requirements of the CAFE Directive. The most recent report, Air Quality in Ireland 2013 – Key Indicators of Ambient Air Quality, was published in October 2014 and provides an assessment of air quality in Ireland for 2013, compared to the CAFE Directive standards, as well as assessments in relation to more stringent World Health Organisation (WHO) air quality guidelines for the protection of human health.

That report indicates that Ireland currently meets all EU standards for air quality but exceeds WHO air quality guidelines for particulate matter in some areas. Particulate matter levels are of concern, particularly during the winter heating season in areas where the sale of smoky coal is permitted. As a result, levels of particulate matter in smaller towns are similar to or higher than those in cities where smoky coal is banned. To help protect our good air quality, the Irish consumer must become more aware of their choice in home heating fuel and the potential

impact that choice can have on air quality in their locality and on human health.

Nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) levels showed a slight increasing trend in the years 2008 – 2010. During this period, NO<sub>2</sub> levels were close to the CAFE limit value in Dublin and Cork cities, due primarily to traffic congestion. However, NO<sub>2</sub> levels decreased from 2010-2012, and thereafter may have stabilised in 2013. To further reduce NO<sub>2</sub> levels in cities, we must develop and implement policies to reduce travel demand, emphasising sustainable transport modes such as cycling, walking and public transport, and improving the efficiency of motorised transport.

More recent figures from the EPA, for 2014, indicate that no levels above the EU limit value were recorded at any of the ambient air quality network monitoring sites in Ireland.

### Air Quality

141. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the way his Department and the Environmental Protection Agency define near real-time reporting in relation to the monitoring of ambient air quality here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32370/15]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):** Air quality monitoring in Ireland is carried out to meet the requirements of EU Directive 2008/50/EC on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe, also known as the CAFE Directive. The instruments at the monitoring stations calculate hourly average values for each pollutant. These values are picked up by the telemetry system at between one minute and thirty five minutes past the hour.

### Emergency Accommodation Numbers

142. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the regulations surrounding the construction and renovation of buildings to use for emergency accommodation. [32379/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey):** The Building Control Act 1990 places a statutory obligation on owners, designers and builders to ensure that a building is designed and constructed in accordance with the requirements of the Building Regulations.

No special provisions relating to emergency accommodation per se are outlined under the Building Control Act 1990 or the regulations made thereunder. However, given that such accommodation would necessarily be intended for habitation by vulnerable persons, compliance with minimum legal safety requirements is of the utmost importance.

The aim of the Building Regulations is to provide for the safety and welfare of people in and about buildings and the regulations apply to new buildings (including a dwelling) or to an existing building which is undergoing works involving an extension, an upgrade, a material alteration or a material change of use. The minimum performance requirements that a building must achieve are set out in the Second Schedule to the Building Regulations. These requirements are set out in 12 parts (classified as Parts A to M) and a Technical Guidance Document is published to accompany each part of the Building Regulations indicating how the legal requirements of that part can be achieved in practice. Copies of the Technical Guidance Documents are available by on my Department's website by clicking on the following weblink - <http://www.environ.>

The regulation of building activity is not confined to the Building Control Acts and regulations made thereunder. Depending on the nature of the development concerned, additional obligations arising under the Planning and Development Acts, the Housing Acts, the Fire Safety Acts, the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, and the Multi-Unit Development Act, may also need to be considered.

### **Emergency Call Answering Service**

143. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of 999/112 calls received by the BT central control call centre in 2014 and to date in 2015; the number of calls for each individual service be it Garda, ambulance, fire or Coast Guard; the breakdown between landline and mobile; the current period of the BT contract and the value of same; the percentage which is paid by each phone provider; the plans to review or alter the current service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32419/15]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White):** The Emergency Call Answering Service (ECAS) answers all 112 and 999 calls to the Emergency Services in the State. Emergency calls are free of charge to callers on all telecommunications networks. The ECAS is funded through the Call Handling Fee (“CHF”), a fee payable by the telecommunications operator presenting the call. ECAS also manages an emergency text messaging service allowing deaf, hard of hearing and speech-impaired people in the Republic of Ireland to send an emergency SMS text message. Following a competitive procurement process, the Department appointed BT Ireland to operate the ECAS initially for five years to 14 July 2015. This was extended for 2 years to 14 July 2017 following a detailed assessment of the costs and benefits of extending the current agreement and procurement of a new service. The total value of this contract including set up costs, operator salaries, accommodation and telecommunications costs is estimated at €55 million over the seven year term.

The ECAS is performing to a consistently high standard and exceeding all of the performance levels set out in the Concession Agreement. It has handled over 10 million calls since it launched in July 2010 and has filtered out over 6.2 million calls allowing the emergency services to deal with genuine emergency calls. The average speed of answer for a caller to ECAS is 0.6 seconds which is one of the fastest in Europe according to a report by the European Commission “*Implementation of the European emergency number 112*”. Calls are passed to the appropriate Emergency Service in under 6.5 seconds on average with details of the emergency and the location of the caller.

My Department is in the process of preparing an invitation to tender (ITT) for a new concession agreement to operate the service with effect from 14 July 2017.

Details of the call volumes requested is set out in this following table:

	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015 (to 1 September 2015)</b>
Total Calls to ECAS	2,149,445	1,243,827
Garda	595,850	363,827
Fire	72,203	44,874
Ambulance	287,156	190,677
Coast Guard	7,811	5,270
Total Landline Calls	538,006	311,330

	2014	2015 (to 1 September 2015)
Total Mobile Calls	1,611,439	932,497

It should be noted that these figures only represent 112/999 calls to the Emergency Services and do not include other direct calls to local stations or offices.

The percentage paid by individual phone providers is commercially sensitive and is not provided in order to respect the legitimate commercial interests of the phone providers.

### Inland Fisheries Data

144. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide in tabular form the salmon counter figures from the counter at Scartleigh Dam on the River Feale from 1 January 2015 to date in 2015 on a month by month basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32427/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Inland Fisheries Ireland maintain the majority of fish counters in place on migratory salmonid rivers and, in addition to downloading raw data, undertake a detailed verification of the counts and confirm the verified counts before making them publicly available. IFI produces an Annual Fish Counter Report which details the relevant verified annual runs of salmon in the rivers where such counters are operational. IFI advise that the verified and confirmed data for the Feale for 2015 are not yet available. I have asked IFI to provide the information to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

I am advised by IFI that the primary index for assessing the status of salmon stocks on the River Feale is the data provided by the Feale fish counter. The annual fish counter assessment is then used in conjunction with the commercial salmon catch and the catch of salmon by anglers to input to the scientific review to generate the annual salmon return to the Feale. Counters, including that on the Feale, are used to support the management of salmon, which is a listed species under the Habitats Directive. Management is designed to ensure the stocks are appropriately protected and that an adequate stock survives to spawn over the winter to ensure the long-term survival of the genetically individual river stock.

### National Broadband Plan Implementation

145. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the regulatory oversight his Department will have on the broadband intervention strategy in terms of supervising universal service obligations, wholesale access conditions, wholesale physical network infrastructure access, retail authorisations, wholesale-retail contract oversight, dispute resolutions, service level agreements, quality of service standards, monitoring of significant market power, normally the job of the regulation but which has been given a limited role until the intervention is complete; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32445/15]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White):** Section 7.7 of the National Broadband Plan Intervention Strategy which I published for public consultation in July last sets out the governance issues that need to be addressed to ensure robust management of the contract or contracts put in place following the NBP procurement

process. The accompanying governance report by our expert advisors contains greater detail on the full range of governance issues. Both documents are available at *www.broadband.gov.ie*. As the contracting authority, it is envisaged that my Department will be responsible for the overall management of the contract(s), including contract governance.

The contract(s) would be monitored and reviewed to ensure consistency with existing and any future telecommunications regulatory framework.

ComReg will continue to exercise its day-to-day regulatory functions in relation to telecommunications market.

### **National Transport Authority**

146. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update on the progress of the plans to hold open tenders for 10% of existing Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann routes; and if he has met with either company to discuss potential difficulties for them should they be unsuccessful in retaining these contracts. [31951/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The tendering process is a matter for the National Transport Authority, NTA, and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Tourism Industry**

147. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the resources which will be made available by his Department for the Ireland's Ancient East tourist initiative; the criteria that must be met for a town's inclusion in same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31803/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The role of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport in relation to tourism lies primarily in the area of national policy. The development of Ireland's Ancient East is an operational matter for the Board and management of Fáilte Ireland. The Department is not directly involved in its development or promotion. Accordingly, I have asked Fáilte Ireland to reply to the Deputy directly in this regard. Please contact my private office if you do not hear from them within ten working days.

### **Rail Network**

148. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the rationale behind the decision to terminate the DART underground project; the representations he has received from the business community and from interested groups expressing concerns regarding the abandonment of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32057/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I refer the Deputy to my response to Priority Oral Question No 1.

### **Rail Services**

149. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason Iarnród Éireann does not sell five-day tickets; if plans to sell five-day tickets are being considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32343/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The issue raised is a matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Rail Network**

150. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an explanation for the decision not to proceed with the DART underground project regarding north County Dublin and as an overall plan for the city transport network. [32368/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I refer the Deputy to my response to Priority Question No 1.

### **Bus Services**

151. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason for the restriction of a licence applied to a bus company (details supplied) with respect to picking up passengers from 7 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 4.30 p.m. to 7.30 p.m. travelling between Ennis and Arthur's Quay, Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32381/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Commencement of Legislation**

152. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has commenced section 11 of the Road Traffic Act 2014; and if not, when he intends to commence this important section. [32393/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Section 11 of the Road Traffic Act, 2014 was commenced on 26 November 2014 by Statutory Instrument number 536 of 2014.

### **Road Signage**

153. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request Transport Infrastructure Ireland, formerly the National Roads Authority, to provide directional signage at Shannon Airport and right along the M18 to the Wild Atlantic Way; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32417/15]



**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), formerly the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to the TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Motor Tax Collection**

154. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will restructure commercial vehicle road tax in line with comparable costs in Northern Ireland in order to save jobs in the haulage sector here as Irish hauliers pay €4,000 per annum per truck for a six-axle articulated vehicle whereas in the North they pay £640 per truck and an Irish haulage operator must also contribute £10 per day per vehicle to access Northern Ireland on routes that had no charge prior to 1 April 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32446/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** An Interdepartmental Group has carried out a review of the current commercial motor tax regime and consulted with hauliers and other stakeholders. The report is being submitted to me and to the Ministers for Finance and for the Environment, Community and Local Government, for joint consideration. Once agreement is reached, I hope to announce a new, fairer, basis for calculating commercial motor tax.

As an interim measure to reduce the commercial motor tax burden on Heavy Goods Vehicles the Minister for Finance committed in November 2014 to reducing the motor tax rates for HGVs of 12 tonnes plus in Budget 2016, with a tapering of the reduction for vehicles below 12 tonnes.

This Government has recognised the challenges facing the sector and announced the fuel duty rebate for hauliers in 2013, which could result in savings of up to €70million per annum for the haulage sector.

The UK HGV road user levy was introduced in 2014. This Government lobbied actively against the application of the charge to Northern Ireland, in co-operation with Stormont Ministers. Unfortunately the UK Minister for Transport chose to give only very minor exemptions to Northern Ireland from the road user charge. However few Irish hauliers are paying £10 per day to access UK roads. The UK charge is a sliding scale, with rates ranging from £1.70 to £10 per day, or £85 to £1,000 per annum, depending on vehicle type and weight.

### **Rail Network**

155. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request Iarnród Éireann to paint and repair the main railway bridge that runs through the town of Athlone, over the Shannon (details supplied). [32449/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

Issues relating to maintenance on the rail network are a matter for Iarnród Éireann in the first instance. Exchequer funds are made available each year for investment in railway safety, asset renewal and maintenance. Since 2014 these funds are governed by the Infrastructure Manager Multi Annual Contract (IMMAC) a requirement under EU rules. The works covered by this contract are prioritised by Iarnród Éireann based on appropriate risk assessments. Therefore works relating to bridges may be funded under this contract if so prioritised.

I have referred the Deputy's question to Iarnród Éireann for a direct reply. If you do not receive a response within 10 working days, please contact my private office.

### **Transport Infrastructure**

156. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he continues to progress integrated transport plans across the entire country with particular reference to the potential use of the rail system for commuter transport to a greater extent that has been found possible heretofore; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32455/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Government's Capital Plan will be published shortly. This will include a major programme of public transport investment for the coming years covering all modes including rail.

It is imperative that we invest in our transport system to ensure that we can meet growing demand and tackle congestion to support economic growth. It is also important that in planning our investment strategy, we plan appropriately so that areas which will see major development and population growth in the future will be properly served by public transport. I am confident that the new capital plan will provide the investment required to meet these objectives.

### **Sports Events**

157. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he continues to have discussions with the major sporting organisations with a view to encouraging the use of this country as an international venue for sporting events; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32456/15]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring):** The hosting of major sports events can generate additional international visits and help 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, in conjunction with their colleagues in Northern Ireland where appropriate, to attract international events, and subject, of course, to an assessment of the costs and 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.

### **Regional Airports**

158. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which regional airports are expected to continue to play a major part in the national transport network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32457/15]

159. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he continues to review the debt affecting any of the regional airports with particular reference to the need to ensure their viability in the future and their place within the national transport infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32458/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 158 and 159 together.

My Department's recently published National Aviation Policy acknowledges the role played by the regional airports of Donegal, Ireland West Airport Knock, Kerry and Waterford as being important because of a level of international connectivity that they bring to a region for the tourism and business sectors. That connectivity is seen as being a significant contributory factor underpinning Ireland's economic recovery and sustainable development into the future.

This Policy confirms that these four regional airports 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 (CAPEX and OPEX) 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 the airports being supported to exploit all opportunities to expand their level of connectivity to other regions.

The issue of the airports' debt is a matter for the regional airports themselves.

### **Tourism Industry**

160. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which the tourism sector has contributed to national economic recovery; if he is satisfied regarding the adequacy of the provisions already in place to facilitate the future development and expansion of the industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32459/15]

163. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which any particular sectors of the tourism sector in 2015 have shown particular potential for growth with consequent economic benefit in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32463/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 160 and 163 together.

Tourism is contributing significantly to Ireland's economic recovery. CSO overseas tourism figures for the first seven months of 2015 show that there were over 4.8 million overseas visits to Ireland, an increase of 12.2% on the same seven-month period of 2014.

This growth in overseas visits has been accompanied by strong growth in overseas tourism revenue from all the main markets. The most recent CSO Quarterly Tourism and Travel publication shows that spending in Ireland by overseas visitors (excluding air fares or ferry charges) for the first half of 2015 increased by 16.2%, compared to the same 6-month period of 2014. There was 8.4% growth in revenue from Great Britain, 33.7% growth in revenue from North America, and 14.9% growth in revenue from Mainland Europe. Other long-haul markets recorded growth of 2.6% in revenue .

The Government's Tourism Policy "People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025" acknowledges that generating increased levels of overseas revenue is key for the future of Irish tourism and the Government's ambition is that overseas tourism revenue will reach €5 billion by 2025 net of inflation, compared to €3.5 billion in 2014.

I have recently appointed a Tourism Leadership Group, to put in place a Tourism Action Plan that will set out the actions required in the period to 2018 in order that the overall objectives in "People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025". can be achieved. I intend to publish the Tourism Action Plan in the first quarter of 2016.

### **Tourism Industry**

161. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he has examined the potential growth for business tourism here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32460/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The role of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport in relation to tourism lies primarily in the area of national policy. The development of business tourism is an operational matter for the Boards and management of Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. Fáilte Ireland is responsible for the development of the business tourism sector. Tourism Ireland is responsible for overseas marketing of Ireland as a destination for business tourism.

Accordingly, I have asked the Agencies to reply to the Deputy directly in this regard. Please contact my private office if you do not hear from them within ten working days.

### **Tourist Accommodation**

162. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which any shortfall in bed accommodation has been identified in Dublin or the various regions throughout the country; his proposals to address this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32461/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** According to Fáilte Ireland's most recent accommodation occupancy statistics, for January to June 2015, hotel room occupancy in Dublin stood at 72%, whereas hotel occupancy in the rest of Ireland was 59%. Occupancy rates in the same period for other forms of accommodation were mostly higher in Dublin than in the rest of the country, although when the statistics become available for the peak tourist season we would expect a lower differential. Comparing occupancy rates

in Dublin/rest of the country respectively, guest house room occupancy was 74%/41% , hostels achieved 73%/47% bed occupancy, B&B room occupancy was 48%/29% and caravan and camping site occupancy was 20%/16%. At 32%, self-catering occupancy levels for the first half of 2015 were the same in Dublin as in the rest of the country.

The overall statistics indicate that the country as a whole has sufficient stock of tourist accommodation to meet the needs of the industry. However, regarding hotel accommodation specifically, analysis of recent trends in occupancy levels and the impact of increasing demand indicates that we will require additional capacity in some parts of the country - in particular Dublin City Centre. Failure to address such capacity constraints could impact negatively on targets set in Fáilte Ireland's "Destination Dublin" strategy and in the Government's Tourism Policy Statement.

To broaden our understanding of the situation and inform consideration of appropriate responses, I understand that Fáilte Ireland recently commissioned an independent assessment of the potential supply of visitor accommodation in Dublin up to 2020 compared to likely demand under several different growth scenarios and I am informed that a full report is expected by November 2015.

*Question No. 163 answered with Question No. 160.*

### **Road Network**

164. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which his Department continues to examine the various traffic routes with a view to future development such an extension of the motorway system, upgrading of existing motorways and-or other options for rapid rail transport to and from the regions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32464/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Government's Capital Plan will be published shortly. This will include a major programme of road and public transport investment for the coming years.

It is imperative that we invest in our transport system to ensure that we can meet growing demand and tackle congestion to support economic growth. It is also important that in planning our investment strategy, we plan appropriately so that areas which will see major development and population growth in the future will be properly served by public transport. I am confident that the new capital plan will provide the investment required to meet these objectives.

### **Road Safety Data**

165. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which well-known and identifiable accident black spots remain an issue throughout the country; the extent to which efforts are being made to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32465/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Local authorities are responsible for mapping and collating available collision data on regional and local roads. Where analysis shows that engineering measures may assist in reducing the collision risk at a particular location then any local authority which is not fully self funding in terms of roads (under the new Local Property Tax regime) may apply to my Department for funding under

the Low Cost Safety programme. Each year monies are made available to local authorities for such works with priority given to works that are considered to be most effective in reducing collisions.

Collision data for national roads is mapped and collated by Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII). Accordingly I am forwarding your query to TII for direct reply in respect of national roads. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Transport Infrastructure**

166. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he continues to strive for a fully co-ordinated and integrated transport sector to meet the needs of road, rail, air and sea traffic with particular reference to meeting the needs of passengers and ensuring minimum delays and cost-effectiveness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32466/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** My Department's Statement of Strategy sets out the actions being taken or planned to deliver an integrated transport network across all transport modes. The strategy sets out performance indicators to measure the achievements of these actions.

My Department and I also constantly monitor our national transport facilities to ensure that, given the resources available, they are achieving their greatest potential. An integrated and co-ordinated transport system is an important consideration when it comes to future decisions on transport investment. In making decisions as to future expenditure, my Department has been active to ensure that a co-ordinated approach is taken and that we do not look at land, maritime or aviation transport in isolation from each other. In this context, my Department published a comprehensive Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport in August 2015 which set out the priorities and key principles for investing in our transport network.

### **Military Aircraft Landings**

167. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the basis for his reporting of the number of US troops passing through Shannon Airport; and the way he arrived at the number of 55,405 for 2014. [32468/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As stated in the response to Parliamentary Question Ref No.617 of 20th January 2015 the figure 55,405 was based on information provided by Shannon Airport Authority.

### **Air Navigation Orders**

168. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will indicate the advance notice required for permit requests for the carriage of munitions under the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973; and the procedure followed when considering those requests. [32469/15]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Applications from airlines for munitions of war exemptions under Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order are received by my Department on a standard

application form.

The Department requests that such applications are made at least 48 hours before the flight is due to take place. Airlines usually make applications weeks in advance of flights, but on occasion applications have been made less than 48 hours in advance and are processed if feasible.

For all such applications the Department seeks the views of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in relation to foreign policy issues and the Department of Justice in relation to security issues. If the munitions involved are also classified as 'dangerous goods' the views of the Irish Aviation Authority are sought in relation to aviation safety issues. A copy of the application is also sent to the Department of Defence for information. Once these bodies have been consulted a decision is made to grant or refuse an application.

### **Cultural Policy**

169. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the extent to which she and her Department have examined the potential for Irish culture to be used as part of a continued economic development plan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32462/15]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department provides significant funding towards numerous cultural events and bodies, which are of great economic and social benefit to the State. For example, my Department supports the annual Culture Night event, which has grown from a relatively small-scale cultural event, staged only in Dublin, in 2006 to the significant national cultural event it now is. Culture Night 2015 had over 3,000 events in 1,500 venues. Early feedback from the event has been overwhelmingly positive with many participating locations reporting larger turnouts than in previous years.

My Department also provides support to numerous other cultural events through the funding it provides to the Arts Council, the national cultural institutions and a range of other cultural organisations.

Over the course of 2015, more than €3 million per week will be invested by my Department in support of arts, culture and film in Ireland.

In addition, my Department is currently the process of developing a new National Cultural Policy. *Culture 2025* will reflect the important role that culture plays in our daily lives and will help integrate cultural policy within broader social and economic goals. It will explore how culture can contribute to building an inclusive society, provide avenues for expression for our citizens, drive innovation and contribute to our societal growth and economic wellbeing.

The final policy document to emerge from this process will be submitted for the approval of Government and it is envisaged that the new policy will be published in early 2016.

### **National Monuments**

170. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the position regarding the reported destruction of a Bronze Age Bog Road at Mayne Bog, County Westmeath; the action that has been taken; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32360/15]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My De-

partment, through the relevant development control frameworks and in co-operation with the landowner, is pursuing an archaeological response in this case that is based on preservation in-situ of those parts of the trackway where it is a realistic option and preservation by record where it is no longer viable. Most recently in that context, my Department submitted a set of archaeological observations, with three specific recommendations in relation to the trackway, to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in connection with an Integrated Pollution Control licence application to the Agency earlier this year for peat extraction at Mayne Bog. The form and extent of the archaeological excavation sought by my Department was directly comparable to the archaeological mitigation strategies adopted in relation to similar monuments on Bord na Móna peatlands.

The archaeological investigations recommended by my Department to the EPA have since been carried out by the landowner under a separate licence granted by me, as Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, under section 26 of the National Monuments Act 1930. The works were inspected and verified at the time by my Department's National Monuments Service.

A report on the excavations has since been received and is being examined in my Department, which will liaise with the landowner in relation to any further archaeological work on the trackway that is determined from the report as being necessary and appropriate.

### **National Monuments**

171. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she is aware of the nationally important issue of Knockhouse Tri Vallate Ring Fort which is one of only two tri vallates in County Waterford and the first to be excavated here, where over 50% of this site has been removed for the construction of the west pharma plant which is currently under way; her views that as part of the company's corporate social responsibility, the area should be conserved, since the fort does not interfere with the factory's location; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32373/15]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Although the monument site referred to is listed in the 1995 Record of Monuments and Places established under the National Monuments Acts, it would be important to note that there were no surviving archaeological features above ground even at that time. The site was, until recently, in the ownership of the local authority. In line with its statutory obligations under Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, and under section 12 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994, the local authority consulted my Department during 2013 and 2014 regarding the archaeological implications of proposed works it was considering in the context of potential future development of the site.

In response, my Department advised the authority of its view that the appropriate course would be to secure the preservation of any archaeological remains, by record, through an appropriate level of archaeological excavation and recording. A programme of archaeological excavation, licensed by my Department under section 26 of the National Monuments Act 1930, was subsequently carried out. The report on the excavation works will be considered by my Department, on receipt and will inform any future deliberations in relation to this matter, including any potential future referral to my Department relating to development impacting directly on the monument site.

### **Hare Coursing**

172. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the posi-



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tion regarding a club (details supplied) which was in breach of licence conditions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32411/15]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question Nos. 1696, 1697, 1711, 1712 and 1713 of 22 September 2015.

### **Wildlife Protection**

173. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the reason she has refused to meet with groups opposed to hare coursing; the reason she did not attend the opening of a Wildlife Rehabilitation Conference but did attend a game fair in Birr, County Offaly which showcased, among other bloodsports, working terrier and lurcher dogs. [32412/15]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I receive numerous invitations from groups and individuals for meetings, events and conferences in relation to various issues which are pertinent to my Department. It is not always possible for me to accept such invitations. With regard to the Wildlife Rehabilitation Conference (dealing with wildlife crime), a senior official of my Department opened that event on 13th September last on my behalf. Officials from the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department also made presentations at this conference.