

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 8, inclusive, answered orally.

GLAS Administration

9. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason, if his Department is encouraging farmers to use controlled burning as an option for land management, that when a green low-carbon agri-environmental scheme planner recommends controlled burning, it results in his Department deeming land as potentially ineligible for payment under the basic payment scheme and the natural constraints scheme by his Department. [34213/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department recognises that controlled burning, properly planned and properly carried out, has a role to play in land management. This role is not just with regard to land-eligibility, but it can also play a beneficial role with regard to habitat conservation and enhancement. In particular, burning has traditionally been used to help manage land in upland areas and is one of the means by which these important habitats were created in the first place, followed by a balanced grazing regime. In more recent times, however, much of the knowledge of how and when to burn land correctly has been lost as the farming activity on these upland zones decreased. Most of these areas are commonages, and many are now seriously under-grazed, which has had a detrimental effect on both land eligibility and biodiversity.

Under GLAS, one of our main objectives is to restore these uplands to agricultural and environmental health. To do that, we have created a specific measure within the new scheme that encourages shareholders on commonages to come together and draw up a new Commonage Management Plan with the help of a trained GLAS commonage advisor. The main component of this plan is a new grazing regime on every commonage, which is tailored to the needs of that commonage, and to which each shareholder must now commit and contribute. Within that plan we have also provided for the possibility of supplementary actions, including controlled burning. If that is to form part of the new management regime, it must be planned properly and carried out in strict accordance with the relevant legislation. Where burning takes place in full compliance with these requirements, there is no issue in relation to land eligibility.

The Guide to Land Eligibility, which issued to farmers this spring, makes this quite clear when it states as follows: "Where land has been burned, it is not in a state suitable for grazing or cultivation and therefore is not eligible. The exception to this is where controlled burning is carried out in full compliance with all relevant environmental legislative requirements and any other lawful requirements, having first consulted with and notified the Gardaí and the local fire service. In the case of Natura lands (lands designated as SAC and/or SPA), prior approval

must be obtained through the Activities Requiring Consent (ARC) system as implemented by NPWS.”

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

10. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures his Department is taking to address agriculture’s large contribution to carbon emissions to meet emissions targets agreed by the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34018/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Sustainable growth is a basic principle of all of our agriculture policies and programmes - we are committed to ensuring that the sector continues to grow sustainably so that Ireland can play its part in meeting the increasing global food demand while having regard to our climate obligations. This is why my Department and its agencies have developed a series of innovative measures including Origin Green and the Carbon Navigator initiative to drive sustainability in the sector. Sustainability and climate change measures are also key elements of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

My Department is also developing its sectorial contribution to the National Mitigation Plan, which will examine how the sector can play its part in addressing the current 2020 compliance challenge and will look out to 2030 and beyond.

The recently launched agri-food strategy, Food Wise 2025, sets a course for the agri-food industry of more sustainable growth over the next decade. An environmental analysis was developed in tandem with this strategy and the final report will be completed shortly.

Ireland sees agriculture, forestry and other land uses (AFOLU) greenhouse mitigation policy as intrinsically linked in an integrated land-use approach. Our major commitment to investment in the Forestry Programme will yield a very significant level of mitigation to 2020 and beyond.

My Department is also working closely with colleagues in the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources to assess the potential of bioenergy from the agriculture and forestry sectors to contribute to the 2020 renewable energy targets.

In terms of research and its contribution to the environmentally sustainable development of the agri-food sector; my Department provides a core grant to Teagasc, and operates competitive funding programmes for ‘public good’ type agri-food research, namely Stimulus and FIRM. A recurring research priority is the greenhouse gas efficiency of Irish agricultural production systems so as to maintain our economic and environmental competitive advantages.

Budget Submissions

11. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he expects to be in a position to reassure the farming community in regard to the various issues it has raised with him in its recent budget submission; if the various farm support payments are paid and up-to-date in line with expectations; if a means can be found to address the issue of fluctuating food prices, with a view to achieving a greater equilibrium; if he remains satisfied regarding the future prospects of the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34188/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The budget

submissions of the farming organisations are mainly concerned with taxation and expenditure. Taxation policy is primarily the responsibility of the Minister for Finance. However I have on-going contact with Minister Noonan to ensure that taxation policy reflects the Government's commitment to agriculture, as evidenced by our cooperation on the 'Agri-taxation Review', which was published as part of Budget 2015.

The Agri-taxation Review is a comprehensive taxation strategy for the sector and the Government's commitment to agriculture was evidenced by the immediate implementation of the majority of its recommendations. Of course it was not possible to implement all of the recommendations in one budget. My Department and I have been engaged with the Department of Finance on the outstanding recommendations from the Review and other taxation matters, including those raised by the farming organisations, which are being considered in the context of Budget 2016.

In relation to expenditure, my intention is to ensure that all resources available to my Department will be managed to provide the optimum economic benefit to the agri-food sector in terms of realising its future potential. Expenditure so far this year is in line with profiles and it is expected that this will continue over the remaining quarter.

As a small open economy which exports the vast bulk of its main agricultural commodities, Ireland will always feel the effects of volatility on world markets:

- Direct payments provide a valuable source of farm income support and act as a hedge against price volatility. The measures in the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme will provide vital support through farm investment, agri-environment and knowledge transfer schemes.

- The package introduced by the EU Commission recently to address difficulties in the dairy and pigmeat sectors reflects the majority of the demands I presented to them. The concession made by the Commission to allow advance payments of 70% under the direct payments scheme and 85% for rural development schemes, which will be of major benefit in easing the cash flow of farmers.

- Income averaging for farmers, extended in last year's Budget from 3 to 5 years, allows a smoothing of the tax liability in any given year to balance out fluctuations in commodity prices.

- I have regular meetings with the CEOs of the main banks, and I know that all are aware of the difficulties in prices this year, and are planning accordingly in terms of managing loans.

With regard to future prospects, Food Wise 2025, the new ten year strategy for the agri-food sector published in July this year, builds on the successful vision of Food Harvest 2020. It identifies the opportunities and challenges facing the sector and provides an enabling strategy, with detailed recommendations, which will allow the sector to grow and prosper.

GLAS Administration

12. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if tranche two of the green low-carbon agri-environmental scheme will contain the same measures as tranche one; if the low input permanent pasture area remains at 10 ha; if planting new hedgerows will continue to be an option; if not, the reasons for the changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34035/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): As the Deputy

is aware, the first tranche of GLAS proved hugely successful attracting nearly 27,000 applications in all. Applications were received from every single county and virtually every action was selected at some stage. On the basis of the plans submitted for the 27,000 applications received to date, we have already met or exceeded RDP targets for Low Input Permanent Pasture, Protection of Watercourses, Laying Hedgerows, Planting New Hedgerows, Planting of Traditional Orchards, Bird, Bee and Bat Habitats, Wild Bird Cover and Stone Wall Maintenance.

For the second tranche of GLAS, which I intend to launch next week, I have revisited the various actions that will be available to farmers in the light of the substantial progress made to date. GLAS differs from previous schemes in that it adopts a very targeted approach to meeting its environmental objectives and the RDP includes a provision for review and reassessment after the first tranche. Not all the actions which have met or exceeded targets require to be adjusted, given that the associated spend is in many cases relatively easily accommodated in within the total budget.

However, given the very high uptake of Low Input Permanent Pasture (LIPP), it is proposed to adjust the provision for this action under the next tranche. It will still be possible to take up to 10 hectares of either LIPP or Traditional Hay Meadow as before, but the LIPP component will be limited to 5 hectares. While this means that we will still see permanent pasture coming into GLAS, I hope it will encourage more farmers to take the hay meadow option, which is well behind target, and which delivers the same payment per hectare.

In relation to the planting of new hedgerows, I am proposing to suspend this action for Tranche 2, along with the planting of traditional orchards. Both actions have met their targets for the entire RDP, and there are concerns about the availability of planting stock. I will, however, review this for Tranche 3. I am also reducing slightly the maximum length for coppicing from 1000 metres to 750 metres. This action is well on target and if possible I would like to encourage farmers to continue to take up the hedge-laying option which has already proved very popular.

On birds, and following discussion with farmer representatives, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and Bird Watch Ireland, I am proposing a number of changes which will make it easier for farmers to adapt to the new regimes required, and which will encourage even greater uptake.

For Natura land, I am providing for part-parcel actions, combined with compatible actions on the remaining part-parcel. Again, this follows discussions with farmer representative and other stakeholders and will provide for greater flexibility.

On protection of watercourses, I am also providing for this action to be available on any land adjoining a water course where cattle may have access, and not just on grassland parcels.

For rare breeds, and as explained previously in this House, I am making it possible for farmers who acquired Kerry Bog Ponies and Galway Sheep in 2014 and who joined the relevant societies, to enter GLAS now under Tier 1. This particular concession recognises the comparatively greater conservation challenge facing these breeds. The remaining Rare Breeds listed for GLAS continue to provide Tier 1 access under exactly the same terms as before.

These proposed changes have been notified to the European Commission, as required, and their final response is expected very shortly.

Agriculture Scheme Administration

13. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will seek an increase in the budget allocation for areas of natural constraint in order to reverse the cuts from previous budgets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34204/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme forms part of the 2014 to 2020 Rural Development Programme, and has replaced the previous Disadvantaged Areas and Less Favoured Areas Schemes. Eligibility requirements under the new ANC scheme have remained largely the same as under the previous schemes, with some minor adjustments. The ANC Scheme has an annual budget of €195 million, and is a central element of the new Rural Development Programme. The rates of aid payable to farmers whose holding are situated in designated areas are in line with the difficulties that they face in farming in the areas in question. In relation to the changes I have made to the requirements of the Scheme in recent years, my priority has been to ensure that this aid is paid to those who are actively pursuing a farming activity, and who are contributing to the economic life of the rural areas where they farm.

I also availed of the negotiations of the new Rural Development Programme to introduce a new Island Farming payment as part of the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme. This is an important development and is in recognition of the specific challenges that these farmers face on a day by day basis carrying out their normal farming activities.

Payments under the ANC scheme, including the island farmer element, have already commenced.

Under the terms of the new Common Agricultural Policy, member states are required to undertake a review of the designation of areas eligible for the ANC scheme by 2018. This new designation will be based on bio-physical criteria such as terrain, and soil conditions.

Work on the data required to underlie this new designation is currently underway, and the budget allocation for the ANC scheme will also be considered as part of this process.

Fishery Harbour Centres

14. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the actions he has taken each year since 2011 to develop fishing, boat repairs, tourism, and other small businesses at Howth fishery harbour in Dublin 13; the number of jobs maintained and created in the harbour over the lifetime of this Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34019/15]

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

To this end, the Harbour regularly approves applications for events, yacht races, local celebrations and various functions etc within the harbour precincts. In addition, the Department approved locating the Howth Tourism Information Office within the confines of Howth Fishery

Harbour Centre. This facility opened in July 2014.

Notwithstanding the prevailing economic environment in which we operate, I am happy to be able to advise the Deputy that in excess of €4.2 million has been invested in maintenance, development and upgrading works at Howth FHC as part of my Department's Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme from 2011 to 2014.

For 2015, I approved funding of €1.79 million for the maintenance and development of Howth Fishery Harbour Centre. Major works for 2015 include the continued upgrading of the electrical system, provision of a small craft pontoon and traffic management works.

There are a total of 70 properties in the Howth Fishery Harbour Centre property portfolio encompassing a range of economic activity. Properties are made available by means of competitive public tender, the most recent competition being held on the 15th June this year. The majority of Fishery Harbour Centre properties are leased by my Department to a variety of public and private sector tenants which support this range of activities.

Employment statistics relating to the private and state organisations operating out of Howth Fishery Harbour Centre are not available, however I am satisfied that the investments made by my Department in the infrastructure of the Harbour are facilitating the maintenance and development of commercial, industrial, leisure and tourist related activity at the harbour and in the wider Howth area.

Live Exports

15. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to secure live export markets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34031/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Live exports serve a vital purpose as a means of satisfying market demand for live animals and providing essential alternative market outlets for Irish cattle farmers. I have always attached major importance to the live cattle export trade, and my Department, along with Bord Bia, has been extremely proactive during my time as Minister in both encouraging and facilitating shipments abroad and the cross border live trade to Northern Ireland. As the Deputy will be aware, Ireland has in place a good system of transport links to facilitate live exports with the highest standards of animal welfare being at the forefront of procedures for approving transportation options. My Department has approved extra roll-on roll-off ferry capacity for livestock transport in the year to date. There are currently three dedicated vessels, the MV Express 1, the MV Atlantic M and the MV Holstein Express approved for the carriage of livestock by sea from Irish ports. Two roll-on roll-off vessels are approved for transport to the UK, and one to the France. Three other vessels are currently at various stages of the necessary processes for approval for carriage of livestock abroad. The Department always co-operates with live exporters to the fullest extent possible in order to facilitate live exports while ensuring that all vessels meet our high standards required.

Ireland continues to have a strong live export trade to Europe and beyond with over 236,000 head of live cattle worth over €172million being exported last year. So far in 2015, Ireland has exported live cattle to seventeen different countries and the total figure for live cattle exports stands at just under 150,000 head. Our most important markets this year have been the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Spain, Italy, Britain and France. The Dutch calf market in particular has seen sharp growth, with almost 44,000 calves sent there so far in just nine months of 2015

as opposed to 39,000 head in the whole of last year. IBR restrictions and geopolitical instability have impeded previously large-scale exports to Belgium and North Africa respectively.

Trade to Northern Ireland has improved sharply, up almost 6,000 head or 17% compared to this time last year, with cattle of beef and dairy dams making up 59% and 41% of the total, respectively. The total figure for the year stands at 40,000 head. It should be noted that the weaker euro has been creating more favourable conditions for live exporters. Currency fluctuations are one of the major factors in determining the relative economic attractiveness of Irish exports to the United Kingdom.

Improved domestic demand and tightening supply have led to a situation where beef producers are receiving a better price than previously at marts. This internal demand explains the overall drop in live exports compared to last year, which have reduced by 25% as of late September. The average price for this year so far is €4.05c/kg for an R3 grade steer excluding VAT. This is over 10% higher than the 2014 average, and is indicative of the generally positive trends that have been present in the beef sector this year.

Staff from my Department and Bord Bia will continue to work tirelessly to find new market outlets for live exports both within Europe and beyond. Ireland has a strong track record in this regard and events outside our control notwithstanding, we can expect to see continuing strong figures in the live trade in future.

Agriculture Scheme Penalties

16. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to address farm penalties under the basic payment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34030/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The reductions and penalties that apply to the Basic Payment Scheme are laid down in EU Regulations 1306/2014 and 640/2014. The reductions and penalties apply in instances such as the following situations:

- Where the applicant over-declares the eligible area of his or her land parcels.

- Where the applicant declares land that is also claimed by another farmer (dual claims) and it is established that he or she has no right to declare it for payment.

- Where the applicant claims land that he or she is no longer farming, which is effectively abandoned land.

- Where application forms are submitted after the deadline for the submission of applications.

The most effective method of reducing the level of penalties that apply to payments under the Basic Payment Scheme is to encourage farmers to ensure that they do not include such ineligible areas in the applications. In that regard, my Department issues maps of all the lands parcels declared for payment on an annual basis to all of the farmers submitting applications under the Direct Payment Schemes. In a covering letter accompanying the maps, farmers are strongly urged to carefully scrutinise the maps and ensure that they exclude all ineligible areas and features from the lands that they declare for payment in that year.

Many farmers have made arrangements with registered agricultural consultants/advisors to act as their agents for the submission of Direct Payment application forms. The majority of such applications are submitted on-line. Where a farmer has any doubts relating to land eligibility he/

she should double check this matter when confirming their application form details with their agent prior to submitting the Direct Payments application form. The vast majority of farmers heed this advice, consulting their agents as necessary and have excluded these ineligible areas from their applications.

My Department continues to take other action to bring this message to farmers and their agents. For example, my Department issued a comprehensive booklet on land eligibility in May of this year to all applicants. In addition, the opportunity is taken at scheme information meetings throughout the country to make a presentation to farmers on what lands should be excluded from their claims for payment.

Those farmers, who have over-claims detected during the completion of the administrative checks or following ground or remote sensing land eligibility inspections have the right to seek a review of the decision and if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the review, they can appeal the decision to the Agricultural Appeals Office.

Dairy Sector

17. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on concerns regarding the decline in profitability in the dairy sector; the European Union's refusal to increase intervention prices; and the action he proposes to take on this matter. [34216/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Having witnessed dairy market developments affecting milk and dairy commodity prices in Ireland and the EU, I presented a paper offering possible solutions to both the EU Commissioner and my EU ministerial colleagues in early September. These were presented on the basis of my belief that they were appropriate for consideration by the Council and as a response to the market issues that had developed. This list was not exhaustive and I sought to reach common ground with other Ministers regarding a suite of appropriate solutions. Whilst welcoming the steps previously taken by the Commission, including extensions to the dates for Aids to Private Storage and Intervention, I noted that having regard to the acute downturn in global milk prices over the past several months, and the severe impact this is having on farm incomes, that a number of further steps were urgently required including:

i. Utilising the provisions of Article 219 of the CMO Regulation to temporarily increase the threshold prices, with particular reference to skimmed milk powder.

ii. Restoring the scheme providing Aids to Private Storage for cheese which was introduced by the Commission in September 2014 but discontinued shortly after. In addition I called for the existing aid rates in the PSA schemes for butter and SMP to be reviewed immediately.

iii. Increasing the EU budget for market supports in light of the fact that the assigned revenues deriving from super levies will be some €400 million higher than originally foreseen in the draft budget for 2016.

iv. Using exceptional promotion measures to promote the consumption of dairy products on EU, but especially on 3rd country markets.

v. Increasing the advance of the Basic Payment and other elements of Direct Payments Scheme to 70%, to alleviate cash flow difficulties.

vi. I also called for the reopening of the scheme on Private Storage for Pigmeat which was

closed in May of this year.

In the longer term, I also made it clear that from my perspective, it will be necessary to give consideration at EU level to responses to volatility issues in the future such as more price transparency through the EU's Milk Market Observatory, further consideration of the role that might be played by futures markets, and the use of financial instruments specifically designed to take account of the cash flow impact of downward price cycles in commodity markets.

I am pleased to note that the final decision at Council on the aid package, including the 100% increase in the case of the PSA scheme for SMP, took account of Ireland's six point plan.. Unfortunately a temporary top-up in the intervention price for SMP did not enjoy the support of all Ministers or the Commission. However the improved PSA scheme for SMP, which will include longer periods for storage as well as the improved aid rates, the re introduction of PSA for cheese, the provision allowing 70% advance in the single farm payment, the provision of increased funding for promotion, and the provision of almost €14m in targeted direct aid for farmers can go some way towards alleviating the worst effects of the current market downturn.

Provision of targeted aid is also a significant initiative. In order to address the existing market disturbance efficiently and effectively and to prevent the situation resulting from that disturbance, or its effect on the market, from continuing or deteriorating further, the Commission deemed it appropriate to provide grant aid to Member States in the form of a one-time financial grant. The aim of this is to support farmers in the relevant sectors who are experiencing the most acute price fall and consequences of the prolongation of the Russian import ban.

Taking these factors into account, Ireland has been granted an allocation of €13.7 million from an overall fund of €420M. I am consulting with stakeholders at present and will make a decision on the use of this aid in the very near future.

GLAS Administration

18. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on his Department using the green low-carbon agri-environmental scheme as a means to reduce participants' claimable area and that of their neighbours who are not participating in the scheme. [34212/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I presume the Deputy is referring to the preparation of Commonage Management Plans under the new measure introduced for commonages as part of the Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environmental Scheme, GLAS. Commonages, which primarily consist of upland grazing, represent a mosaic of extremely important habitats, many of which are designated Natura areas. They are also, however, extremely important areas for agriculture and indeed their environmental value today and the richness of the biodiversity they present is to no small extent a result of hundreds, and indeed, thousands of years of agricultural use. Many of these commonages are now seriously under-grazed, which has had a detrimental effect on both land eligibility and biodiversity.

Under GLAS, one of our main objectives is to restore these uplands to agricultural and environmental health. To do that, we have created a specific measure within the new scheme that encourages shareholders on commonages to come together and draw up a new Commonage Management Plan with the help of a trained GLAS commonage advisor. The main component of this plan is the introduction of a new grazing regime on every commonage, which is tailored to the needs of that commonage, and to which each shareholder in GLAS must now commit and contribute.

The new GLAS Commonage Management Plans are required to review the entire area of the commonage, as all this area is potentially accessible to anybody grazing the hill. The Plan, when submitted, will provide a full assessment of the land cover that exists on the ground at present. This is one of its key values: these Plans are based on a new assessment of the condition of the commonage, drawn from site-visits and discussion with the participating shareholders. Amongst other things, the Plan needs to identify the actual grazable area on the commonage and then prepare a series of actions designed to at least maintain that area in good condition, while also addressing the conservation of other important habitats elsewhere. For this reason, under GLAS, my Department will pay on the entire area, not just the area directly available for agriculture.

The assessment undertaken must address any areas that are possibly ineligible under the current eligibility rules. If a consequence of this is that the Maximum Eligible Area (MEA) needs to be reduced, my Department will need to consider whether the BPS claim on the parcel in question also needs to be reduced in order to ensure that penalties do not occur. However, it should be noted that the MEA approach is considerably more flexible than previous ones, allowing areas of scrub for example to be accommodated within an overall calculation of what is eligible for payment. I believe that the combination of this approach, with a renewed and balanced grazing effort initiated through GLAS, will in fact safeguard the eligibility of these lands into the future.

GLAS Administration

19. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide the list of stocking rate calculations for commonages; respond to criticism that his Department officials are unable to provide clear guidance as to whether the stock that is carried on the commonage should include all stock, from both green low-carbon agri-environmental scheme, GLAS, and non-GLAS participants; and if the GLAS planner is only to take into account the stock carried on the commonage of GLAS participants. [34214/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Maximum and minimum stocking levels have already been established and published for all commonages. However, in the context of drawing up the Commonage Management Plans required under GLAS, it is accepted that the GLAS advisor acting for the shareholders concerned may form a different impression of what the commonage can or should carry, in the best interests of its environmental health. In such cases, I have specifically provided that the Advisor may recommend a different stocking level to the one which has been published, to ensure the commonage is adequately grazed and that habitats are protected. If the basis for doing so is sound, that new stocking-level will be accepted and can be used for drawing up the required Commonage Management Plan. For commonages in excess of 10 hectares, the stocking figures adopted for the Commonage Management Plan are based on what is required to maintain the commonage and requires the active participation of all GLAS farmers who have signed up to the Plan. However, where there are also farmers grazing the commonage under AEOS contracts, the GLAS Advisor drawing up the new Commonage Management Plan may include the grazing effort of these AEOS farmers in his calculations. This has been fully explained to advisors.

In addition, I have also provided for further flexibility in situations where a very small number of shareholders sign up to a Commonage Management Plan and the scale of the grazing requirement is clearly unattainable by that group. These cases will be reviewed by the Commonage Implementation Committee who may recommend that a lower total minimum grazing requirement apply.

Finally, where some shareholders signing up to the Commonage Management Plan are already grazing in excess of their individual maximum stocking level, I have also provided that this can be accommodated within the Plan if the other shareholders agree. In such cases, the other shareholders can reduce their own grazing effort by up to 50% to rebalance the Plan overall.

TAMS Eligibility

20. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the elements of the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme II that have been announced to date; the closing date for applications under each element; the allocated money; and if he will make a decision on the matter [34223/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): All elements of the various TAMS II schemes have now been announced and in each case the relevant closing dates and indicative budgets have also been provided. In relation to the first tranches of each scheme, the position is as follows: Young Farmers Capital Investment Scheme : closing date 25 th September 2015, budget €10m

Dairy Equipment Scheme : closing date 16 th October 2015 , budget €4.16m

Low Emission Slurry Spreading Scheme : closing date 20 th November 2015 , budget €0.35m

Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage Scheme : closing date 30 th October 2015 , budget €14.8m

Pig, Poultry Investment Scheme : closing date 30 th October 2015 , budget €1.7m

Organic Capital Investment Scheme : closing date 30 th October 2015 , budget €0.64m

Subsequent tranches will open regularly under each Scheme and will continue to invite applications until 2020.

Agrifood Sector

21. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine following the announcement of Food Wise 2025, the report of the 2025 agrifood strategy committee, the steps taken to ensure the targets set for agriculture production and exports fully take into account the accelerating challenge of climate change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34210/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Food Wise 2025 sets out a cohesive, strategic plan for the sustainable development of agrifood sector over the next decade. As part of the initial ground work to Food Wise 2025, a public consultation took place which involved 15 background papers and a questionnaire. These included a particular focus on climate change and sustainability.

Sustainability was the brief for one of the five core subgroups of the Food Wise 2025 committee. The projections in the report focus on the value of exports and production, rather than simply production increases and were developed giving full recognition that there is increasing pressure on global agricultural resources, and the environment.

Food Wise 2025 includes clear and comprehensive commitments to managing the projected growth in the sector in a sustainable way. There are sixty individual actions related to sustainability which aim to allow the sector reach its growth potential, while protecting and improving the environment, by managing finite resources in the most efficient and effective manner.

There is a strong commitment in the report to measurement and monitoring the sustainability credentials of the sector. As part of the implementation phase of Food Wise, a Sustainability working group will be established. My Department will work closely with relevant actors to ensure appropriate monitoring across all sectors of the agrifood industry on the environmental impacts of the strategy including possible impacts at regional level. This implementation process will include evaluation and assessment of the delivery of sustainability and mitigation actions.

In order to ensure that environmental considerations were at the heart of Food Wise 2025 an Environmental Analysis (which represented both a Strategic Environmental Assessment and an Appropriate Assessment) was conducted in tandem with the development of the Food Wise 2025 strategy. This analysis was carried out by an independent team of consultants and involved stakeholder and public consultation throughout the process. My Department chairs a Steering Group with representatives from Teagasc, the EPA and Bord Bia to oversee this process.

The submissions received in response to the eight week public consultation following publication of Food Wise 2025 and the draft Environmental Analysis report are currently being considered. These submissions will help to inform the final Environmental Analysis Report, which I expect to receive shortly.

Common Fisheries Policy

22. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views that the integrity of the penalty points system of the Common Fisheries Policy has been undermined by the recent refusal of the Danish authorities to allocate points to a vessel detected fishing without a quota in Irish waters over the summer of 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34207/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The imposition of points for the licence holder of a vessel involved in a serious infringement of the CFP is set out in Article 92 of Council regulation 1224/2009 and the detailed rules for its implementation are set out in Commission Regulation 404/2011. These regulations are given effect in S.I. No. 3 of 2014 European Union (Common Fisheries Policy) (Point System) Regulations 2014. Article 126(1) of Regulation 404/2011 places the obligation on the Flag Member State of the vessel to assign the points to the licence holder as a result of a serious infringement.

The procedure for vessels held liable for an infringement in the waters of another Member State are set out in Article 126(5) of Regulation 404/2011, the implementing rules. These state that the competent authorities of the flag Member State shall assign the points upon notification under Article 89(4) of the Control Regulation. The operation of these articles in the context of S.I. No. 3 of 2014 allows for the foreign licence holder to utilise the appeals mechanism in Ireland. However, if found liable for the infringement following an appeal, the SFPA will notify the competent authorities in the flag Member State of the infringement.

Article 126(5) of 404/2011 is clear that it is the Flag Member State which is liable for the assignment of the points when it has been notified pursuant to Article 89(4) of the Control Regulation that a vessel is held liable for a serious infringement. The wording of this Article does not appear to give discretion to the Flag Member State in this process.

It should be noted that operational issues in relation to sea fisheries control are a matter for the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) who operate independently in relation to enforcement. The SFPA has issued the following statement in relation to the failure of the Danish Authorities to issue the points in accordance with the detection of a serious infringement by one of their vessels in the Irish Exclusive Fishery Zone.

“Ireland is a coastal state in whose waters numerous fishing vessels operate. The points for serious infringements are significant sanctions to deter non-compliance with fisheries regulations across the EU and the SFPA is working to ensure that compliance is the norm for all vessels operating within the Irish EEZ, irrespective of nationality.

The Authority is continuing to pursue this matter with the Danish Fisheries Control Authorities. SFPA has also been in communication with the EU Commission and will be seeking formal clarification on the assignment of points by a Flag State which have been notified to it by a Coastal State.”

The SFPA continues to press the EU Commission for a formal clarification on the discretion afforded to the Flag Member State when it has been notified that the licence holder has been held liable for a serious infringement.

Bovine Disease Controls

23. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has considered the implications of research conducted by the Institute for Global Food Security at Queen’s University Belfast that interference with badgers may be contributing to maintaining bovine Tuberculosis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34016/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The study referred to by the Deputy related to research into the impact of interference with badger setts and the relative roles of badgers and cattle in the transmission of Bovine Tuberculosis, using data solely related to Northern Ireland. The findings, therefore, can only be applied to the situation in Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland badger populations are not controlled, even in areas where the historical risk of TB is high. As the Deputy is aware, my Department implements an official badger population control in areas where badgers are implicated in TB breakdowns and, in this respect, the situation here differs from that in Northern Ireland. As I have stated, the study referred to relates to the possibility that TB may be spread by illegal interference with a sett, not by the removal of badgers in a controlled manner as implemented under my Department’s programme. Accordingly, it has no implications for the implementation of this programme. In addition, in Ireland we have no evidence that interference with badger setts may be contributing to maintaining bovine TB. It is the experience of staff in my Department that they very rarely find any evidence of badger sett interference, such as discussed in the research paper to which the Deputy refers. I should also stress that interference with badger setts is illegal and where such instances are found by staff of my Department the details are passed on to officials in the National Parks and Wildlife Service who follow up such reports.

There is very considerable scientific evidence of a link between badgers and cattle in the context of the spread of bovine TB. Research conducted over the years by my Department and others has demonstrated that the eradication of bovine TB disease is not a practicable proposition until the issue of the reservoir of infection in badgers, which is seeding infection into the cattle population, is addressed. It is therefore necessary to eradicate TB in both species. In view of this, the comprehensive TB Eradication Programme as implemented by my Department has incorporated a badger removal and population control policy since 2004.

While the current approach to badger control is cost effective and has contributed significantly to the very significant improvement in the disease situation in recent years, the ultimate objective of my Department is to incorporate badger vaccination into the Irish TB eradication programme. However, this strategy can only be deployed when data are available to ensure that this can be done in an optimally effective and sustainable manner. In view of this, various projects, involving vaccine development and oral-delivery techniques are under way (including a collaboration with the United Kingdom), with a view to developing a viable badger TB vaccine and vaccination strategy.

Milk Prices

24. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the progress made to date in negotiations with the European Union on increasing its market intervention price for milk to reflect production costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34222/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Provisions in the CMO indicate that the reference thresholds and by extension reference prices for intervention shall be kept under review by the Commission, taking account of objective criteria, notably developments in production, costs of production and market trends. It also provides that when necessary, the reference thresholds shall be updated in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure in the light of developments in production and markets. The Commission have been reluctant to engage in such a review, preferring to utilise enhanced supports in other areas. Furthermore, they have made it clear that the legislative procedure under which this would be undertaken would entail an 18 month lead in time. In such circumstances, my preferred approach was to examine the possibility of utilising provisions under “Exceptional Measures”, to introduce flexible instruments, such as a modified or temporary intervention scheme, more quickly, by delegated act.

In early September I presented a paper offering possible solutions to both the EU Commissioner and my EU ministerial colleagues. These were presented on the basis of my belief that they were appropriate for consideration by the Council and as a response to the market issues that had developed and I sought to reach common ground with other Ministers regarding a suite of appropriate solutions.

I welcomed steps previously taken by the Commission but noted that having regard to the acute downturn in global milk prices over the past several months, and the severe impact this is having on farm incomes, that a number of further steps were urgently required. These certainly included utilising the provisions of Article 219 of the CMO Regulation to temporarily increase the threshold prices, with particular reference to skimmed milk powder. As outlined earlier to the house I made calls for numerous other measures in the areas of Aids to Private Storage for cheese, which was introduced by the Commission in September 2014 but discontinued shortly after. In addition I called for the existing aid rates in the PSA schemes for butter and SMP to be reviewed immediately.

Another key request was increasing the advance of the Basic Payment and other elements of Direct Payments Scheme and from 16th October 2015 to 70%, to alleviate cash flow difficulties. In addition to these more immediate concerns I made it clear that from my perspective, it will be necessary to give longer term consideration at EU level to responses to volatility issues.

I am pleased to note that the final decision at Council took significant account of Ireland’s requests. Unfortunately a temporary top-up in the intervention price for SMP did not enjoy the

support of all Ministers. However the improved PSA scheme for SMP, which will include longer periods for storage as well as the improved aid rates, the re introduction of PSA for cheese, the provision allowing 70% advance in the single farm payment, the provision of increased funding for promotion and the provision of almost €14m in targeted direct aid for farmers can go some way towards alleviating the worst effects of the current market downturn.

In respect of the direct aid element within the suite of measures mentioned above, I am engaging with stakeholders and will make a decision on the use of this aid in the very near future.

GLAS Administration

25. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason if green low-carbon agri-environmental scheme planners are qualified by his Department to make the maximum eligible area assessment, they are insisting on re-assessing the planner's reduction with a departmental inspection. [34215/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I presume the Deputy is referring to the assessment of the Maximum Eligible Area (MEA) in terms of the preparation of Commonage Management Plans as part of the Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environmental Scheme, GLAS. Commonages, which primarily consist of upland grazing, represent a mosaic of extremely important habitats, many of which are designated Natura areas. They are also, however, extremely important areas for agriculture and many of these commonages are now seriously under-grazed, which has had a detrimental effect on both land eligibility and biodiversity. Under GLAS, one of our main objectives is to restore these uplands to agricultural and environmental health. To do that, we have created a specific measure within the new scheme that encourages shareholders on commonages to come together and draw up a new Commonage Management Plan with the help of a trained GLAS advisor. The main component of this plan is the introduction of a new grazing regime on each commonage, which is tailored to the needs of that commonage, and to which each shareholder in GLAS must now commit and contribute.

The new GLAS Commonage Management Plans are required to review the entire area of the commonage, as all this area is potentially accessible to anybody grazing the hill. The Plan, when submitted, will provide a full assessment of the land cover that exists on the ground at present. This is one of its key values: these Plans are based on a new assessment of the condition of the commonage, drawn from site-visits and discussion with the participating shareholders. Amongst other things, the Plan needs to identify the actual grazable area on the commonage and then prepare a series of actions designed to at least maintain that area in good condition, while also addressing the conservation of other important habitats elsewhere. For this reason, under GLAS, my Department will pay on the entire area, not just the area directly available for agriculture.

The assessment undertaken must address any areas that are possibly ineligible under the current eligibility rules. If a consequence of this is that the Maximum Eligible Area (MEA) needs to be reduced, my Department will need to consider whether the BPS claim on the parcel in question also needs to be reduced in order to ensure that penalties do not occur. However, it should be noted that the MEA approach is considerably more flexible than previous ones, allowing areas of scrub for example to be accommodated within an overall calculation of what is eligible for payment.

In some circumstances my Department may deem it necessary to conduct a ground check on certain commonages where the planner has indicated that there is a change in the reference area/

MEA of a commonage. I believe that the combination of this approach, with a renewed and balanced grazing effort initiated through GLAS, will in fact safeguard the eligibility of these lands into the future.

Fertiliser Prices

26. **Deputy Helen McEntee** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine in view of the high cost of fertilisers for farmers; the global structure of the fertilisers manufacturing industry; if he will update Dáil Éireann on his efforts at the European Council of Ministers to ensure a concerted approach by the European Union in tackling fertiliser prices; his discussions with the European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Mr. Phil Hogan, regarding this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34091/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): No fertilisers are now manufactured in Ireland, resulting in indigenous fertiliser companies being price-takers, dependent on global supply and demand and subject to Euro exchange rates against the US dollar and other currencies. Nitrogen, in the form of Calcium Ammonium Nitrate (CAN), Phosphorous and Potash constitute the vast majority of fertiliser nutrients used in Ireland and since all fertiliser used in Ireland is imported, Irish fertiliser companies have little control over the price at which they buy their products on the global market.

On-farm prices range from €330 to €450 /tonne depending on type and nutrient content. Fertiliser costs are among the highest input costs in Irish agriculture at 20% on average and can amount to double this for certain tillage crops.

Currently, Europe is only 80% self-sufficient in fertiliser production and must import 20% of its requirements. As such, European and Irish fertiliser prices are strongly linked to global prices and heavily influenced by supply and demand. With global demand outstripping supply, Irish fertiliser prices have increased by 6-8% so far in 2015. It is anticipated that world demand will continue to increase into the future maintaining upward pressure on prices to the final consumer in Ireland.

The advice from Teagasc is for farmers to keep in contact with merchants as prices often spike at periods of high demand when European order books are full. Purchasing fertilisers at off-peak periods will help minimise prices. Teagasc further advises that finding alternative sources of major nutrients will save money and farmers should consider the use of slurry applications to minimise expenditure on chemical fertilisers. In addition, soil testing will prevent unnecessary applications.

Sale of State Assets

27. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the rationale behind the sale of Coillte's portfolio of telecommunications assets; his plans to sell off other Coillte assets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34217/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The rationale for the disposal of Coillte's portfolio of telecommunications assets is that it will enhance Coillte's focus on its core activities in forestry and the operation of its board mills, which was an underlying principle in the Government Decision relating to Coillte in June 2014. The restructuring is also consistent with the Government Decision, also relating to Coillte, in June 2013. I understand that Coillte has stated that the proceeds from the transaction will strengthen

the company's balance sheet and support their ongoing investment of €59 million in one of their panel board subsidiaries, SmartPly which is based in Belview Port, outside Waterford city, and further investment in its renewable energy business. In relation to the actual transaction, Coillte Teoranta was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act 1988. In compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, such a significant disposal was a matter for the Board of Coillte while my approval and the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for the disposal were required, also under the Code of Practice. The business was sold through a competitive bidding process in which the sale of the assets was widely advertised. The sale was handled on Coillte's behalf by Goodbody Corporate Finance and overseen closely by the Board of the company.

Coillte has stated that, while sites at 298 locations were included in the sale, the total area of land associated with these sites is less than 15 hectares. The company has also given an assurance that access to its forests for recreation use is unaffected by the sale of their telecoms portfolio.

The decision to dispose of Coillte's telecommunications portfolio was not made by me or the Government. It was a business decision by Coillte to capitalise on the significant value built up in its telecommunications business over the last 30 years at a time when there is considerable interest in acquiring infrastructure assets and to use the proceeds for re-investment in core aspects of its business thus creating new State assets.

As I have mentioned, under the Code of Practice, significant disposals are a matter for the Board. The company is currently refreshing its corporate strategy which I will be considering in due course.

Animal Welfare

28. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on recent consideration of amending the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 to provide increased protection to animals, particularly regarding outlawing hare coursing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34017/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Coursing of a hare is permitted under Animal Health & Welfare Act 2013 Act unless the hare is hunted or coursed in a space from which it does not have a reasonable chance of escape. The protections, such as the muzzling of greyhounds, which were introduced in 1993 have played an important role in safeguarding hares involved in coursing. In addition to supervision by officers from the National Parks & Wildlife Service, my Department's veterinary officials attend around 10% of coursing meetings with a view to ensuring optimum welfare standards. These are selected through a combination of random and risk-based decision making. The Deputy will be aware that the matter was both debated at length and voted upon during the extensive debates that occurred during the passage of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 through the Houses of the Oireachtas. I think that we have struck a reasonable balance in the legislation as between those opposed to hare coursing and those who consider it to be a legitimate sport.

I would like to emphasise that I am fully committed to promoting good practices that respect the welfare of all animals and my Department devotes considerable resources to protecting animal welfare and in dealing with breaches of animal welfare legislation. The Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 applies across the board, both to rural and urban areas and to all animals, irrespective of species, whether kept for commercial, domestic, sport, show or for other purposes. Under the Act, the penalties are as high as can be permitted under our legal system such that on

summary conviction, a person can be fined up to €5,000 and/ or imprisoned for up to 6 months; on conviction on indictment, a fine of up to €250,000 and/or imprisonment up to 5 years may be imposed. There is provision for fixed penalty payments for lesser offences.

I am satisfied that the Act provides the framework within which the welfare of animals can be safeguarded and I am hopeful that the substantial and significantly increased levels of penalties for offences of animal cruelty provided for under the Act will act as a deterrent to animal welfare abuses. I have no plans to review the Act so soon after it has come into operation.

GLAS Data

29. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide up-to-date figures for applications under the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme, with particular reference to counties Galway and Mayo; and how commonage plans as part of the scheme are progressing. [34202/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Almost 27,000 applications to join GLAS were received under the first tranche of the new scheme this year, making this one of the most successful launches of any agri-environment scheme ever in Ireland. All applications are now being assessed and applicants will be notified in writing in October of the outcome of their application and of their contract commencement date. A total of 3,250 applications were received for Galway and 2,681 applications for Mayo. A full breakdown of the applications received is supplied in the following table:

County	Submitted
Carlow	299
Cavan	961
Clare	1684
Cork	2347
Donegal	2043
Dublin	66
Galway	3250
Kerry	1853
Kildare	305
Kilkenny	473
Laois	393
Leitrim	1067
Limerick	1130
Longford	536
Louth	160
Mayo	2681
Meath	481
Monaghan	611
Offaly	505
Roscommon	1585
Sligo	978
Tipperary	1233
Waterford	393

County	Submitted
Westmeath	680
Wexford	859
Wicklow	362
Total:	26935

I am pleased to say that GLAS Commonage Advisors have already been appointed to 1,800 Commonages, while appointments to the remainder will be made very shortly. Where Commonage Advisors have been appointed, preparation of commonage management plans can commence and I am aware that fieldwork has already been carried out in many cases. In addition, some 200 applications were in respect of commonages under 10 hectares in area, and these do not require the appointment of a single Commonage Advisor; in all such cases, applicants are free to draw up individual plans with their own advisor.

Dairy Sector

30. **Deputy Helen McEntee** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine in view of the abolition of dairy quotas and the consequent market turbulence, as well as the significant borrowings undertaken by dairy farmers who share the Government's ambition to increase Irish milk production in this new era for the sector, if he will update Dáil Éireann on his engagements with banks to ensure they afford credit flexibility to dairy farmers while the Irish dairy sector consolidates its expansion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34092/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The price of milk and dairy commodities is determined by supply and demand factors at international level. Food commodity markets including dairy markets have been characterised by significant levels of volatility for a number of years prior to the abolition of dairy quotas. Factors contributing to global price volatility in 2015 include the Russian Ban and the softening of Chinese demand on one side, coupled with increased production among key global producers on the supply side. The longer term perspectives remain very positive and Irish dairy farmers are well placed to take full advantage of rising global demand. The ending of EU milk quotas has not witnessed anything that could be described as a spike in production at EU level. Ireland has sought to avail of the opportunity that longer term trends will bring. I have maintained ongoing contact with the Irish banks and have impressed upon them at every opportunity of the need to show flexibility in their dealings with farmers experiencing temporary cash flow difficulties in 2015 and into 2016. Most recently at the dairy forum, I reiterated these calls to the three main banks in attendance. The Irish dairy sector is cost competitive and Teagasc figures indicate that Irish farmers have relatively low levels of indebtedness compared to counterparts in competition countries. The banks assured me that they will remain vigilant on this issue, particularly if prices continue to deteriorate into spring 2016 therefore and will be facilitative in the measures available and in their dealings with dairy farmers. They stressed the need for early engagement for those who see early signs of such liquidity imbalance.

The Government has also been proactive of course and chief among the initiatives here are provisions allowing dairy and other farmers to use income averaging over five years when it comes to paying income tax bills. This also offers respite to the sector from a cash flow perspective. Furthermore, I have also ensured that priority has been given to measures for the dairy sector in the Rural Development Plan. The recent agreement at the council of Agriculture Ministers to increase the rate of single Farm Payment advance to 70% will also be of assistance from a cash plan perspective.

Finally I decided to make a 3 year interest free instalment arrangement available to all those affected by superlevy this year. This option has been availed of by approximately 3,700 producers and will be of assistance to farmers facing cash flow difficulties arising from super levy in the final year of the milk quota regime.

Fishery Harbour Centres

31. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide details of future tendering processes for properties at Howth fishery harbour in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34014/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The property portfolio in Howth, one of six Fishery Harbour Centres managed and operated by my Department, encompasses a range of diverse properties reflecting its remit as a working fishery harbour and its unique features which facilitate a broad range of other diverse activities which are important from both an economic and social perspective. My Department's aim, working within the Government Framework for the management of State property and relevant legal frameworks, is to ensure that the sites within this diverse portfolio generate a competitive economic return while fostering a diverse range of maritime activities. In this context my Department reviews the portfolio of properties on an ongoing basis in order to optimise those returns to the Exchequer.

On Monday 15th June 2015 my Department offered two of these properties for tenancy under lease agreement by competitive public tender. The competitions were advertised on my Department's website, in a national and local newspaper and within the harbour and were open to all interested parties. The successful and unsuccessful Tenderers for these competitions have been notified and the finalisation of the lease agreements is well advanced.

A further two properties are currently subject to legal, operational or planning considerations and cannot be made available for tenancy until these issues are resolved. These issues are being progressed and, when appropriate, further tender competitions will be publicly advertised, in a similar manner to the previous competitions.

Animal Welfare

32. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the current regulations for dog shelters, boarding kennels, dog breeders; and behaviourists and trainers working with dogs; if he considers there are gaps in the regulations which are causing poor standards in the treatment of dogs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34209/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The provisions of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 Act apply to the premises and the persons referred to by the Deputy. The Act is designed to protect the health and welfare of all animals, irrespective of species, whether kept for commercial, domestic, sport, show or for other purposes. Under the Act, the penalties are as high as can be permitted under our legal system such that on summary conviction, a person can be fined up to €5,000 and/or sentenced to up to 6 months imprisonment; on conviction on indictment, a fine of up to €250,000 and/or imprisonment for up to 5 years may be imposed. There is provision for fixed penalty payments for lesser offences. The Act provides the framework within which the welfare of animals can be safeguarded and I am hopeful that the substantial and significantly increased levels of penalties for

offences of animal cruelty provided for under the Act will act as a deterrent to animal welfare abuses. Therefore, I am satisfied that the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 provides a robust vehicle to enable the respective authorities to investigate and, if necessary, prosecute any breaches of the welfare provisions of the Act by dog shelters, boarding kennels, dog breeders and behaviourists or trainers.

As the Deputy is aware, I am fully committed to promoting good practices that respect the welfare of all animals and my Department devotes considerable resources to protecting animal welfare and in dealing with breaches of animal welfare legislation. My Department operates an Animal Welfare Hotline on which members of the public can report suspected incidents of animal neglect. All such reports are followed up by officers of my Department. If there are any specific allegations about individuals or organisations they can be notified to the Animal Welfare Hotline.

Beef Data Programme

33. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the progress to date in rolling out the beef data and genomics scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34219/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The closing date for applications to the Beef Data & Genomics Programme (BDGP) was the 5th June 2015, and my Department received almost 30,000 valid applications for the scheme. The BDGP is an essential component in reversing the widely acknowledged decline in the maternal index of the Irish suckler herd. The BDGP will also improve the quality of the national suckler herd and deliver an accelerated improvement in the environmental sustainability of the beef herd through the application of genomics technology. Participants in the programme will receive a payment of €142.50 for each of the first eligible 6.66 hectares and €120 for each of the remaining hectares up to the maximum payable area. The maximum payable area is based on the number of calved suckler cows in each herd in 2014. The payment rates provide for a higher payment linked to the first 10 animals on each herd as I felt it was important to favour smaller herds through this programme. The payment rate of €142.50 is the maximum amount which could be provided based on the cost incurred and income foregone associated with the actions under the BDGP, as negotiated with the European Commission.

The focus has now turned to implementation of the scheme which is now well underway and my Department and the ICBF are working closely with scheme participants on the various requirements. This is progressing well with over 255,000 tissue tags sent to scheme applicants to date. This leaves only 70,000 more to be sent out and the ICBF expect that these will be in the post within the next two weeks. Over 70,000 samples have been sent back for genomic testing, which covers over 7,000 herds. This is a very positive start to the BDGP as it means that already 25% of participants have completed their genotyping requirement in the BDGP. A reminder letter will issue to farmers who have not yet sent back their samples by the end of next week. The online facility for recording animal survey data is now open and around 5,500 farmers have used this method to complete their surveys with this number expected to rise.

In addition, my Department in conjunction with the ICBF and Teagasc are holding a series of information meetings nationwide for scheme participants. These meetings will enable farmers within the scheme to have one to one time with Department, ICBF and Teagasc staff in order to query any aspect of the scheme and look at their own personal circumstances with regards to the requirements they will have to fulfil to ensure full compliance, and therefore full payment, with the scheme.

The BDGP is a new and innovative programme. It's a world first in terms of bringing genomic technology to beef farming and can revolutionise beef breeding in this country and help to drive on-farm profitability, while improving the environmental sustainability of the beef.

Bovine Disease Controls

34. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will remove the 10% threshold for compensation for farmers with tuberculosis reactors; if he will remove the prohibition on purchasing into restricting holdings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34205/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): There is a very comprehensive range of compensation measures provided by my Department to herdowners in the event of an outbreak of bovine TB in their herd. The main compensation scheme for these farmers is the On-Farm Market Valuation Scheme, which provides for full compensation, based on current "Market Value", for the direct losses incurred by farmers arising from the removal of cattle as reactors. In addition to these valuation payments, herdowners who experience a disease breakdown may also qualify for compensation, for consequential losses, under the Income Supplement, Depopulation or Hardship Grant Schemes, subject to the terms and conditions applying in each case. Payments under these schemes are designed to compensate herdowners for income losses or additional costs incurred by farmers who have animals removed as reactors and whose herds are restricted. In relation specifically to the Income Supplement Scheme, a farmer must lose in excess of 10% of his animals to TB before payment can be considered.

Total expenditure on compensation paid to farmers in 2014 under the TB eradication scheme amounted to €15.2m. My officials are currently engaged in a review of these schemes and I will be making an announcement shortly in relation to this matter.

With regard to the restrictions on buying further animals into a TB restricted herd, the position is that these restrictions derive from EU legislation governing bovine TB eradication programmes. Article 17 of Council Directive 78/52 EEC provides that a herd in which bovine TB is confirmed may not be restocked until after the cattle identified as reactors are slaughtered and all cattle, over six weeks old, remaining in the herd have passed one official tuberculosis test. Once a herd passes such a test, it may be restocked under permit from the Regional Veterinary Office. Given that this requirement derives from binding EU legislation, it is not open to my Department to depart from it.

Aquaculture Licence Application Numbers

35. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of aquaculture licences awaiting decision when he came into office; sought; and decided, since he came into office; currently awaiting a decision, broken down between shellfish licences and fin-fish licences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34220/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The statistical information sought by the Deputy in respect of aquaculture licence applications is as follows;

-	Shellfish	Finfish
Number of Aquaculture Licences sought since I came into office	408	34
Number awaiting decision when I came into office	512	32
Number decided since I came into office	302	5
Number awaiting decision at present	564*	61

Note: These figures include both new licence applications and renewals. In particular, almost all finfish licences awaiting decision are renewal applications.

* Does not include applications withdrawn by applicant/closed by Department.

Since taking office I have made 302 determinations in respect of shellfish aquaculture licence applications and 5 in respect of finfish aquaculture, of which 4 are for land based sites. The difference in numbers between shellfish and finfish reflects the greater number of operators conducting shellfish aquaculture and also, crucially, the hugely complex nature of the assessment process involved in respect of finfish. This is not to suggest that the assessment process is simple in the case of shellfish. However the requirement for a mandatory Environmental Impact Statement in the case of finfish cultivation in the marine environment adds a significant regulatory requirement on operators and on my Department when conducting assessments.

In addition, my Department in conjunction with the Marine Institute and the National Parks and Wildlife Service is conducting an “Appropriate Assessment” process in respect of designated NATURA bays. This process was agreed with the European Commission and is designed to ensure that Ireland is in full compliance with the EU Birds and Habitats Directives.

This process includes the following steps:

- a detailed data collection in 91 Bays / Estuaries
- detailed analysis of raw data collected
- setting of Conservation Objectives by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) in respect of each site
- carrying out Appropriate Assessments of each licence application / fishery plan against the detailed Conservation Objectives set, and
- determination of Licences on the basis of the Appropriate Assessment and other relevant factors

The Appropriate Assessment process has now been completed in respect of twelve bays – Castlemaine Harbour, Roaringwater Bay, Dundalk Bay, Lough Swilly, Donegal Bay, Dungarvan Harbour, Ballycotton Bay, Kenmare Bay, Valentia Harbour/Portmagee Channel, Galway Bay, Clew Bay and Drumcliff Bay/Cummeen Harbour.

The completion of the process on a bay by bay basis enables my Department to assess applications for new licences or the renewal of licences. Pending a decision on the renewal of licences, operators may lawfully continue their aquaculture activity under the provisions of Section 19A (4) of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act.

The regulatory procedures in respect of all aquaculture activities have never been stronger and represent a good balance between the need to develop the Industry and provide the highest level of protection for our marine and coastal environment. They are however highly complex in nature and resource intensive. The Deputy will be aware that in Food Wise 2025 I have

undertaken to commission a review of the existing aquaculture licensing system involving all key stakeholders, to identify the current shortcomings and bottlenecks (legislative, resource and logistical), and implement necessary changes to the aquaculture licensing system as a matter of priority. This measure is a further indication of the importance I attach to getting our licensing system fit for purpose in the context of the challenges and opportunities facing the industry in the medium to long term.

GLAS Applications

36. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason he is downgrading the low input permanent pasture measure in the latest round of the green low-carbon agri-environmental scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34206/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The first tranche of GLAS proved hugely successful attracting nearly 27,000 applications in all. Applications were received from every single county and virtually every action was selected at some stage. On the basis of the plans submitted for the 27,000 applications received to date, we have already met or exceeded RDP targets for a number of different actions, including Low Input Permanent Pasture. For the second tranche of GLAS, therefore, I am revisiting the various actions that will be available to farmers in the light of the substantial progress made to date.

GLAS differs from previous schemes in that it adopts a very targeted approach to meeting its environmental objectives and the RDP includes a provision for review and reassessment after the first tranche. Given the very high uptake of Low Input Permanent Pasture (LIPP), and the fact that it has substantially exceeded its targets, it is proposed to adjust the provision of this action under the next tranche. As things stand, over 20% of the entire budget for GLAS is set to be paid on Low Input Permanent Pasture, and we clearly cannot continue to accept additional hectareage at the same rate indefinitely. However, it is important to note that it will still be possible to take up to 10 hectares of either LIPP or Traditional Hay Meadow as before, but the LIPP component will be limited to 5 hectares. While this means that we will still see permanent pasture coming into GLAS, I hope it will persuade more farmers to take the hay meadow option, which is well behind target, and which delivers the same payment per hectare.

These proposed changes for Tranche 2, including the rebalancing of LIPP, have been notified to the European Commission and their final response is expected very shortly.

Food Harvest 2020 Strategy

37. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the attainment of the objectives set out in Food Harvest 2020; he expects the prospects to remain good for the dairy, beef, pig meat, lamb, poultry, and fishing sectors in the next five years; if he has identified particular or specific likely requirements during this period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34189/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The main targets set out in the Food Harvest report published in 2010 were, by 2020, to increase the value of:

The main targets set out in the Food Harvest report published in 2010 were, by 2020, to increase the value of:

- Primary output in the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sector by 33% (from a 2007-09 average baseline),
- Agriculture, food (including seafood) and drink exports by 42% (from a 2007-09 average baseline),
- Value added production by 40% (from a 2008 baseline).

In addition to these value increases, the dairy industry targeted a 50% increase in milk production by 2020, to be progressed once the cap on milk production was lifted in April 2015.

Progress on these targets is monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis. The fourth annual report "*Milestones for Success 2014*" published September 2014, showed that the sector had achieved very significant progress on these targets and illustrated the manner in which the Food Harvest 2020 vision of 'smart, green, growth' is being attained.

Food Wise 2025, the new ten year strategy for the agri-food sector published in July this year, builds on the successful vision of Food Harvest 2020. It identifies the opportunities and challenges facing the sector and provides an enabling strategy that will allow the sector to grow and prosper. Food Wise includes more than 380 specific recommendations, spread across the cross-cutting themes of sustainability, innovation, human capital, market development and competitiveness; as well as specific sectorial recommendations.

If these recommendations are implemented, the expert committee which drew up the Food Wise strategy believes that the following growth projections are achievable by 2025:

- Increasing the value of agri-food exports by 85% to €19 billion;
- Increasing the value added in the agri-food, fisheries and wood products sector by 70% to in excess of €13 billion;
- Increasing the value of primary production by 65% to almost €10 billion;
- The creation of an additional 23,000 direct jobs in the agri-food sector all along the supply chain from primary production to high value added product development.

Realising these growth projections will be challenging, but I am confident that they can be achieved. Last week I chaired the first meeting of the High Level Implementation Committee for Food Wise 2025, including senior executives from relevant state agencies and Government Departments. I am committed to putting in place a robust implementation process, which will be influenced by the final Environmental Report on the strategy. As the Food Wise report states, "*environmental protection and economic competitiveness are equal and complementary: one cannot be achieved at the expense of the other*". Therefore sustainability will be at the core of the strategy's implementation.

Beef Exports

38. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the tonnage of Irish beef that has been exported to China and the United States of America since January 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34211/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland received a major reputational boost for its beef this year as the first EU Member State to gain

access to the US. The Chinese authorities decided in February 2015 to lift the BSE ban on boneless beef from animals under 30 months of age from Ireland making us the first EU MS to achieve this goal. This move, while very significant, does not permit trade to commence and my Department is working closely with its counterparts in China to conclude the necessary technical steps, which need to be completed before trade commences. The US market was opened to Irish beef exports in January 2015. Feedback from exporters eligible to export beef to the US indicates that exports to date had reached approximately 330 tonnes by early September. This would have an approximate value of €2.1m. This is a very encouraging start, particularly given that the trade to date is confined to the market for intact cuts as we currently await approval to export beef intended for grinding. It must be remembered that only two plants were eligible to export up to mid-May and June respectively. There are now six plants approved to export and my understanding is that this momentum in exports will continue and grow right through to the end of 2015. As with any new market it takes time to build reputational brand and a customer base and the real time to assess its value is when these are bedded down.

More importantly the relatively high prices available for beef in Europe this year means that US buyers can be priced out of the market and Irish exporters are choosing to send product to more valuable markets in the UK and on the continent. Exports to the UK are up 4,000t compared with the same period in 2014 and this coincides with a reduced kill overall (back about 6% year on year) highlighting further the strength of Irish beef exports in the UK. This of course is helped by a strong sterling and weak euro.

Overall, 2015 has been a very positive year for beef prices in Ireland with the yearly average to date almost 10% up on last year; €4.04 for an R3 steer excluding vat, compared to €3.70 in 2014, a 10% increase. Prices last week are 10% up on the same week last year notwithstanding recent price decreases. Ireland is currently at 104% of the EU 15 price and 107% of the EU 28 price.

There has also been significant progress in facilitating trade in other international markets for Irish beef. For example I recently concluded an extension to our market access to the Philippines, where already this year there has been almost €10 m of beef exports from Ireland, making us the second largest exporter of beef into the Philippines. Furthermore we are currently in the process of trying to secure beef access to other third countries including Korea, Vietnam and Mexico. It is my intention to continue to focus on developing as many third country markets as possible in order to provide exporters as many commercial opportunities as possible in a competitive global marketplace.

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

39. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if an increase in rent support will be facilitated for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare given that the person's rent has now increased to €1,300 per month; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34748/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department has not, to date, received an application for Rent Supplement from the client concerned. They should forward same to be assessed for entitlement to the Mid-Leinster Rent Unit, Po Box 11758, Dublin 24.

Invalidity Pension Applications

40. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) in County Cork will be entitled to an invalidity pension as he was previously approved for a disability payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34758/15]

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.

To qualify for IP claimants must, inter-alia, have at least 260 (5 years) paid PRSI contributions since entering social insurance and 48 contributions paid or credited in the last complete contribution year before the date of their claim. Only PRSI classes A, E or H contributions are reckonable for IP purposes.

According to the Department's records, it appears that the person concerned does not satisfy the PRSI contribution criteria for IP. However entitlement to IP can be definitively determined on receipt of a completed claim.

Disability allowance (DA) is a weekly allowance paid to people with a specified disability who are aged over 16 and under 66. The disability must be expected to last for at least one year and the allowance is subject to a medical assessment, a means test and a habitual residency test.

The person in question was in receipt of disability allowance (DA) from 13 December 2006. Payment ceased with effect from 11 September 2011 as the person's means exceeded the statutory limit for DA. If the person concerned thinks he now may be eligible for DA, it is open to him to make a new application and a decision on his eligibility will be made as soon as possible.

Back to Work Allowance

41. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of persons in County Kerry who have applied for the back to work enterprise allowance; who were successful; who have launched their own business; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34762/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): There are two schemes to assist people on certain social protection payments who wish to become self-employed; namely the Short Term Enterprise Allowance and the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance. The Short Term Enterprise Allowance provides immediate access to support where people who have lost their jobs and qualify for Jobseeker's Benefit wish to set up a business. Payment under the scheme is at the same rate and for the same duration as their entitlement to Jobseeker's Benefit. The Back to Work Enterprise Allowance is designed to provide a monetary incentive for people who are on social welfare payments to develop a business while allowing them to retain a reducing proportion of their qualifying social welfare payment over two years; 100% in year 1 and 75% in year 2.

Under both schemes, those taking up self-employment must first have their self-employment project approved as viable and sustainable. In partnership areas this will be done by the partnership company Integrated Development Company (IDC). A qualifying business must be approved in advance by (IDC) or a Case Officer of the Department. It must be deemed genuine and viable, and not displace an existing business. In assessing viability, cognisance is taken of the demand for, and supply of, the particular product or service at local level.

At the end of September 2015 there were 469 people availing of the Short Term Enterprise Allowance, 21 of whom are living in Co. Kerry and there were 11,825 people availing of the

Back to Work Enterprise Allowance, 387 of whom are living in Co. Kerry. The Department does not collect information on the number of applications received or rejected.

State Pension (Contributory) Applications

42. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on the issue with the State pension (contributory) where persons whose average contributions over a greater number of years work out at less than those for persons whose average contributions over a shorter period will qualify them for a similar or reduced pension; that this is unfair, particularly in the case of women who commenced working in the 1960s and 1970s and who took time out to care for their families; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34789/15]

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

Since 1961, when contributory pensions were first introduced, the average contributions test has been used in calculating pension entitlement. Once over 16 years of age, the date a person enters into insurable employment is the date used for averaging purposes.

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

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

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

However the scheme will not, of itself, qualify a person for a pension. The standard qualifying conditions, which require a person to enter insurance ten years before pension age, pay a minimum of 520 contributions at the appropriate rate and achieve a yearly average of at least 10 contributions on their record from the time they enter insurance until they reach pension age, must also be satisfied.

For those with insufficient contributions to meet the requirements for a State pension (contributory), the State pension system provides alternative methods of support. Where someone over 66 does not qualify for a full rate contributory pension, they may apply for a non-contributory pension, which is based on need and is means tested. The maximum rate of this pension is €219 weekly, which is 95% of the maximum rate of the contributory pension.

Where it is more beneficial for the claimant, they may instead seek an Increase for Qualified Adult payment, on their spouse's State pension contributory, the maximum rate of which is

€206.30. This increase is, by default, paid directly to the Qualified Adult.

Work is underway to replace the ‘yearly average’ system with a ‘total contributions approach’. Under this approach, the number of contributions recorded over a working 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 Applications

43. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when an application for a disability allowance will be processed for a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34798/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Following a review of the entitlement of the person concerned, an increase in disability allowance has been awarded with effect from 29 April 2015. First payment at the higher rate and any arrears due will issue to the person concerned on 14 October 2015.

Unemployment Benefits

44. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of persons under 25 years of age, by county, in receipt of jobseeker’s benefit, jobseeker’s allowance and signing on for credits; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34803/15]

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

It should be noted that the county level statistics indicate the number of people signing-on for payment at an office located in the county indicated. As the catchment area of many local offices cross county borders this data is not equivalent to the number of people residing in each county who are signing-on.

Persons under 25 years of age who have been in receipt of Jobseeker’s Allowance, Jobseeker’s Benefit or signing for credits by County at the end of August 2015

County	Jobseeker’s Allowance	Jobseeker’s Benefit	Credits
Carlow	841	39	3
Cavan	810	33	3
Clare	865	63	3
Cork	3,115	198	11
Donegal	2,377	95	4
Dublin	9,845	627	58
Galway	1,787	128	4
Kerry	1,189	76	9

County	Jobseeker's Allowance	Jobseeker's Benefit	Credits
Kildare	1,910	116	13
Kilkenny	703	45	1
Laois	1,027	40	4
Leitrim	335	32	2
Limerick	1,803	79	9
Longford	516	12	2
Louth	1,933	77	7
Mayo	1,108	86	3
Meath	927	51	7
Monaghan	510	25	3
Offaly	1,128	43	3
Roscommon	357	26	3
Sligo	557	25	5
Tipperary	1,910	112	22
Waterford	1,366	60	15
Westmeath	1,179	56	6
Wexford	1,967	100	14
Wicklow	1,181	44	7
Totals	41,246	2288	221

Unemployment Benefits

45. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of persons under 25 years of age who have been in receipt of jobseeker's benefit, jobseeker's allowance and signing on for credits for 12 months or more; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34804/15]

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

It should be noted that the county level statistics indicate the number of people signing-on for payment at an office located in the county indicated. As the catchment area of many local offices cross county borders this data is not equivalent to the number of people residing in each county who are signing-on.

Persons under 25 years of age who have been in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance, Jobseeker's Benefit or signing for credits for 12 months or more at the end of August 2015

County	Jobseeker's Allowance	Jobseeker's Benefit	Credits
Carlow	394	0	0
Cavan	401	0	0
Clare	349	1	0
Cork	1,348	3	4
Donegal	1,145	1	0
Dublin	4,207	5	16

County	Jobseeker's Allowance	Jobseeker's Benefit	Credits
Galway	821	1	1
Kerry	491	2	0
Kildare	834	1	1
Kilkenny	332	0	1
Laois	501	3	1
Leitrim	103	0	0
Limerick	812	4	3
Longford	229	0	2
Louth	803	3	1
Mayo	505	4	1
Meath	434	1	4
Monaghan	244	3	2
Offaly	533	0	1
Roscommon	150	1	1
Sligo	227	0	0
Tipperary	862	1	7
Waterford	591	2	3
Westmeath	605	1	1
Wexford	952	4	4
Wicklow	510	0	3
Totals	18,383	41	57

National Internship Scheme Administration

46. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when the proposed evaluation of the JobBridge scheme, which is currently out to tender, will be completed and published; if the evaluation will include consultation with participants on the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34805/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): The JobBridge Scheme was introduced in July 2011 as a response to the unprecedented collapse in employment and the sharp increase in unemployment (a Live Register of 460,000). As a consequence of this economic shock, jobseekers were finding it increasingly difficult to secure work experience which was specified as a requirement for many jobs. JobBridge was designed to address this issue.

It has attracted the voluntary participation of almost 18,000 host organisations that have provided work experience opportunities to over 43,000 interns and helped many to secure full-time employment afterwards.

The economic environment today is very different than four years ago, when JobBridge commenced. Unemployment has falling to 9.4%, and the recovery is very much jobs-led. The Department is keen, therefore, to review the scheme to take account of the changed economic circumstances and feedback from host organisations and citizens.

A commitment was given in *Pathways to Work 2015* to develop and implement a robust evaluation programme to assess the impact of *Pathways to Work* initiatives and identify poten-

tial areas for future attention. This includes an evaluation of the JobBridge scheme.

The purpose of the review is to assess the effectiveness of the scheme to date. The results will also be considered in relation to any future changes to the scheme.

The review will be an independent external evaluation. It will comprise an econometric review and both quantitative and qualitative analysis, including surveys of host organisations and interns.

A formal request for tender issued on 7 September 2015 and the closing date for receipt of submissions is 19 October 2015. It is expected that the evaluation will be completed and a final report published in early 2016.

Youth Guarantee

47. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection for a breakdown of the number of education, training and work experience places which the Government is committed to delivering on the various programmes as part of the Youth Guarantee in the calendar year 2015; the number of education, training and work experience places which have been delivered under each programme in 2015 to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34806/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): The Government's primary strategy to tackle youth unemployment is to create the environment for a strong economic recovery by promoting competitiveness and productivity. Economic recovery will underpin jobs growth and the availability of productive employment for young people.

However, the Government recognises that as the recovery takes hold, there is a need for additional measures to ensure that as many as possible of the jobs created are taken up by jobseekers and young jobseekers in particular. This is the rationale behind the Government's Pathways to Work strategy and the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan.

Within this framework, the Youth Guarantee sets a medium-term objective of ensuring that young people receive an offer of employment within four months of becoming unemployed. The main plank of the guarantee is assistance to young people in finding and securing sustainable jobs. For those who do not find employment, additional offers are provided for. Most such offers (over 70%) are in further education or training. Others are in community-based employment programmes such as CE, Gateway and Tus, or through the JobsPlus employment subsidy for private employment.

Overall, the Youth Guarantee provided nearly 25,000 places for young people in 2014 (a similar number are expected to be provided in 2015). This figure excludes some 24,000 places provided for young people through PLC courses and apprenticeships. These PLC and apprenticeship places, together with the wide range of vocational third-level courses provided for the young, although not reserved for unemployed jobseekers, nevertheless contribute to the spirit of the guarantee. The following table details the expected full year intake for 2015 as well the number of Youth Guarantee starters, where data is available.

Youth Guarantee Progress 2015 Starters

Questions - Written Answers

Programme	Expected full-year intake	2015 information to date	Note
Youthreach		688	Expected full year intake combines Youthreach and Community Training Centres. Youthreach places as of end May 2015
Community Training Centres	3,300	916	Supersedes Youthreach from July 2015. As of end August 2015
JobBridge	5,000	1,784	As of end September 2015
Tús	1,000	1,070	As of end September 2015
JobsPlus (including JobPlus Youth)	1,500	445	As of end August 2015
Momentum	2,000	971	As of end September 2015
BTEA (excl Momentum)	3,300	N/A	
BTWEA	200	151	As of end September 2015
VTOS	500	N/A	Enrolment begins in September
Former FÁS/SOLAS*	9500	4,534	Based on Specific Skills Training, Traineeship, Bridging & Local Training Initiative starters end August 2015.
County Enterprise Board Youth Entrepreneurship Training and Mentoring supports.	700		This programme has been superseded by Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur 2014/5 competition
Micro Finance Ireland micro-loans for young people.	150	N/A	Age-specific breakdowns not yet available.
International Work Experience and Training	250	6	As of end September 2015
Gateway	450	272	As of end September 2015
Community Employment	500	540	As of end September 2015
Total	28,350	11,375	Excluding where figures are not available

*FÁS – Former Training and Employment Authority/SOLAS – Further Education and

Training Authority

*NB The figures above refer to the cumulative starters under 25 upon entry to the programme, from 1 January 2015.

Youth Guarantee

48. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the budget for the delivery of the Youth Guarantee in 2014; the amount of funding provided by the European Social Fund and the European Youth Employment Initiative and by the Exchequer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34807/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) is being managed as part of Ireland's relationship with the European Social Fund (ESF) under the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020, for which the Irish Managing Authority is the Department of Education and Skills.

I am informed that the total amount of YEI funding for which Ireland is applying in relation to the years 2014-2018 is €68,145,419 in respect of overall relevant programme expenditure of €204,436,537 million. It is anticipated that the YEI funding will be matched by a similar amount of ESF funding, with the balance coming from matching domestic expenditure. In the normal course of events, this amount of YEI funding will be drawn down as final claims are made in respect of these years. However, I understand that an advance payment of €21,465,806.99 was made to Ireland under the YEI earlier this year.

YEI funding has been applied for in relation to only some of the programmes that go to make up Ireland's response to the EU Recommendation on a Youth Guarantee. The overall range of such programmes is set out in the government's Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, which estimated annual expenditure on the core programmes involved of approximately €336 million, with a further expenditure on other relevant programmes (Apprenticeship and PLC courses) of €192 million.

Youth Guarantee

49. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the budget for the delivery of the Youth Guarantee in 2015; the amount of funding to be provided by the European Social Fund and the European Youth Employment Initiative and by the Exchequer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34808/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) is being managed as part of Ireland's relationship with the European Social Fund (ESF) under the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020, for which the Irish Managing Authority is the Department of Education and Skills.

I am informed that the total amount of YEI funding for which Ireland is applying in relation to the years 2014-2018 is €68,145,419 in respect of overall relevant programme expenditure of €204,436,537 million. It is anticipated that the YEI funding will be matched by a similar amount of ESF funding, with the balance coming from matching domestic expenditure. In the normal course of events, this amount of YEI funding will be drawn down as final claims are made in respect of these years. However, I understand that an advance payment of €21,465,806.99 was made to Ireland under the YEI earlier this year.

YEI funding has been applied for in relation to only some of the programmes that go to make up Ireland's response to the EU Recommendation on a Youth Guarantee. The overall range of such programmes is set out in the government's Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, which estimated annual expenditure on the core programmes involved of approximately €336 million, with a further expenditure on other relevant programmes (Apprenticeship and PLC courses) of €192 million. Actual expenditure on participation by young people on this range of programmes in 2015 will depend on the take-up of places, and can be estimated only after the end of the financial year.

Social Welfare Benefits

50. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will restore the full adult rate of social welfare to young persons engaged in education, training and work experience in the upcoming budget to support young persons in gaining the skills and qualifications they need to obtain employment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34809/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Reduced rates for younger jobseeker's allowance recipients were first introduced in 2009 for those aged 18 and 19. The reduced rates have been extended over the intervening years and now apply to jobseeker's allowance recipients under 26 years of age.

The reduced rates do not apply to certain categories of jobseeker, for example those with a qualified child or those whose claim is linked to a previous claim at the higher rate made within the previous 12 months.

The reduced rates for young jobseekers are a targeted measure aimed at protecting young people from welfare dependency. The measure aims to incentivise young jobseeker's allowance recipients to avail of education and training opportunities. If a jobseeker in receipt of the reduced jobseeker's allowance rate participates on an education or training programme they will receive a higher weekly payment.

There are a wide range of education and training opportunities available through the Department of Social Protection and the Department of Education and Skills. These opportunities for jobseekers support them in strengthening their qualifications and skills base thereby maximising their chances of meeting the requirements of the modern labour market and gaining employment. These opportunities include the back to education allowance scheme, Education and Training Board (ETB) training courses, VEC education courses, Tús and JobBridge - the national internship scheme.

There is a network of case officers at a local level who work with social welfare recipients to identify appropriate training or development programmes for them. Young jobseekers who participate on an education or training programme will receive a higher weekly payment. For example, young jobseekers who participate in the tús programme will have their payment increased to €208 per week and jobseekers who attend ETB training courses will have their payment increased to €160 per week.

The Department of Social Protection administers the back to education allowance scheme (BTEA) which is an educational opportunities scheme for persons in receipt of certain social welfare payments wishing to pursue second or third level courses of education subject to meeting the qualifying conditions. The objective of the scheme is to raise educational and skills levels to enable them to better access to emerging labour market needs in line with the Govern-

ment's activation strategy set out in Pathways to Work. For persons under the age of 26 who are in receipt of an age related jobseekers payment, a personal maximum rate of €160 applies. The full year cost of increasing the back to education allowance rate to €188 per week for recipients aged under 26 years is estimated at a maximum of €6.6 million. These costs are subject to change in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2016.

However, it should be noted this cost only refers to the back to education allowance. If young jobseekers attending ETB training courses were to receive an increased payment of €188 this would have cost implications for the Department of Education and Skills. Any change to provision in this area would be a matter for Government to consider in a budgetary context.

Community Employment Schemes Funding

51. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if there is a €28 million surplus in her Department's community employment training fund; her plans to restore the training grants to community employment projects to the pre-cut rate; and, if not, her plans to spend this money on participant training. [34817/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): There is no surplus of €28 million in the CE Training Fund. The 2015 annual training budget for Community Employment is €6.1 million. CE training expenditure up to 23rd September 2015 is €4.1 million. It is not possible at this point in time to determine if there will be an underspend in this budget by year end. As you are aware, there is always an increase in the take-up of training during September and October on CE due to the start of the academic year in most colleges. The Department encourages the full use of this budget by the adult learners on CE who for many provides a valuable opportunity to engage in learning and to make up for lost opportunities in the past.

The Department is considering the CE budget for 2016 and is reviewing the training budget as part of this process.

Domiciliary Care Allowance

52. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of persons who were and are in receipt of the domiciliary care allowance who were called upon by her Department to undergo a medical assessment over the past five years. [34818/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The domiciliary care allowance scheme (DCA) transferred to the Department of Social Protection in 2009 and is now paid to over 28,500 parents/guardians in respect of some 30,700 children.

All applications for DCA are subject to a medical assessment, there has been over 25,000 new applications received in the last 5 years. Once awarded, entitlement can be reviewed periodically to confirm continued eligibility. A total of 909 eligibility reviews, also involving medical assessments have been carried out in the last 5 years.

Medical assessments for DCA are conducted by the Department's medical assessors who, having examined the medical evidence and other supporting information provided by the applicant, provide an opinion on medical eligibility for the benefit of a deciding officer.

Water Conservation Grant

53. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of homes that have applied for; that have been paid the Water Conservation Grant. [34821/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Water Conservation Grant is being administered by the Department of Social Protection on behalf of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

As of the afternoon of the 6th October, over 680,000 grant applications had been made by householders.

A total of 395,504 householders have received their Water Conservation Grant payment. The total value of Water Conservation Grant payments made to date is €39,550,400.

The closing date for applications is Thursday 8th October 2015.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

54. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the options open to a person (details supplied) who is currently homeless to restore her weekly income, given the successive cuts to the lone parent payment imposed by her Department. [34876/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned was in receipt of one parent family payment until 2 July 2015 when their entitlement ceased. In addition to their income from part-time employment, the person is currently in receipt of family income supplement of €95 per week. The person has also been awarded back to work family dividend at the rate of €29.80 per week. This claim has been backdated to 2 July 2015 and arrears have issued.

There is currently no claim for rent supplement from the person concerned and there has been no change to the person's address on the Department's records since February 2013. The most recent claim for rent supplement ceased in June 2012. If the person wishes to apply for rent supplement, they should do so at their local Intreo Office.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

55. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the options open to a person (details supplied) in Dublin 17 to restore a weekly income given the cuts to the lone-parent payment in July 2015 and the impact this has had on this person's financial situation. [34877/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned is currently in receipt of supplementary welfare allowance at the rate of €74.92 per week, for which the person's means were assessed at €140.88 per week.

A claim for jobseeker's allowance has been submitted with effect from 2 October 2015 and the person has been asked to provide documentary evidence from their employer confirming the date that the hours of employment were reduced, and the current earnings.

A decision on the person's entitlement to jobseeker's allowance will be made when this documentation is received. The requested information from the employer will also enable a review of the supplementary welfare allowance claim in order to establish if the payment was made at the correct rate.

Carer's Allowance Applications

56. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the steps she will take to expedite an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath, which was submitted some time ago; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34884/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the Department received an application for carer's allowance from the person concerned on 16 September 2015. Once processed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

57. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the steps she will take to expedite an application for a domiciliary care allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34885/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received from the person concerned on the 21st August 2015. This application has been forwarded to one of the Department's Medical Assessors for their medical opinion. Following receipt of this opinion, a decision will be made by a Deciding Officer and notified to the person concerned. It can currently take 12 weeks to process an application for DCA.

Social Insurance Yield

58. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will provide in tabular form the amount of employer's pay-related social insurance collected by her Department in each year from 2011 to 30 June 2015, by county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34896/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The following table shows the total amount of employer's Pay Related Social Insurance collected in each of the years, 2011 to 2014, and in 2015 up to 30th June 2015:

2015

2011	2012	2013	2014	YTD 30th June
€000	€000	€000	€000	€000
5,460,786	4,995,971	5,331,152	5,749,428	3,101,053

A breakdown of employer contributions by county is not available for the years in question.

Living Wage

59. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will outline the discussions she or her Department have had with suppliers or service contractors to her Department, or to agencies of her Department, to ensure that employees of such suppliers and contractors are paid the Living Wage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34898/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): My Department procures services from suppliers via open public procurement which is governed by a comprehensive regulatory, legal and procedural framework. In particular procurement practice is governed by EU Directive 18 of 2004 and supported by procurement guidelines published by the Department of Finance, and circulars of the Department of Finance and Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Under Article 27 of Directive 2004/18/EC as implemented into Irish law by Regulation 27 of European Communities (Award of Public Contracts) Regulations 2006 (S.I. No. 329 of 2006), tenderers must provide a statement confirming that they have taken account of their legal obligations relating to employment protection and working conditions relating to the provision of the services sought.

Tenderers are also required to include an undertaking to comply fully with the provisions of the application of the Transfer of Undertakings and Protection of Employees (TUPE) Directive and Irish implementing Regulations S.I. No. 131 of 2003 European Communities (Protection of Employees on Transfer of Undertakings) Regulations 2003.

The Government has assigned responsibility for procurement policy and procedures to the Office of Government Procurement.

The Department's procurement policy is published on the website <http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Procurement-Policy.aspx>. I am satisfied the Department is compliant with best practice in the procurement of supplies and services.

Farm Assist Scheme

60. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the funding under the farm assist programme in each year from 2010 to 2014; the projected expenditure in 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34918/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The farm assist scheme provides support for farmers on low incomes and is similar to jobseeker's allowance. The 2015 Revised Estimates for the Department provide for expenditure this year on the farm assist scheme of €88.7 million.

The farm assist scheme is kept under ongoing review. My officials have regular discussions and meetings with the IFA in relation to the scheme. Policy and operational staff are in close contact and co-operate on an ongoing basis on issues arising at local level and discuss and follow up on individual cases when the need arises.

The expenditure by year is attached in the following table.

Expenditure on Farm Assist, 2010 to 2015

Year	Expenditure on Farm Assist€m
2010	110,931

Year	Expenditure on Farm Assist€m
2011	113,724
2012	108,170
2013	99,450
2014	93,6141
2015 (REV)	88,700

2014 Prov Outturn 1

Credit Unions Regulation

61. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 236 of 29 September 2015, if he will confirm that the non-implementation of section 44, the local investment provision, of the 1997 Credit Union Act is not primarily due to any reluctance or unwillingness on the part of the boards of credit unions to establish special funds for social, cultural or charitable purposes, but rather, is due to the active discouragement of such initiatives on the part of the Central Bank of Ireland in its role as Credit Union Regulator; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34795/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Further to Parliamentary Question No. 236 of 29 September 2015, I have been informed by the Central Bank that section 44 of the Credit Union Act, 1997 provides that a credit union may establish a special fund to be used by the credit union for such social, cultural or charitable purposes (including community development) where it is approved by a resolution passed by a majority of its members present and voting at a general meeting. Funds established under section 44 do not require approval of the Central Bank. The Central Bank informs me that it is supportive of such initiatives by credit unions provided they fall within the provisions of section 44. These provisions include a requirement that funds paid into such a special fund can only be paid out of the annual operating surplus of a credit union and that no funds may be paid into such a special fund unless adequate provision has been made out of the annual surplus to cover all current and contingent liabilities and to maintain proper reserves. There is also a requirement that the payment of the funds into the special fund will not affect the financial stability of the credit union. In addition section 44(3) specifies that the amount of funds which may be paid out of the annual operating surplus into such special fund shall not exceed 0.5% of the value of the credit unions’ assets.

Credit Unions Regulation

62. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 236 of 29 September 2015, if he has been apprised of the disposition of the Central Bank of Ireland, in its role as Credit Union Regulator, on the desirability of including credit unions in the dormant accounts regime, something that was seen as desirable by the Minister of Finance who introduced the dormant accounts regime (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34796/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Dormant Accounts legislation is a matter for the Department of the Environment Community and Local Government (DECLG).

Further to Parliamentary Question No. 236 of 29 September 2015, the Dormant Accounts Act, 2001 (as amended) provides for accounts in credit institutions to be transferred to the Dormant Accounts Fund when an account has been dormant for 15 years. Credit unions are

currently not subject to the dormant accounts legislation. Accordingly, accounts in credit unions that have not been reclaimed by the owners for at least 15 years are not transferred to the Dormant Accounts Fund.

The Credit Union Act, 1997 (as amended) does not make reference to Dormant Accounts. Dormant accounts in credit unions, and the practices surrounding them, are governed by Rule 22 of the Standard Rules for Credit Unions published by the Irish League of Credit Unions.

I have been informed by DECLG that an analysis of the benefit of adding dormant credit union accounts to the Dormant Accounts Fund has not been carried out. In practical terms, increasing the amount available in the Fund does not necessarily allow for the introduction of new dormant accounts measures or programmes, which is the focus of DECLG in respect of the Fund. While applying the provisions of the dormant accounts legislation to credit union accounts could increase the size of the Fund, Government Departments must source monies for dormant accounts programmes and measures from their Exchequer allocation in the same way as with any other funding programme. When the monies expended on dormant accounts measures and programmes are reimbursed from the Dormant Accounts Fund, the refund is to the Exchequer rather than to the spending Department. For this reason, dormant accounts expenditure is subject to the same constraints within Departments as any other spending programme.

In addition, expenditure on new dormant accounts measures or programmes would serve to increase Government debt levels, as moneys disbursed from the Dormant Accounts Fund belong to the account holder, who can reclaim it at any time, and not to the State. Consequently, every euro spent from the Fund is regarded in accounting terms as a potential Government liability.

It would be a matter for Government on the advice of the Department of Finance or DCELG to decide on any extension to the Dormant Account legislation to include credit unions. However, there are no plans at present to introduce such a change.

Budget Submissions

63. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Finance if he has received pre-budget submissions from the artisan cider production sector; his views that this sector could emulate the experience of the craft beer sector and grow from 1% of market to 10% of market; if so, if he will consider a single excise rate for the cider industry, similar to what exists for wine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34815/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I can confirm that I have received pre-Budget submissions seeking an examination of the excise bands which apply to cider with a view to removing the band that applies for alcohol content between 6% and 8.5%.

All excises are considered in the context of the annual Budget and Finance Bill process, however, it is not the practice of the Minister for Finance to comment in advance of the Budget on any initiatives that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

Revenue Commissioners Reports

64. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Finance for an update on the Revenue Commissioner's year-by-year statistical reports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34867/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised that the Revenue Commissioners have proactively reviewed both the content and dissemination methods for their publication of statistical information in the recent years. They have moved to provide their most relevant and sought after information in new and more accessible formats for statistics across all of the taxes and duties. Whereas previously information was provided by way of static tables in documents and published as an Annual Revenue Statistical Report, Revenue is now making the same statistical information available to be queried and downloaded in a range of formats.

This makes it much easier for interested parties and researchers or analysts to access and use Revenue's statistics. The information on this webpage is updated in due course, as newer data become available, rather than on an annual basis as previously. This initiative also places Revenue at the forefront of the Government's Open Data programme.

The Revenue Statistics webpage is located at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/index.html>. In relation to income distribution statistics, these are linked from the Revenue statistics webpage and can be accessed directly at http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/pssn/rv01/homepagefiles/rv01_statbank.asp. The information the Deputy queried is available under the "Income Tax and Corporation Tax Distribution Statistics" heading.

Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears

65. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if his view on the legal enforceability of the code of conduct on mortgage arrears has changed following the Supreme Court's ruling on the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34870/15]

66. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to amend or introduce legislation to put the code of conduct on mortgage arrears on a statutory footing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34871/15]

67. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will discuss with the Central Bank of Ireland whether changes are required to the code of conduct on mortgage arrears following the recent Supreme Court ruling on the matter of the legal enforceability of the code; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34872/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 65 to 67, inclusive, together.

The Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) is a statutory code issued under Section 117 of the Central Bank Act, 1989. The CCMA applies to all regulated mortgage lenders operating in the State when dealing with borrowers facing or in mortgage arrears on their primary residence, including any mortgage lending activities outsourced by these lenders.

Where breaches of any regulatory requirements occur, firms and/or individuals can expect vigorous investigation and follow through by the Central Bank. The Central Bank regularly conducts themed inspections to ensure compliance with all of its codes of conduct, including the CCMA. Breaches of regulatory requirements are dealt with using appropriate supervisory powers, including Administrative Sanctions powers, where appropriate.

There is no legal issue, therefore, over whether or not regulated entities are to comply with this statutory code. Lenders are required to comply with all aspects of the CCMA and non-compliance with the CCMA is enforceable against regulated entities by the Central Bank. The precise issue that arose before the Courts was the extent to which non-compliance with the CCMA could be adjudicated by the Courts in a repossession case between a lender plaintiff

and a borrower defendant. In that regard, the Supreme Court found that where a breach of the CCMA involves a failure of the lender to abide with the moratorium referred in the CCMA, but in no other circumstances, non-compliance with the CCMA affects a relevant lender's entitlement to obtain an order for possession. Following on from this, a breach of any other aspect of the CCMA does not in itself adversely affect a lender's contractual right to possession in the circumstances of mortgage default.

The Supreme Court found that the CCMA prohibited lenders from seeking an order for possession where the moratorium was not complied with but that it did not prohibit the seeking of an order for possession in other circumstances. The Supreme Court has therefore ruled that where the Code of Conduct prohibits the seeking of an order for possession the Courts will enforce that prohibition. To quote from the judgement of the Supreme Court:

“A financial institution which, entirely ignoring the provisions of the Code in that regard, simply went ahead and sought possession as soon as it was legally entitled so to do would be doing the very thing which the Code is designed to prevent. For a court to entertain an application for possession which was brought in circumstances of clear breach of the moratorium would be for a court to act in aid of the actions of a financial institution which were clearly unlawful (by being in breach of the Code) and in circumstances where the very act of the financial institution concerned in seeking possession was contrary to the intention or purpose behind the Code itself.”

Where the code does not so prohibit and where it is not illegal for an order of possession to be sought then it is not a matter in which the Courts will intervene. I am pleased to note that the Supreme Court decision has in fact recognised that the CCMA forms part of the law and that a regulated financial institution is obliged, as a matter of law, to obey it. However, it should also be noted that in a repossession case before the Courts a borrower's rights are not confined to the provisions of the CCMA.

The 2013 Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act has provided a new statutory avenue to borrowers in a repossession case involving a primary dwelling to seek an adjournment of the repossession case to allow the borrower the opportunity to consider and, if so decided, to propose a Personal Insolvency Arrangement (PIA) to creditors in order to resolve an unsustainable debt position. If this is approved by the Court, the debtor would then be in a position to formally propose an alternative and sustainable payment arrangement irrespective of whether or not the primary home lender considered or rejected such an arrangement under the CCMA. Also, under a PIA there is an onus on the personal insolvency practitioner to, insofar as is reasonably practicable, formulate a proposal on terms that will not require the debtor to dispose of an interest in, or cease to occupy, a private principal residence. Even if such a PIA proposal is rejected by creditors, the Personal Insolvency Act has now been amended to provide that the proposal can then be submitted to a Court for adjudication.

I appreciate the genuine concerns Deputies may have regarding the implications of the particular decision for borrowers in genuine difficulty with a mortgage on their own home. While the full implications of the decision can be considered further by my own officials and the Central Bank, as I have already noted, the Central Bank has powers to both supervise and enforce that Code. In any event the recent changes to the Land and Conveyancing Act and the Personal Insolvency Act has given a statutory right to a borrower to propose a sustainable solution to creditors, or failing that a court, as an alternative to repossession.

Credit Unions Regulation

68. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance if he will refrain from commencing consultation paper 88 until such time as full consideration is given to the recommendation of the International Credit Union Regulators Network Report that a review be carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34939/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): My role as Minister for Finance is to ensure that the legal framework for credit unions is appropriate for the effective operation and supervision of credit unions.

The Registrar of Credit Unions at the Central Bank is the independent regulator for credit unions. Within her independent regulatory discretion, the Registrar acts to support the prudential soundness of individual credit unions, to maintain sector stability and to protect the savings of credit union members.

While it is important to distinguish this division of roles, it is equally important to recognise that both the Registrar of Credit Unions and myself, as Minister for Finance are working together for the safety of members' savings and the security of the credit union sector.

The purpose of the International Credit Union Regulators' Network (ICURN) review was to assess the performance of the Central Bank's performance of its regulatory functions in relation to credit unions. The review assessed the legal, regulatory and prudential supervisory framework in place to fulfil the Central Bank's mandate under section 84 of the Credit Union Act, 1997 and accordingly focused on the legal and regulatory framework for the regulation of credit unions in effect at the time of the review. Overall the review found that the Central Bank effectively performs its functions in the regulation and supervision of the credit union sector.

The review included a number of recommendations for refinements under the 3 broad areas: Supervisory Approach; Communications and Guidance; and Resources. ICURN made a number of recommendations in relation to each area. Under the heading Communications and Guidance, ICURN also suggested that consideration be given by the relevant authority to directing a review to evaluate the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission on Credit Unions. ICURN further stated that this is not a matter for the Central Bank. As Minister for Finance I have no plans at this time to carry out such a review.

I have been informed by the Central Bank that the draft regulations set out in Consultation Paper 88 (CP88), will be introduced at end December 2015. It is my intention to commence the remaining sections of the 2012 Act on 31 December 2015 in line with the introduction of the regulations. These sections of the 2012 Act, when commenced, will replace, amend or supplement existing sections of the 1997 Act.

As outlined in the Central Bank's feedback statement on CP88, as part of the consultation process I proposed that in the interests of clarity and fairness, credit unions are provided with details of the process of applying for a retention of savings above the limit amount. I have been informed by the Registry of Credit Unions that all credit unions have been contacted giving further information on its application criteria for the retention of savings in excess of €100,000. The Registry of Credit Unions intends to engage with the representative bodies and to invite comments from them prior to finalisation of the application process. When the application process is finalised, the Registry will provide an application form and explanatory notes in order to assist credit unions. It is anticipated that application forms will be available during December 2015. It is envisaged that applications will be accepted in the first quarter of 2016 and that applicant credit unions will be informed by the end of the second quarter of 2016 on the outcome of the process, which is well within the 12 month transitional period. Where a credit union has demonstrated that it meets the criteria, it will be in a position to retain members' savings in excess of €100,000 held at the commencement of the regulations.

I welcome the steps that have been taken to provide clarity for credit unions on the criteria for the retention of savings over €100,000 and also welcome the proposed engagement with the representative bodies to seek their comments on the application process.

The Central Bank has also informed me that it is committed to undertaking a review of the continued appropriateness of the savings limit, once the impact of the restructuring process can be assessed. It is envisaged that this review will commence within three years of the introduction of the regulations. The Central Bank has agreed to provide regular updates to my Department on developments in this matter.

The Central Bank has further informed me that it is open to working with the credit union sector to ensure that prudent and appropriate business development can be facilitated within the regulatory framework. As set out in the feedback statement on CP88, the Central Bank intends to invite interested parties to discuss business model development in the coming months.

The Government's priorities remain the protection of members' savings, the financial stability of credit unions and the sector overall and it is absolutely determined to continue to support a strengthened and growing credit union movement.

Tax Reliefs Data

69. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance for the number of farmers, in tabular form, who availed of the various tax reliefs specifically in the income tax, stamp duty, capital gains tax and inheritance tax codes for farmers for the most recent year that this information is available; the cost of each relief to the Exchequer for that year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34948/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that farmers may avail of a number of tax reliefs. The table below shows the main reliefs used by farmers, and their cost to the Exchequer, for which data are available to Revenue.

Tax	Relief	Numbers Availing	Tax Cost €m
Income Tax	General Stock Relief	8,950	5.2
Income Tax	Stock Relief for Young Trained Farmers	310	1.1
Income Tax	Stock Relief for Registered Farm Partnerships	30	0.1
Income Tax	Exempt Rental Income from Leasing of Farm Land	4,370	7.3
Capital Gains Tax	Retirement Relief within the Family	211	117*
Capital Gains Tax	Retirement Relief outside the Family	341	53*
Capital Acquisitions Tax	Agricultural Relief**	1,581	164
Stamp Duty	Young Trained Farmers Relief	722	4.7

* Figures reflect the disposal consideration amount rather than the tax cost.

** This relief may be claimed by non-farmers in some cases.

Departmental Staff Redeployment

70. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide in tabular form the total number of staff under the remit of his Department that have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35294/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am aware of five staff who have applied through the Human Resources Unit of my Department to be transferred to Department's outside the Dublin region including my Department's Office in Tullamore. I wish to inform the Deputy there are a few ways for staff to apply for a transfer to other Departments and Offices including applying directly to the Department/Office and applying for a "Head to Head" transfer through their Union Magazine. My Department would not be aware of such applications.

Flood Relief Schemes

71. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 87 of 30 September 2015, if he is awaiting receipt of a report from the Office of Public Works due to be prepared by the engineering firm referred to therein; if so, when he expects to receive this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34753/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Office of Public Works (OPW) is not awaiting a report from the consulting engineering firm referred to by the Deputy in relation to minor flood relief works carried out at Inchigeela, Co Cork.

Seanad Elections

72. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cost of registered post for ballot papers in the cultural and educational panel by-election to Seanad Éireann in 2014. [34792/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The cost of registered post for ballot papers, in the Cultural and Educational Panel by-election to Seanad Éireann in 2014, was €2,676.00.

Seanad Elections

73. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cost of registered post for ballot papers in the National University of Ireland and University of Dublin constituencies in the general election to Seanad Éireann in 2011. [34793/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): For the election to Seanad Éireann 2011 the cost of registered post for ballot papers, for the National University of Ireland constituency was €534,336.46, and for the University of Dublin constituency was €826,744.15.

Living Wage

74. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will outline the discussions he or his Department have had with suppliers or service contractors to his Department or agencies of his Department to ensure that employees of such suppliers and contractors are paid the living wage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34902/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In response to the Deputy's question I can confirm that my Department adheres to all appropriate current wage legislation and considers Protection of Employees on Transfer of Undertakings (TUPE) Regulations information and the guidelines in relation to wages from the Joint Labour Committees with regard to dealings with suppliers or service contractors.

With regard to the agencies, organisations and bodies under the aegis of my Department I can confirm that the Valuation Office, the State Laboratory, the Institute of Public Administration, the Office of the Ombudsman, the Office of Public Works and the Special EU Programmes Body have had no discussions with suppliers/contractors regarding the application of the living wage to their own employees. The Public Appointments Service (PAS) has advised that as part of the terms and conditions of any supplier or contractor procured by PAS they require that "the statutory terms which are applicable to all workers in Ireland, regardless of nationality, must be adhered to in all public contracts including the supply of labour". The Public Appointments Service have had no discussions in relation to employees of suppliers and contractors being paid the living wage.

Departmental Staff Data

75. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of staff currently employed in each Department and State agency, in tabular form, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34905/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Detailed, spreadsheet information on the number of Civil Servants on a county-by-county basis is being provided to the Deputy under separate cover. These numbers are recorded on a full-time equivalent basis, and the figures reflect the position at end June 2015. Information on the number of Civil and Public Servants in each State office or body under the aegis of my Department, on a county-by-county basis, is also provided.

With regard to the detailed county-by-county information on employees across the rest of the Public Service and outside the aegis of my Department, for example within the Education or the Health sector, I direct the Deputy to the relevant sectorial Minister.

For other high level information on the Public Service numbers I direct the Deputy to my Department's web site - at <http://databank.per.gov.ie/>.

Departmental Staff Redeployment

76. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide, in tabular form, the total number of staff under the remit of his Department that have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34906/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In response to the Deputy's question the following table shows the number of staff under the remit of my Department that have applied to be transferred to Department or State Agency offices located outside the Dublin region.

Department/State Agency	No. of Staff
Department of Public Expenditure and Reform	3
Valuation Office	1
Institute of Public Administration	0
State Laboratory	0
Special EU Programmes Body	0
Office of the Ombudsman	0
Public Appointments Service	6
Office of Public Works	0
Total	10

Political Funding

77. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount of funding that has been allocated to a political party (details supplied); and the purpose of this money. [34957/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I presume that the Deputy is referring to the Parliamentary Activities Allowance (formerly known as the Party Leaders Allowance).

Provision for the allowance is made under the Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices Act 1938 as amended, most recently by the Oireachtas (Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices) (Amendment) Act 2014. The allowance is paid to the parliamentary leader of a qualifying party in relation to expenses arising from the parliamentary activities, including research, of the party. The conditions governing entitlement to payment of the allowance are set out in the Act.

Payments are made in respect of members of the party elected to Dáil Éireann and members elected/nominated to Seanad Éireann at the last preceding general election or a subsequent bye-election or, in the case of Seanad Éireann, nominated to it after the last preceding general election. The legislation also provides that payments may be made to a member of Dáil or Seanad Éireann who is elected other than as a member of a qualifying party i.e. an Independent member.

The amount payable to party leaders is calculated on a tiered basis by reference to the number of party members who are elected or nominated to the Dáil or Seanad and is fixed at the time of the election, or following a bye-election. Members subsequently leaving or joining parties does not affect the position. The allowance was not introduced to support individual members of parties and the tiered calculation system provided for in the legislation is only used for calculating the payments due it is not an allocation for individual members.

The total amounts paid to the Fine Gael party from 1 January 2013 to 30 September 2015 are as follows:

Party	2013	2014	end Sept 2015
Fine Gael	€2,687,388.61	€2,553,863.00	€1,795,080.30

IDA Site Visits

78. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of visits made by potential multinational investors with the Industrial Development Agency to a town (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34797/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am advised by IDA Ireland that site visits are recorded on a county basis only so it is therefore not possible to give figures for individual towns. The number of site visits by potential multi-national investors to Co. Galway to the middle of 2015 is 16. At present, there are 63 IDA supported companies in Galway City and County, employing 13,862 in total. IDA Ireland actively markets Galway as part of its West region, which comprises counties Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. The agency has developed property solutions in Galway, which are promoted across its global offices. In particular, there are two sites in Tuam that IDA Ireland markets. The first is the Tuam Business Park, which is a 13.48ha site. The second is the 10.73ha Tuam Business & Technology Park. Tenants include companies such as Valeo Vision Systems, Transitions Optical, Logstrup and SSL Logistics.

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

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

IDA Ireland launched its new Strategy for the next five years earlier this year. Entitled 'Winning – Foreign Direct Investment 2015-2019', it sets out the IDA Ireland's commitment to achieve a significant increase in the amount of FDI projects going into regions and outlines the strategic actions aimed at achieving that the organisation's regional goals. One such strategic action is a €150m property investment plan, which will be spread out over five years. The funding will be used to upgrade Ireland's business and technology parks, as well as investing in a number of strategic utility-intensive sites and building new advanced technology buildings in a number of regional locations.

Competition for FDI is intense and global, with virtually every country in the world actively seeking new FDI investments but IDA Ireland has a long and credible track record of presenting potential investors with the best location options throughout Ireland for each client. The agency actively incentivises and encourages investors to consider a range of potential locations in Ireland, however, the ultimate locations selected are always decided by its clients and not by IDA Ireland.

Departmental Reports

79. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation when the study on low-hour contracts will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34810/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Gerald Nash): I confirm that the University of Limerick (UL) has completed its study, which I

received recently. The study is a substantial body of research into the prevalence of zero hour contracts and low hour contracts across the Irish economy, the manner of their use and their impact on employees. I intend to bring the report to Government in the first half of October with a view to its immediate publication and to provide stakeholders with a period of time within which to consider its findings and respond to me, prior to my bringing policy recommendations to Government on foot of the study which I intend to do at the earliest opportunity.

Living Wage

80. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will outline the discussions he or his departmental officials have had with suppliers or service contractors to his Department, or to agencies of his Department, to ensure that employees of such suppliers and contractors are paid the living wage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34903/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Gerald Nash): The introduction of the Living Wage Campaign is a voluntary initiative which I am championing. Over 120 employers, trade union representatives and civil society organisations gathered at Dublin Castle on 30 September to discuss the issues involved with both myself and the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton T.D. participating.

The Living Wage Campaign has been designed as a voluntary initiative, centred on the social, business and economic case and is not one based on legislation. It is different to the National Minimum Wage which is a statutory pay floor.

As the economy recovers, it is an opportune time to review issues around wage levels, employment opportunities and competitiveness. In this context, I have brought together a significant number of individuals and organisations to discuss how best to progress the issue of a Living Wage on a voluntary basis. This is very much in keeping with my agenda that work should always pay.

Currently, my Department's suppliers and service contractors are required to confirm that they have taken account of their statutory and legal obligations relating to the employment protection and working conditions of their employees, in the provision of goods and services sought for my Department through the eTenders website.

Departmental Staff Redeployment

81. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide in tabular form the total number of staff under the remit of his Department who have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35297/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The number of my Department's staff who have applied for a transfer to offices outside Dublin is set out in the following table. This includes staff seeking to move from one of my Department's regional locations to another.

Current Location	Staff requesting transfer to location outside Dublin
Carlow	6

Current Location	Staff requesting transfer to location outside Dublin
Cork City	1
Dublin	2
Kilkenny	7
Total Staff	16

I have asked all Agencies under the aegis of my Department to provide me with corresponding information in relation to their own staff and I will communicate that information to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

82. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) in County Cork has not yet received a payment under the disadvantaged areas scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34752/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2015 Basic Payments / Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme was received from the person named on 7 May 2015. Processing of the application under the ANC Scheme is currently in progress. On completion of this process, the ANC application will be further reviewed with a view to payment issuing directly to the nominated bank account of the person named at the earliest possible date.

GLAS Eligibility

83. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason Dexter cattle were not included in the 2014 green low-carbon agri-environmental scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34759/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): There is no change to the list of rare breeds eligible for support under GLAS, and this list includes Dexter cattle. Priority entry to GLAS is available to those who were registered with the relevant breed society and had stock in 2012 and/or 2013. In the case of the Kerry Bog Pony and the Galway Sheep, which are of particular conservation concern, those acquiring stock in 2014 and registering with the relevant breed society will also be eligible under the next tranche of GLAS.

Harbours and Piers Development

84. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the progress made on the plans for Ros an Mhíl Harbour in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34765/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is responsible for the six Fishery Harbour Centres located at Howth, Dunmore East, Killybegs, Dingle, Castletownbere, and Ros an Mhíl. This Department is also responsible for North Harbour at Cape Clear Island and for maintaining a range of piers, lights and beacons around the coast in accordance with the 1902 ex-congested Districts Board Piers, Lights and Beacons Act. The Fishery Harbour & Coastal Infrastructure

Capital Development Programme which the Department administers on an annual basis provides funding for capital works at the above locations. The suite of projects for inclusion in the 2016 programme are being finalised as are commitments to possible longer term projects I will make an announcement on these issues in due course.

Question No. 85 withdrawn.

Agrifood Sector

86. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which a system may be devised to protect producers and consumers against peaks and troughs in the food production sector, which alternately affect food producers and consumers; if he has studied means whereby the more serious fluctuations may be ameliorated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34840/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Food Wise 2025, the new ten year strategy for the agrifood sector published in July this year, builds on the successful vision of Food Harvest 2020. It identifies the opportunities and challenges facing the agrifood sector and provides an enabling strategy with more than 380 specific recommendations, which will allow the sector to grow and prosper. As a small open economy which exports the vast bulk of its main agricultural commodities, Ireland will always feel the effects of volatility on world markets. However, there are measures in place to help Irish farmers through these periods:

- Direct payments estimated by Teagasc at an average of over €19,000 per farm in 2014 provide a valuable source of farm income support and act as a hedge against price volatility.

- The measures in the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme will provide vital support through farm investment, agri-environment and knowledge transfer schemes.

- The package introduced by the EU Commission recently to address difficulties in the dairy and pig meat sectors reflects the majority of the demands I presented to them, particularly

- The increase of more than 100% in the rate of private storage aid for skimmed milk powder.

- The award of almost €14 million in direct aid to Ireland.

- The concession made by the Commission to allow advance payments of 70% under the direct payments scheme and 85% for rural development schemes before completion of controls, which will be of major benefit in easing the cash flow of farmers.

I believe that an important insulation against volatility is moving up the value chain where possible, in terms of the type of products sold and how they are produced.

I have regular meetings with the CEOs of the main banks, and I know that they are all aware of the difficulties in dairy prices this year, and are planning accordingly in terms of managing dairy loans. - Lower costs of production mean lower exposure to price and input volatility. In Ireland our grass based system gives us a natural advantage in this regard, and my Department is doing a lot to improve efficiency on farms, with the assistance of discussions groups and Teagasc advisory, education and research work, and in the processing sector, with initiatives like Origin Green.

The European Commission decided in June to establish a new High level Forum for a Better

Functioning of the Food Chain comprising Member States and representatives of parties in the food supply chain and will assist the Commission with the development of measures contributing to a better functioning food supply chain.

Also, the 2013 reform of the Common Agricultural Policy was a useful and progressive reform making the CAP fit for purpose to 2020. It provided Irish farmers and the agrifood sector with policy certainty for the years to come and with strategic financial support to increase sustainability and enhance competitiveness. I will continue to work with my EU colleagues to ensure that we engage in policies that promote the interests of the EU agricultural sector.

Food Exports

87. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he expects this country to capitalise on the global food market in the future, with particular reference to added-value product; if he remains satisfied regarding the extent to which the markets for dairy, beef, lamb, pigmeat, poultry and fish continue to be available for Irish producers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34841/15]

88. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which his Department continues to assess global markets with a view to identifying the scope for Irish exports, whether in niche or general markets in respect of dairy, beef, lamb, pigmeat, poultry and fish; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34842/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 87 and 88 together.

Meat Markets

A strong global demand for meat exists and my focus as Minister is to enable Irish exporters to take advantage of the market opportunities that arise. My Department engages on an ongoing basis with many countries, in collaboration with Bord Bia and Irish embassy staff, on market access issues. These initiatives have led to a number of notable successes in securing agreement to export Irish beef to, Japan, Singapore, Egypt, Iran and the US, to export sheepmeat to Singapore, South Africa, the Philippines the UAE, and Canada and to export pigmeat to Australia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Serbia.

In relation to China, there has been a lifting of the ban on boneless beef from Ireland for animals under 30 months. However, further work is required before trade will commence and my Department is at present engaging with the Chinese authorities on these technical aspects.

Irish beef is now listed with more than 75 high-end retail chains across the European Union. This broad portfolio of customers has contributed significantly to higher returns for Irish beef in recent years and reflects the success of Bord Bia's differentiation and premiumisation strategy, which focuses on the key attributes of Irish beef: environmental sustainability, grass-based production systems, full traceability, quality assurance at all stages and superior eating quality. Among Bord Bia's key initiatives in 2015 is the continued development, global promotion and marketing of the Origin Green initiative, designed to establish Ireland as a world leader in sustainably produced food and drink. Over 200 companies are currently working with Bord Bia to develop and commit to sustainability plans setting out clear targets in emissions, energy, waste, water, biodiversity and corporate social responsibility activities.

The poultry sector plays an important role within the Irish agricultural economy, accounting for approximately 2% of gross agricultural output and supporting around 5,000 jobs, most

of these in rural areas. Export values for poultry meat have increased steadily over the last few years to c. €310 million in 2014, growing by 20% alone in the last year, as the value of trade was driven by increased shipments of processed products. A high proportion of these exports are destined for the UK market and redirected to international markets through agents for fifth quarter' product like chicken feet in particular. Strong fundamentals supported demand in almost all regions of the world in 2014 and this is expected to continue in 2015, although some easing in global poultry prices is expected.

The development of a viable pigmeat sector is a priority for me, given the crucial role which the industry plays in supporting approximately 7,000 jobs including production, slaughter, processing, feed manufacture and services. In 2014 export volumes increased by approximately 7%, with growth to the UK, Continental Europe and International markets. Export values increased by some 3% and are in the range of €570 million, continuing the growth seen in recent years. The growth in Irish pigmeat exports to international markets evident over recent years has been negatively impacted by the restrictions of the Russian trade ban, however this has been offset by the opening of alternative spot markets such as Vietnam and the Philippines. These Asian markets will continue to provide valuable opportunities for Irish pork producers into the future.

Milk Markets

The milk quota regime ended on March 31st. The abolition of milk quota presents a massive opportunity for the Irish dairy sector and one which we should look forward to with confidence. Planning for the post quota period has been ongoing amongst all stakeholders for a number of years and I believe we have the right balance of measures in place to ensure that Irish dairy farmers can enter the new era with full confidence.

Irish Dairy produce is exported to approaching 130 countries and in 2014 exports were valued at over €3bn. Due to its reputation and significant global footprint, the dairy sector in Ireland retains significant future growth potential. The removal of quotas will be a key driver in this respect. Ireland exported dairy products worth €2.3bn in 2010 and by last year this had risen by over one-third to over €3bn. I remain acutely aware of the need to develop as many market outlets as possible for Irish dairy products. Notwithstanding our successful trade performance, I continue to work with industry to raise the profile of the Irish dairy sector, and the Irish agrifood sector generally, in emerging markets in the Far East, North Africa, the Gulf States and elsewhere.

Since taking office I have led Trade Missions to a variety of destinations in recent years, including China, the United States, Algeria, Japan and the Gulf States, in order to promote Irish Food and Beverages and dairy promotion has been a significant feature of such missions. I intend to lead missions to China, Vietnam and Africa in the coming months. Most market analysts predict that medium term prospects for global dairy markets are good, with growth in world population and wealth expected to stimulate strong levels of demand for dairy products. My aim is to help position the Irish dairy sector to be able to take advantage of this opportunity.

Seafood

Irish seafood exports recorded an increase of 7.3% in 2014 to reach a value of €533 million. The main EU markets, namely France, Spain, UK, Italy and Germany continue to dominate seafood exports, accounting for in excess of 50% of export values. However, this compares to a 60% share in 2012 and demonstrates the on-going focus of the leading Irish seafood exporters in the development of new business in emerging markets to offset some price resistance in core European markets.

The seafood sector offers huge potential for expansion. There are a number of significant macro trends which are expected have an impact on the future direction of the Irish seafood sector and which indicate that the prospects for this industry both at a global and European level are very favourable, especially in the medium to long term. Strong global population growth, which is expected to reach 8 billion by 2025, will result in a huge new market for seafood. Some experts estimate that an extra 40 million tonnes of seafood will be required annually by 2030. Coupled with the forecast global population growth, the rate of income growth in the Asia Pacific region is also anticipated to have far reaching implications for the consumption and trade of seafood.

Despite the opportunities for Irish seafood in emerging markets, it is important to note that longer term opportunities are not restricted solely to these regions. One of the key achievements of the sector in 2014 was the growth in exports in the core European markets with Ireland maintaining its premium position and growing sales on the back of four years of sluggish growth. In the longer term, supply constraints in these markets as a result of the shift in global supply to the East will present niche opportunities for Irish seafood exporters. It is important therefore that Ireland's strong position and reputation in these markets is maintained and promoted to encourage loyalty and to hold market share.

Bord Bia recognises the significant growth potential of seafood and is committed to supporting the Irish seafood sector in taking advantage of these opportunities through an expansion of its seafood marketing and promotions programme over the coming years.

Food Labelling

89. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which traceability continues to be enforced throughout the food production sector, with particular reference to the need to ensure clear indication regarding the origin, husbandry, compliance with national, international and European Union regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34843/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My colleague the Minister for Health has overall responsibility for the general food labelling legislation and the new EU food information regulations which were adopted by the Council of Health Ministers in December 2011. However, my Department plays an important role in the enforcement of this legislation under service contract to the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI). Primary responsibility under EU law for the safety and traceability of food placed on the market lies with food business operators (FBOs). The role of National Competent Agencies is to verify compliance with this requirement. This is done through a combination of inspecting establishments and auditing the food safety management systems which operators are required to have in place. These controls are applied at different stages in the food supply chain.

Regulation (EC) No. 178 of 2002 sets out the general principles and requirements of EU food law and stipulates that FBOs at all stages of production, processing and distribution within the businesses under their control, must ensure that the requirements of food law are satisfied. In regard to traceability, the regulations require that FBOs must have systems in place to identify any person from whom they have been supplied with a food. They must also have a system in place to identify the other businesses to which their product has been supplied. This is commonly referred to as the 'one step forward, one step backward' traceability system. There are additional traceability requirements for certain fishery and aquaculture products under the Control Regulation (Regulation 1224/2009 and its Implementing Regulation 404/2011) from first sale to subsequent stages of production, processing and distribution up to retail.

My Department has a permanent veterinary presence at all its approved slaughter plants. Controls at plants only engaged in secondary processing are carried out at a frequency based on an annual risk assessment. An annual audit of imported products is also carried out in each Department-approved plant, which includes checks on physical identity, labelling and documentary checks for product originating both in EU Member States and third countries. Labelling and documentary checks also form part of the routine checks conducted by the Department.

The import of products of animal origin from third countries is governed by a comprehensive and robust legislative framework laid down at EU level, controlled by EU Member States in the first instance, and audited by the European Commission's Food and Veterinary Office (FVO), to ensure compliance with all of the relevant food safety standards. The legislation imposes a series of health and supervisory requirements, designed to ensure that imported products meet standards at least equivalent to those required for production and trade between Member States. Border Inspection Posts are operated by my Department. The import controls procedures on products of animal and fish origin are highly prescriptive and strictly audited by the FVO to ensure compliance. Reports of the findings of inspections are published on the FVO's website.

In order to import fish or fishery products into Ireland from a third country, the person who wishes to import the products is required to register with the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA). The SFPA and the Border Inspection Posts operate an agreed sampling plan, which is reviewed annually, to ensure that they meet the EU criteria with respect to potential contaminants, and for the presence of any medical residues or where there is concern that the product may not be fit for human consumption.

Specific requirements for consumer information for fishery and aquaculture products such as more detailed information on provenance are also set down in EU Regulations under (EU 1379/2013) on the common organisation of markets. The Regulations on fish labelling are enforced by the SFPA as part of ongoing official controls in food establishments under their supervision. Comprehensive labelling checks including country of origin are carried out in establishments under SFPA official control as part of routine inspections by authorised officers and at retail level by the Environmental Officers.

Rules on the labelling of meat and meat products are laid down in EU legislation. For beef, compulsory rules have been in place for many years, and require food business operators to label fresh, frozen or minced beef with specific information to enable the product to be traced back to the animals from which it was derived. This must include details of the slaughterhouse and de-boning hall in which the animal was processed, and the country in which it was born, reared and slaughtered. In 2011 the European Union passed the Food Information for the Consumers (FIC), Regulation 1169/2011, which is applicable to all foods intended for the final consumer and including foods delivered to mass caterers. In particular, the FIC Regulation extends mandatory origin labelling to meats other than beef for the first time. The implementing provision is Commission Regulation No. 1337/2013, which introduced mandatory origin labelling for meat from pigs, poultry, sheep and goats with effect from the 1 April 2015. Under this regulation, labelling is required to identify the Member State or third country of rearing and the Member State or third country of slaughter for these meats. The term 'Origin' can also be used where the country/member state of birth is the same as the country of rearing and slaughter.

Ireland has been a strong proponent of such rules and I have signed into law a new Statutory Instrument to ensure that the necessary provisions are in place to implement this mandatory labelling requirement. In addition, my Department is working closely with the Department of Health with a view to extending the legislation to include 'loose meats' e.g. meat cuts sold through butcher counters. I expect rules to cover loose meats to be introduced before the end of the year.

Pigmeat Sector

90. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he expects the pigmeat sector to develop and remain viable for producers for the foreseeable future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34844/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The development of a viable pigmeat sector is a priority for me given the crucial role which the industry plays in supporting approximately 7,000 jobs including production, slaughter, processing, feed manufacture and services. In 2014 export volumes increased by approximately 7%, with growth to the UK, Continental Europe and International markets. Export values increased by some 3% and are in the range of €570 million, continuing the growth seen in recent years. Pigmeat prices tend to be cyclical in nature with periods of lower prices and production followed by recovery. My Department carefully monitors developments in the pig sector, both domestically and internationally. I am conscious of the fact that prices have come under pressure over the last year and the difficulties that this is causing for producers. Having said that, it must be noted that Irish prices remain broadly in line with the EU average at present. However I would also add that like any other EU Minister I do not have a role in the setting of prices. This is a function of the market.

In relation to the Russian ban on EU pigmeat exports, I am fully aware of the concerns Irish pig farmers have as a result of the closure of this market. My Department has met with the Russian authorities on a number of occasions to impress upon them the importance we attach to the normalisation of trade with Russia. However the restrictions on other products under the EU-wide ban is not something which Ireland alone will resolve and will only be progressed through a common EU approach. The Commission has referred this matter to the WTO for resolution.

At last month's Special Meeting of the Council of Agriculture Ministers in Brussels, I joined with other like-minded Ministers from other EU MS in calling on the EU Commission to monitor market developments and deliver a comprehensive package of support to address the current difficulties in the Irish and EU pigmeat sector. The resulting package reflects the majority of the demands presented by Ireland to the Commission who awarded almost €14 million in direct aid to Ireland and the maximum flexibility announced by the Commission in the use of these funds. I am currently consulting with stakeholders on how to disburse this aid. The reintroduction of private storage aid for pigmeat and the improved aid rates and conditions will also help to bring the market back into balance.

Support is provided by my Department for the pig sector in a number of ways. Firstly I have included provision in the Rural Development Programme for an on-farm capital investment scheme, TAMS II, with an overall budget of €395 million across all sectors. Some €37 million has been allocated for 2015. Amongst the areas identified for initial funding are investments on pig farms for energy, water meters and medicine dispensers. Other elements of the RDP, such as a targeted on farm animal health and welfare scheme will also be of benefit to the pig sector.

Other supports for the sector come through Teagasc which, through its Moorepark pig research facility and courses in pig production, plays an important role in improving production at farm level. Through its Joint Research Advisory Programme, Teagasc supports Irish pig producers by providing advice, research and education across a range of issues of importance to the sector. The programme which is funded by a voluntary industry levy has enabled Teagasc to employ four additional advisors and researchers to support producers and the sector through advice, research and education across a range of issues of importance to the sector. The high level objective of the programme is to enhance the sustainability of Irish pig meat production, including improvements in economic, social and environmental standards. This will result in

improvements in the production and marketability of Irish pigmeat.

I am also conscious of the need to promote the consumption of Irish pigmeat in domestic and overseas markets. Bord Bia provides assistance to the pigmeat sector through its marketing and promotional activities, and the pigmeat quality assurance scheme helps to consolidate the position of Irish pigmeat on the domestic market and to expand its presence on EU and third country markets.

For my part I have undertaken to ensure that as many alternative markets as possible are open to Irish Pigmeat processors since the closure of the Russian market last year. In this regard I was pleased to announce the opening of the markets in Vietnam and the Philippines for Irish pigmeat which will serve as valuable alternative markets to Russia for Irish pigmeat exports. My Department will continue in its efforts to develop access to international markets.

Fishing Industry Development

91. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he expects the fishing industry to develop in the future, with particular reference to value-added products, and employment in the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34845/15]

93. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which families dependent on fishing continue to be able to rely on a reliable income in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34847/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 91 and 93 together.

Foodwise 2025 recognises that seafood, in common with the broader food sector, will benefit from the projected increasing global demand for food produce over the coming decade. Current FAO estimates are that world consumption of fish will grow by an average annual consumption of 17 kg per person per annum resulting in a requirement for an extra 40 million tonnes of seafood by 2030. The report identifies that Ireland is well placed to take advantage of this opportunity because of our natural advantage of being adjacent to some of the most productive fishing ground in the EU.

In order to avail of this opportunity we need to pursue a strategy of growing raw material supply through sustainable development of aquaculture and encouraging landings into Irish ports of quota compliant catch by other Member States. We need to add value to that material by moving away from commodity exports and developing prepared consumer seafood products. Last but not least, we need to effectively market Irish seafood products on world markets.

Earlier this year, I announced a new €241 million Seafood Development Programme funded by the Irish Government and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. I expect that this Programme will be adopted by the European Commission in the next month or two and I will then be rolling out a range of Schemes to promote this strategy for the seafood sector. The new Programme involves a doubling of our levels of investment in the seafood sector and will enable us to achieve the potential identified in Foodwise 2025 and to achieve the Government's target of growing employment in the seafood sector by 3,000 to 14,000 by 2020.

Poultry Industry

92. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which his Department continues to evaluate the poultry sector, with particular reference to the extent to which the quality and reliability of production is emphasised, and can remain competitive on international markets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34846/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The poultry sector plays an important role within the Irish agricultural economy, accounting for approximately 2% of gross agricultural output. The poultry sector supports around 5,000 jobs, most of these in rural areas. The value of primary output for the total poultry sector stood at approximately €186 million in 2014. Given that the forecast for consumer demand remains somewhat stable, estimates for 2015 stand at €186 million. Export values have increased steadily over the last few years to c. €310 million in 2014, growing by 20% alone in the last year as the value of trade was driven by increased shipments of processed products. Strong fundamentals supported demand in almost all regions of the world in 2014 and this is expected to continue in 2015, although some easing in global poultry prices is expected. Irish production is forecast to remain stable during 2015 as EU and international production is estimated to increase marginally. Poultry is normally reared under contract to processors for a pre-agreed price, which underpins a level of continuity in the supply chain, however, the impact of cereal price changes may influence output decisions by producers as the year progresses.

The poultry sector remains very competitive, and given that Ireland is over 100% self-sufficient in poultry meat and 85% self-sufficient in egg production it is important to have the edge provided by Bord Bia's Quality Assurance Scheme. This is an integrated scheme involving the producer and the processing plant working in partnership to provide the customer with quality assured product. With almost 96% of all poultry and egg producer members of the Scheme, a strong and resilient home market is critically important for the success of the industry. In the current economic climate consumers regard poultry as a value-for-money food and the inherent added value this Scheme gives to the product does not escape the consumer.

The new Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (RDP) is a key support in enhancing the competitiveness of the agrifood sector, achieving more sustainable management of natural resources and ensuring a more balanced development of rural areas. In relation to the poultry sector, the main areas for support in the RDP includes:

- Significant support for on-farm capital investment under the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme II (TAMS II) scheme;

- Knowledge transfer and innovation measures, aimed at underpinning farm viability, sustainability and growth through the adoption of best practice and innovative solutions, and TAMS II entails financial support to a number of key areas within agriculture, including the poultry sector. Under TAMS II, energy investments, water meters and medicine dispensers are envisaged for the poultry sector. Support for Knowledge Transfer Groups also covers a number of sectors, including the poultry sector. These groups will cover issues such as financial/risk management, animal health and welfare, breed improvement, environmental protection, climate change and innovation and their operation will largely mirror existing templates already in operation in the beef and sheep sectors. The poultry sector, amongst other sectors, may also avail of support under the Targeted Animal Health and Welfare Advisory Measure.

Question No. 93 answered with Question No. 91.

Fisheries Protection

94. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which European fish catch conservation measures continue to benefit the industry, with particular reference to conservation and sustainability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34848/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The new Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) provides the framework for the long term conservation and sustainability of fish stocks around our shores and is designed to ensure the long term sustainability of fishing in Ireland and throughout EU waters. A key element of the new CFP is the setting of fishing levels on the basis of MSY (Maximum Sustainable Yield). This should ultimately lead to healthy fish stocks, higher quotas for both Irish and EU fishermen and lead to more sustainable fishing patterns. The new Common Fisheries Policy specifically calls for the progressive restoration and maintenance of populations of fish stocks above biomass levels capable of producing MSY. I am committed to the ambitious objective of achieving MSY by 2020 at the latest.

Scientific information on the state of the fisheries resources exploited by the Irish fleet is compiled by the Marine Institute and is published in the Stock Book each year.

The 2014 Stock Book informs us that in relation to stocks of a healthy biological state, there was an improvement in 2014 compared with 2013 on the state of the resource base in relation to pressure indicators. In all 73 stocks are subject to the scientific advice of the Marine Institute. This is an increase from 59 stocks last year, mainly due to the addition of a number of skates and rays stocks. There is a higher number, 25 stocks, assessed to be sustainably fished in 2014, up from 20 last year. The proportion remains the same due to the higher number of stocks being assessed overall this year. The number of stocks overfished has also increased from 14 in 2013 to 22 in 2014. This is due to the inclusion of 4 new stocks (rays and sea bass) and 4 stocks have gone from unknown status or underfished to overfished. The number of stocks with unknown status is 26, which is similar to last year.

In respect of the biomass of stocks, that is the quantity of mature fish in the sea, approximately one quarter, or 17 stocks are in a positive state with above biomass trigger points. The number of depleted stocks has increased from 7 to 12 and now 16% of stocks are assessed to be depleted. The number of stocks with unknown Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB), no assessments or undefined maximum rate of fishing mortality (Fmsy) remains relatively high involving 44 stocks. Many of these stocks have good information on biomass trends and this informs scientific advice for the stocks.

The 2015 Stock Book is due to issue in November 2015 and it is expected that these early indications are that these positive trends will continue.

A Key element of the new CFP is the setting of fishing levels on the basis of Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY). This will be phased in gradually, applying by 2020 at the latest for all stocks. This will result in more fish being left in the sea to mature and reproduce leading to increased abundance of fish, and over time to higher quotas for Irish fishermen.

Dairy Sector

95. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he can reassure the dairy sector regarding its future prospects in the wake of the abolition of quotas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34849/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): As the Depu-

ty is aware, Ireland strongly supported the abolition of the milk quota regime, on the basis that quotas were widely regarded by all concerned as a brake on the potential of the Irish dairy sector to respond positively to market opportunities. The ending of milk quota regime represented an exceptional opportunity for the dairy industry to increase milk output and reach the 50% target set out in Food Harvest 2020. The abolition of milk quotas allows dairy farmers capitalise on the on farm improvements which they have engaged in over recent years, covering improved genetics, more compact calving patterns and better grassland management.

It is disappointing that milk prices have dropped so soon after the abolition of milk quotas, but it would be disingenuous of anybody to suggest that the reduction in world prices is as a direct result of the abolition of milk quotas. It is accepted by analysts that price volatility will be a feature of the world dairy markets and we are currently at the lower end of that volatility curve.

In recent times I have made a number of proposals to the Commission to deal with the current downturn in prices and I welcome the steps taken by it, including extensions to the dates for Aids to Private Storage and Intervention, and the improved PSA scheme for SMP, which will include longer periods for storage as well as the improved aid rates, the re introduction of PSA for cheese, the provision allowing 70% advance in the single farm payment, the provision of increased funding for promotion, and the provision of almost €14m in targeted direct aid for farmers.

In terms of market, the medium to long term forecast for global dairy prices remains very positive. I am confident that the building blocks are in place to allow the Irish dairy sector to be more competitive and take full advantage of the opportunity presented by expanding global population and demand.

Artisan Food Sector

96. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the future development and expansion potential of the artisan food sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34850/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In Replies to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 7249/15 and 13361/15 on 18 February and 31 March respectively, I indicated that the artisan or speciality sector was valued at €615 million in 2012, that some 350 producers employ over 3,000 people and that the sector can have a significant impact on local economies. The development of programmes such as Food Academy and Food Works and promotional ventures such as the Artisan Market at Bloom and the three year ‘Discover Farmhouse Cheese’ promotion funded by the trade, the EU and my Department are assisting small producers to build food and drink businesses.

Identity is important to the future development and expansion of the artisan sector. So the publication by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland of Guidance Note No. 29 setting out a definition of the term Artisan/artisanal is significant. Artisan businesses are defined as micro-enterprises with a turnover up to €2m, employing fewer than 10 people and producing food in limited quantities (weekly average under 1,000 kg or litres) using skilled craftspeople, a traditional method and characteristic ingredient(s) produced within 100 km. (https://www.fsai.ie/publications_food_marketing_terms/). The Note also defines the terms Farmhouse, Traditional and Natural.

The FSAI definition was included in Food Wise 2025, the agrifood development strategy launched in July, which recognises the highly fragmented nature of the artisan/small business

sector, which encompasses a diverse range of food and drink products, and identifies the opportunities offered by the resurgent interest in locally sourced foods, local food networks and short supply chains. These have led to an evolution of food markets and festivals, which often act as incubation units for start-up food and drink businesses.

Food Wise 2025 recommends actions to help the artisan sector to realise its potential, including festival markets, a pipeline for new entrants to the Artisan Food Market at Bloom, promoting meet the buyer opportunities, delivery of small business specific consumer and market insights and programmes to assist producers to extend their business reach. The commencement of the Ascent programme, a partnership between Bord Bia and PWC to support small food companies to scale their businesses, is one such programme. It will contribute to the implementation of Food Wise by the development agencies, Departments and the food sector and to delivery of sustainable growth.

Exports Growth

97. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he expects new markets to open up markets for all Irish food and food products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34851/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The opening of new markets for Irish food and food products is of critical importance to the ongoing development of the agrifood sector in this country, and will play an important role in helping to achieve the sustainable growth targets in the Food Wise 2025 industry development strategy.

Agrifood exports to non-EU markets grew to a record €3.1 billion in 2014, an increase of 15% over 2013, with particularly strong growth in exports to Asia (+36%) and the Gulf States (+39%). Non-EU markets accounted for 28% of total Irish agrifood exports last year, with significant potential for further growth. These new markets, with growing middle class populations and increasing levels of disposable income, will provide significant growth opportunities for Ireland's agrifood and drinks sectors in the coming years.

Since my appointment as Minister, I have led several successful trade missions to facilitate trade promotion and market access to markets outside the EU, including to the United States, China, the Gulf States and Algeria. These visits provided the numerous Irish companies who accompanied me with an opportunity to increase their profile in new markets and build upon existing trade relationships. My visits to China and the US were also instrumental in helping to re-open these valuable markets to Irish beef.

To date this year, I have:

- led successful trade missions to the US in February and September to launch beef access to this very valuable market;

- welcomed Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and Agriculture Minister Han Changfu on a farm visit in Mayo, which proved an invaluable opportunity to demonstrate the best of Irish farming to the Chinese Government and the Chinese media;

- hosted meetings with Ministers and high level delegations from several non-EU countries.

I am presently finalising plans to lead trade missions to Vietnam and China, and also to West Africa, before the end of this year. These are key markets which have been identified by Irish exporters as being of major strategic importance. The West Africa mission in particular will

offer Irish food companies an opportunity to showcase their produce to a large and emerging market outside of our more traditional destinations.

Food Industry Development

98. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he expects the innovative ability of the Kerry Group to continue to become a main player on global markets, given its pivotal location and expertise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34852/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The completion of the Kerry Group Global Centre facility in Naas is the largest single investment in food innovation ever by a company in Ireland. It represents a huge vote of confidence in the Irish economy. Equally importantly, it represents a resounding endorsement in the quality and expertise of Irish food science graduates and in their capacity to deliver cutting edge solutions in pursuit of new and innovative products. By extension, this will drive expansion for the industry into new and exciting domestic and export markets.

The Government's support for the agrifood sector at all levels from farming right through to processing has been a priority for us over the term of this Government and will remain the case. Events such as the opening of Kerry's new facility in Naas are what mark out the importance of the agrifood sector for our overall economy, our people in terms of job creation and the positive knock on effects for the wider economy and in particular the rural economy.

Investments such as this one are vitally important to the sustainable future for the Irish agrifood sector because they provide the essential infrastructure needed to target key markets. The innovation behind turning local raw materials into world-class ingredients and consumer products is one of the key goals in the Food Wise 2025 Strategy and I am committed to working with companies like Kerry to achieve these goals.

Bovine Disease Controls

99. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the adequacy of disease control, traceability, and isolation in the context of the prevention of bovine diseases; whether he remains satisfied that existing measures remain adequate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34853/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): As stated in my reply to you on 1 July last, my Department has robust notification and traceability systems to ensure the early detection of diseases. It is a legal requirement to notify my Department of any suspicion of all relevant diseases, including those affecting bovines. Vigilance against the introduction of 'Class A' disease including foot and mouth disease, avian influenza, bluetongue and African swine fever, remains a priority for my Department and previous experience has demonstrated the absolute necessity of properly regulating trade, high levels of bio-security, continued vigilance, contingency arrangements and robust legislation to deal speedily and effectively with disease threats and outbreaks.

My Department has contingency plans in place to deal with disease threats and outbreaks. These plans are based on existing EU legislation and criteria identified during outbreaks in Europe and aim to mitigate the risk of disease introduction into Ireland and to control and eradi-

cate them quickly if outbreaks occur. The continued focus of the Department is on constantly reviewing, refining and updating our various contingency plans and arrangements and ensuring that we have all of the necessary measures in place and tools available to us to deal with any suspect or outbreak of these diseases.

In the event of an outbreak or the threat of an outbreak, the key focus will be on bio-security measures at the optimal level on farms as well as on-going co-operation contact with other state agencies (including NI), industry and farm representatives to ensure that a high degree of vigilance is being maintained with a view to preventing the incursion of the disease, insofar as this is possible, and to detect an outbreak at an early stage in order to prevent its spread.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

100. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when headage payments for 2015 will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34873/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2015 Basic Payments/Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme (ANC) was received from the person named on 19 May 2015. Processing of the ANC Scheme application has recently been finalised, with payment under the ANC scheme due to issue shortly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

101. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34886/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2015 Basic Payments/Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme was received from the person named on 30 April 2015. Processing of the application under the ANC Scheme is currently in progress. On completion of this process, the ANC application will be further reviewed with a view to payment issuing directly to the nominated bank account of the person named at the earliest possible date.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

102. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the disadvantaged areas scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34887/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2015 Basic Payments/Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme was received from the person named on 30 April 2015. Processing of the application under the ANC Scheme is currently in progress. On completion of this process, the ANC application will be further reviewed with a view to payment issuing directly to the nominated bank account of the person named at the earliest possible date.

Questions - Written Answers
Agriculture Scheme Payments

103. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons receiving farm subsidies; the total amount paid out, by county; the highest amount paid to a person, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34894/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013 provides that information relating to beneficiaries of EU funded and co-funded Common Agricultural Policy schemes be published on a publicly accessible website and remain available for a period of two years.

In respect of payments made in the financial year 16 October 2013 to 15 October 2014 the specific requirements included publication of

- The name of the beneficiary (unless the amount of payment under CAP funds is less than €1,250 in which case the individual will be identified by a code).

- The municipality where the beneficiary is resident

- The amount of payment corresponding to each measure received by a beneficiary, and

- The nature and description of each measure.

My Department published the data before the 31 May 2015 deadline and this information remains available at the address below:

www.agriculture.gov.ie/agri-foodindustry/euinternationalpolicy/commonagriculturalpolicy/capbeneficiariesdatabase/

The specific information requested by the Deputy is set out in the table below. The total number of beneficiaries, including County Development Boards and Local Development companies, amounted to 129,977. In most cases the highest amount paid within each county is to such bodies. Consequently the information below details both the highest total payment and the highest amount paid to a person in each county. The county in these cases relate to the postal address of the beneficiary with some of these addresses being outside the state.

County	Total	Highest	Highest	County	Total
		Overall	Individual		
	€	€	€		€
CORK	216,052,368.29	3,815,984.21	444,412.16	WEST-MEATH	48,463,145.13
GALWAY	136,345,933.66	2,704,894.41	162,013.09	MONAGHAN	46,397,615.10
TIPPERARY	128,071,553.93	3,942,300.80	309,610.92	OFFALY	44,857,489.87
MAYO	102,931,928.61	2,776,178.60	127,870.17	KILDARE	39,055,022.26
KERRY	94,625,407.38	3,188,406.65	200,000.00	WICKLOW	36,752,463.14
DONEGAL	85,499,258.65	4,009,465.55	179,630.23	SLIGO	36,743,639.50
CLARE	75,684,557.84	4,088,775.90	138,372.98	LEITRIM	33,499,914.95
WEXFORD	75,276,717.93	3,120,175.43	377,648.67	CARLOW	30,935,813.32
LIMERICK	74,324,335.74	5,323,251.21	209,767.49	LONGFORD	30,164,552.53
KILKENNY	65,497,565.76	2,005,851.18	316,144.49	LOUTH	25,309,565.99
MEATH	58,603,563.49	1,633,262.92	260,805.52	DUBLIN	14,650,553.43
ROSCOMMON	56,014,348.89	2,917,320.89	119,279.07	N IRELAND	2,583,421.76
CAVAN	55,713,771.16	3,083,693.64	306,480.00	UK	76,530.57

County	Total	Highest Overall	Highest Individual	County	Total
	€	€	€		€
LAOIS	48,744,616.88	2,727,836.67	213,184.67	USA	10,765.34
WATERFORD	48,486,478.30	2,539,119.95	686,958.77	GERMANY	5,965.35

Highest Overall	Highest Individual
€	€
2,344,387.38	171,536.38
4,789,181.96	136,080.00
2,716,579.70	440,000.00
2,830,795.64	312,967.95
2,853,254.41	244,931.71
1,562,039.12	76,007.95
2,219,660.45	114,738.58
1,818,390.96	312,000.00
1,877,860.13	96,968.00
2,453,775.58	236,816.62
1,244,147.07	193,760.56
56,111.32	56,111.32
15,114.80	15,114.80
10,765.34	10,765.34
5,956.35	5,956.35

Rural Development Programme Projects

104. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason farmers are no longer allowed to nominate a person in their stead, such as a spouse, partner, son, or daughter, to attend the knowledge transfer courses; the reason a person on a traditional mixed farm can no longer receive a grant for attending more than one knowledge transfer course, for example, in beef and sheep; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34922/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme Knowledge Transfer Groups across a range of sectors, including beef, dairy and sheep, will be established. The design of the measure has been informed by experience from previous discussion groups, extensive stakeholder consultation, and the relevant EU regulations. Participants are required to attend Knowledge Transfer Group meetings and complete a Farm Improvement Plan. I believe that the combination of both farmer knowledge exchange meetings and one to one interaction between the farmer and advisor in the development of a Farm Improvement Plan will ensure the transfer and exchange of information and best practice to participating farmers. As currently constituted, participation in more than one Knowledge Transfer Group across sectors is not permitted. This is largely due to potential double funding which would arise from the completion of more than one Farm Improvement Plan for a single farming enterprise. I have, however, asked my officials to examine how farmers could participate in more than one Knowledge Transfer group across two sectors, while at

the same time avoiding double funding issues.

The issue of allowing a named nominee to attend a Knowledge Transfer Group has been raised on a number of occasions. Following on from further consideration of this issue, an appropriate named nominee will now be allowed to attend meetings in the place of a farmer participating in a Knowledge Transfer Group. This would include spouses/partners or children of 18 years or more.

My officials are continuing to consult with relevant stakeholders in order to ensure the most efficient and effective roll out of the Knowledge Transfer Groups.

Animal Welfare

105. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will amend the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 in order to provide protection for foxes from dogs (details supplied). [34931/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 lawful hunting of an animal is permitted. However, the Act prohibits the hunting of animals which have been released in an injured, mutilated or exhausted condition. In addition, Section 25 of the Act provides for the establishment of codes of practice and for the adoption of codes published by other persons for the purposes of providing practical guidance relating to any aspect of the Act, including fox hunting. The Irish Masters of Foxhounds Association has a detailed code of conduct in place in respect of the hunting of foxes. This code places responsibility on member packs to ensure that the highest standards of animal welfare and good behaviour are maintained at all times. My Department will, in due course, be engaging with all the hunting associations with a view to adopting codes under Section 25 of the Act in order to ensure that those who participate in hunting will continue to honour their obligations to maintain the highest standards of sportsmanship and good behaviour at all times.

I am fully committed to promoting good practices that respect the welfare of all animals and my Department devotes considerable resources to protecting animal welfare and in dealing with breaches of animal welfare legislation. Under the Act, on summary conviction, a person can receive a fine of up to €10,000 and, on indictment, €250,000 and/or imprisonment up to 5 years. There are fixed penalty payments for lesser offences. The Act provides the framework within which the welfare of animals can be safeguarded and I am hopeful that the substantial and significantly increased levels of penalties for offences of animal cruelty provided for under the Act will act as a deterrent to animal welfare abuses.

Departmental Staff Relocation

106. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide in tabular form the total number of staff under the remit of his Department that have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35290/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Two officers in my Department have currently expressed an interest in transferring to one of my Department's offices outside Dublin and consideration will be given to facilitating the requests when suitable vacancies are identified. My Department avails of workforce planning to assist in

achieving the right balance between labour demand and supply so that the right number of employees, with the right skills is available in the right location at the right time. My Department operates a flexible approach to mobility and seeks to accommodate requests from staff to transfer to specific locations where possible.

Rapid Response Initiative

107. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Defence the number of military personnel, by rank, who are on the Irish Aid Rapid Response Corps roster. [34774/15]

108. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Defence the number of military personnel, by rank, for whom Irish Aid has requested releases under the sustainable livelihoods approach. [34775/15]

109. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Defence the number of military personnel, by rank, who have been refused release to Irish Aid from the Defence Forces. [34776/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 107 to 109, inclusive, together.

It is the policy of my Department to seek to develop Memorandums of Understanding and Service Level Agreements with other Government Departments and agencies in relation to the provision of supports that may be sought from the Defence Forces in respect of their Aid to Civil Authority role. In this context a Service Level Agreement (SLA) came into effect on 31st October, 2013 following agreement between my Department and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, as represented by Irish Aid, regarding the support that can be provided by the Defence Forces for the Rapid Response Initiative.

Prior to this, Irish Aid had established a Rapid Response Corps in 2007 which is a roster of both civilian and military volunteers who are available to deploy with the United Nations for humanitarian operations. In addition to making provision for members of the Defence Forces who have volunteered to register with the Rapid Response Corps, the SLA also provides for Defence Forces support in the provision of pre-deployment training courses for all members of the Rapid Response Corps.

There are currently 13 Defence Forces personnel registered with the Rapid Response Corps, of which there are five Commandants, two Captains, one Lieutenant, one Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant (RQMS), one Company Quartermaster Sergeant (CQMS) and three Sergeants. In accordance with the SLA, the Defence Forces seek to release registered personnel for immediate deployment in response to a formal request from Irish Aid, subject to the availability of such personnel and current and contingent operational commitments.

The following table sets out the number of military personnel, broken down by rank, whose release was sought by Irish Aid and the number of instances when such requests could not be acceded to.

	-	31st October to end 2013	-	2014	-	2015 to-date
Rank	Sought	Refused	Sought	Refused	Sought	Refused
Commandant	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

-	-	31st October to end 2013	-	2014	-	2015 to-date
Captain	2	Nil	1	1	1	Nil
Lieutenant	1	Nil	2	Nil	Nil	Nil
RQMS	Nil	Nil	1	1	2	1
CQMS	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	1	1
Sergeant	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	3	Nil

Departmental Staff Relocation

110. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide in tabular form the total number of staff under the remit of his Department that have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35292/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department has decentralised offices in Newbridge, Galway and Roscrea. The total number of staff in my Department is 358, with 343 of these based outside Dublin. The following table outlines the breakdown of civil servants who have transferred or applied to transfer from my Department to locations outside the Dublin region since 2011.

Staff No	Office	Transfer Location
1	Newbridge	Portlaoise
1	Newbridge	Cork
1	Newbridge	Athy
1	Dublin	Achill
1	Newbridge	Celbridge
4	Galway	Athlone
1	Galway	Thurles
1	Galway	Castlebar
1	Roscrea	Portlaoise

In relation to civilian employees attached to military installations, 2 Cork-based staff have requested transfers to the Shannon/Clare and West Cork areas respectively.

My Department does not hold specific details in relation to staff who have sought to transfer from my Department to other locations. All staff wishing to transfer to a location designated under the Government's Decentralisation Programme were required to register their interest on the Central Applications Facility (CAF) which was administered by the Public Appointments Service.

Naturalisation Applications

111. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will

indicate the eligibility for naturalisation of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34750/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that an application for a certificate of naturalisation was received from the person referred to by the Deputy. The application is at an advanced stage of processing and the case will be submitted to me for decision in due course.

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.

Garda Deployment

112. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality If she will provide additional resources to An Garda Síochána in Tallaght in Dublin 24 to facilitate effective action to tackle criminal activity which is occurring in Bohernabreena Cemetery; her views on the concern of many concerning this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34784/15]

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

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that there have been four crime incidents of 'thefts from unattended vehicles', recorded as having occurred at Bohernabreena Cemetery, Tallaght since January, 2015.

I am advised that the area in question is regularly policed by uniform and neighbourhood policing units, as well as the District Detective Unit and the District Drug Unit. The area has also been highlighted as a patrol area under Operation Irene, an operation established to counteract incidents of anti-social behaviour, associated with alcohol consumption in public areas and open spaces frequently used by young people. Community Gardaí are currently liaising with South Dublin County Council to have CCTV erected at the cemetery in an effort to combat the issue of thefts in the area.

I am further informed that Garda Management is satisfied that a full and comprehensive policing service is being delivered to the communities in the area concerned.

Residency Permits

113. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and expected residency status of a person (details supplied) in County Louth; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34785/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is

the subject of a Deportation Order made on 08 December 2009.

Representations were received from the person's legal representative, to request the Minister to use her discretion, 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 mean-time, 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.

Drugs Seizures

114. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of drug seizures by An Garda Síochána in the R district in 2014; in 2015 to date; the type; the monetary value, of the drugs seized. [34800/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I wish to advise the Deputy that I have requested the information sought from the Garda authorities and I will revert to the Deputy in due course.

Data Protection

115. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she is aware of the risks to archives services posed by current negotiation in Brussels on the draft European Union regulation on the processing of personal data, the data protection regulation; that proposed changes to the Council of Ministers' text of Articles 5 and 6 may make it impossible for some services to continue to accept and preserve documents that are an important part of our national heritage and our history, and provide essential authentic evidence for citizens to discover their personal identity and background; her views that there may be a legitimate and overriding public interest in preserving documents containing personal data, and even highly sensitive personal data; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34819/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Dara Murphy): The position is that a General Approach on the proposed Data Protection Regulation was agreed by Justice Ministers of the Member States at last June's JHA Counsel meeting. It contains specific provisions, which we fully support, which are intended to permit the processing of personal data for archiving purposes in the public interest and also for scientific, statistical and historical purposes. Intensive discussions are currently taking place with the European Parliament in its capacity as co-legislator with a view to reaching agreement on the text of the Regulation. In that context, Ireland will continue to support inclusion of the specific provisions relating to archiving activity which are contained in the Council's General Approach.

Garda Recruitment

116. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when further recruit-

ment to An Garda Síochána will commence. [34858/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): 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.

The position in relation to the current competition is as follows. Following receipt of 24,000 applications, the Public Appointment Service invited candidates to complete Stage 1 of the competition which consisted of an assessment questionnaire and reasoning tests which were undertaken on-line. I understand that around 18,000 candidates completed this stage and fewer than 13,000 candidates reached a satisfactory standard. Those who did achieve a satisfactory standard were placed in three bands determined by their overall scores.

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.

Naturalisation Applications

117. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will examine and expedite an application for temporary and limited leave to remain in the State by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34860/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that an application was received for permission to remain in the State from the person mentioned on 26 February 2015. The consideration of information on file is ongoing. Further documents were requested by INIS on 30 September 2015, and a final decision cannot be made on this application until these documents are submitted.

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 for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of Parliamentary Question 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.

Court Accommodation Refurbishment

118. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will consider Wicklow court house as part of the €10 million provision in Exchequer funding for courts building refurbishment under the capital investment plan, as this court house has been earmarked for development of a Four Courts campus by the Courts Service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34869/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts, including the

provision of accommodation for court sittings, is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service have informed me that a portion of land adjacent to Wicklow Courthouse was acquired by the Courts Service that would allow for the future development of the courthouse. The courthouse building and surrounding lands are in the ownership of the Courts Service. While the Courts Service has not been in a position in recent years to proceed with its plans for Wicklow Courthouse, it is committed to the development of the courthouse and is reviewing its capital investment proposals in the light of the recent publication of “Building on Recovery: Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2016-2021”. I am assured that the matter will be kept under review, having regard to available resources.

Garda Deployment

119. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality for a breakdown of the number of community Gardaí in the Kerry division; and where they have been stationed for the years 2010 to October 2015. [34879/15]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the number of Community Garda in the Kerry Division, from 31 December 2010 - 31 August 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available, are as set out in the table attached.

It is, of course, the case that all Gardaí have a role to play in addressing community policing issues as and when the need arises. In that sense, community policing involves far more than a single unit within the Garda Síochána, a point highlighted by the Garda Inspectorate in their third report entitled “Policing in Ireland—Looking Forward” in which they stated that community policing is a fundamental policing philosophy and that there is a strong foundation for it in Ireland.

An Garda Síochána now operates a new model of Community Policing which aims to build upon and enhance progress made so far. I fully support this renewed emphasis on Community Policing particularly in light of the priority given to this in the Programme for Government. The model is about renewing, reinvigorating and restructuring the community policing function within An Garda Síochána to deliver a consistent national structure to the community policing function, a more co-ordinated and efficient Garda service to the community and a spread of good practice and quality of service in community policing on a national basis.

Community Garda Kerry Division

Year	Tralee Garda Station	Killarney Garda Station
2010	5	4
2011	6	3
2012	7	3
2013	7	2

Year	Tralee Garda Station	Killarney Garda Station
2014	6	2
*2015	6	-

* 31 August 2015

Garda Station Closures

120. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the savings from Garda Síochána station closures in the Kerry division since January 2011. [34880/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Garda District and Station Rationalisation Programme was implemented in An Garda Síochána during 2012 and 2013. The primary objective of the Programme was to identify opportunities to introduce strategic reforms to enhance service delivery, increase efficiency and streamline practices within the organisation. In its review of the Garda Station Network which informed the Programme, Garda management concluded in relation to certain stations that Garda resources could be better deployed and more effectively used on the front line if those stations no longer had to be staffed and maintained. In reaching these conclusions, Garda management reviewed all aspects of An Garda Síochána's policing model, including the deployment of personnel, the utilisation of modern technologies and the overall operation of Garda stations.

As part of the Programme, there were a total of twelve station closures in the Kerry Division in 2012 and 2013. There were no station closures during 2011. I am informed by the Garda authorities that the total estimated direct savings since 2011 on utilities and maintenance as a result of the closure of these stations is €108,000. This does not, of course, represent the full value of the Programme. The closures have allowed front line Garda to be managed and deployed with greater mobility, greater flexibility, and in a more focused fashion particularly with regard to various targeted police operations.

I am further informed that local Garda management closely monitors the allocation of all resources in the context of crime trends, policing needs and other operational strategies, to ensure optimum use is made of Garda resources, and the best possible Garda service is provided to the public.

Garda Operations

121. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedures within An Garda Síochána for handling and transporting blasting gelignite; if An Garda Síochána is routinely available to police blasting procedures, or if the blasting procedures are fraught with delays; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34882/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy is no doubt aware, an Garda Síochána is involved in the security and protection of explosives (which could include gelignite type explosives) while they are being transported, stored and/or utilised. An Garda Síochána do not however, as a matter of policy and security, disclose the nature of the procedures in place in this regard.

Visa Applications

122. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will consider whether or not an injustice has occurred in the case of an application for a visa by a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34911/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that correspondence has issued to the person concerned seeking clarification with regard to their educational qualifications in order to establish whether or not the person meets the qualifying criteria in order to be granted the particular immigration permission sought.

On receipt of the information requested the person's application will be fully considered.

Departmental Staff Relocation

123. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide in tabular form the total number of staff under the remit of her Department that have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35298/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Human Resources Division of my Department manage a very substantial number of requests for staff transfers both across my Department and other Civil Service Departments and Offices each year. There are a range of different reasons for such a transfer request, one of which is based on geographic location. In such instances staff can submit a formal request to Human Resources Division for a transfer to a specific location. This request is then forwarded to all Civil Service Departments with offices in that location. It is then the responsibility of that Department to administer their transfer list and consider candidates as and when suitable vacancies arise.

Due to the large variation in the range and circumstances of staff transfers each year, it is not possible to readily isolate the numbers and breakdown sought by the Deputy in respect of transfers requests to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region and attempting to retrieve this information would involve a disproportionate dedication of staff resources.

I wish to advise the Deputy that where possible my Department will facilitate such transfer requests however the priority will always be to maintain a balanced and appropriate level of staff resources in priority areas and to match people with the most relevant skills to the requirements of posts.

Housing Provision

124. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he is aware of the serious concerns in the Tallaght region of Dublin 24 regarding the imminent closure of the Cuan Álainn refuge for women and families which has operated in the area since 2012; his views on a statement by Respond Housing Agency that this closure is due to the lack of Government funding; the action he will take to intervene in the crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34782/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Cuan Álainn centre provides accommodation for women and children who may have been in emergency accommodation provided by domestic violence refuges. I understand that the Centre was established

independently of the State. It opened in 2012 and has been funded by Respond Housing Association.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency allocates available funding for domestic violence to emergency refuge accommodation services and community-based domestic violence supports.

I am advised that the Cuan Álainn facility does not operate as a front line emergency domestic violence service, rather it provides 'step down' or 'transitional' accommodation to support a transition into a permanent settled home. This can include survivors of domestic violence who are transitioning from emergency services to a new, permanent home.

Officials from my Department and Tusla recently met with Respond, at the housing association's request, to discuss the situation in Cuan Álainn. The Department sought additional information from Respond, including information in relation to the housing association's financial well being. The most recent information provided indicates that Respond, which is made up of two companies, remains in good financial health.

I hope that the matter can be satisfactorily resolved, by allowing sufficient time for all avenues to be explored by the relevant parties. This will need to include discussion with other parties, including the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government as it would appear that these families have pressing housing needs.

Counselling Services

125. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide the necessary funding to re-establish the scheme of grants for marriage, child and bereavement counselling services, as previously administered by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34823/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency is tasked with improving outcomes and well-being for children and young people. In this regard, Tusla must ensure that it makes the most efficient use of its resources in a way that is efficient, equitable, proportionate and sustainable.

In the context of resources available, a decision was taken by Tusla to direct its budget towards services which are best aligned to those outcomes prioritised in the Agency's corporate plan. In this regard, it was necessary to effect some savings under the Scheme referred to by the Deputy.

I appreciate the decision creates a challenge for the organisations concerned.

While my Department is not in a position, at this time, to identify a new funding stream for these organisations, the position will be kept under close review.

Departmental Staff Relocation

126. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide in tabular form the total number of staff under the remit of his Department that have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35291/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): While my Department

does not operate a transfer list, two members of staff have expressed an interest to the Department in a transfer to a location outside of the Dublin region.

The information requested in respect of the agencies under my aegis is not normally held in my Department and I have asked my officials to arrange for the Child and Family Agency, The Adoption Authority of Ireland, The Ombudsman for Children's Office and the Children Detention Schools to supply this information directly to the Deputy.

Early Childhood Care Education

127. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding support for a family with a young child with autism under the early childhood care and education scheme (details supplied) in Dublin 5; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34934/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, which is the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, provides for a free pre-school year to eligible children in the year before they commence primary school. The objective of this scheme is to support early learning in a formal setting in advance of starting school. I understand that certain flexibilities are built into the scheme in an effort to accommodate children with special needs, such as an overage exemption, or waiver, for children with special needs who do not meet the age criteria and the option to avail of the free pre-school year over two years.

The Health Service Executive has no statutory obligation to provide assistant supports for children with special needs wishing to avail of the free pre-school year. However, the HSE does work at local level and in partnership with the relevant disability service providers to address individual needs as they arise. This is done, for example, by funding special pre-schools that cater specifically for children with disabilities. In some limited cases at local level, disability services have also facilitated children with a disability to attend mainstream pre-schools by providing assistant supports where possible and where resources are available. The provision of such pre-school assistant supports should not be confused with Special Needs Assistants who are funded by the Department of Education and Skills to support children with special educational needs in primary and post-primary school settings.

The *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* children and young people's policy framework that has been developed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs contains a commitment to develop a plan for the inclusion of children with a disability in mainstream pre-school and early years settings. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs has lead responsibility for the implementation of this commitment and has recently concluded an intensive process of deliberation and consultation on the matter in conjunction with my Department and the Department of Education and Skills. Work is ongoing to develop an appropriate model of supports to facilitate the full participation of children with special needs in the ECCE Programme.

Within this context, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy in relation to the individual case he has highlighted. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Health Services Provision

128. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health his views on correspondence (details supplied); his plans to address the major concerns raised; to meet the representative group; and

if he will make a statement on the matter. [34749/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Irish National Dementia Strategy was launched in December 2014. This delivers on a commitment in the Programme for Government to develop a national Alzheimer's and other dementias strategy to increase awareness, ensure early diagnosis and intervention and develop enhanced community based services.

The Department of Health and the HSE have agreed a joint initiative with the Atlantic Philanthropies to implement significant elements of the Strategy over the period 2014-2017. This National Dementia Strategy Implementation Programme will represent a combined investment of €27.5m, with Atlantic Philanthropies contributing €12million, and the HSE contributing €15.5million.

This programme will promote a greater focus on timely diagnosis of dementia and on the value of early intervention, along with the long-term objective of making people in Ireland generally more aware and understanding of the needs of people with dementia, and of the contribution that those with dementia continue to make to our society.

Key elements of the initiative include:

- the rollout of a programme of Intensive Home Supports and Homecare Packages for people with dementia;
- the provision of additional dementia-specific resources for GPs, who are the critical and initial point of contact with the health system for those with dementia. The resource material will include training materials and guidance on local services and contact points, etc.
- Measures to raise public awareness, address stigma, and promote the inclusion and involvement in society of those with dementia.

A Monitoring Group, chaired by the Department of Health, has been established to assist with and advise on implementation of the National Dementia Strategy, including the National Dementia Strategy Implementation Programme. This Group includes health professionals, administrators, researchers, and advocates. The Group also includes a person living with dementia and a representative of those who care for people with dementia. The most recent meeting of this Monitoring Group was held on 24 September 2015.

The question of funding for dementia services next year is being considered as part of the Estimates Process 2016 which is currently underway, and the recommendations received have been noted in this context.

Medical Card Appeals

129. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if and when medical cards will be restored to persons (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34751/15]

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 he should contact my Private Office who will follow up on the matter.

Dental Services Provision

130. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) in Dublin 10 will be issued new dentures by a dentist. [34766/15]

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 he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days he should contact my Private Office and they will follow up on the matter.

Hospital Appointment Status

131. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for hip surgery will be scheduled without further delay for a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [34767/15]

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 the Deputy directly. If he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days he should contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Primary Care Centre Provision

132. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for Health given that the Health Service Executive has committed to providing a new modern primary care centre in Tubbercurry in County Sligo, if he will provide an up-to-date position on its provision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34770/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The HSE has responsibility for the provision, maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres. Therefore, this matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy. If he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days he should contact my Private Office and they will follow up on the matter.

Health Services Provision

133. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health the services available to a person (details supplied) who is severely disabled following a stroke but who wishes to return home as soon as possible. [34778/15]

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

Community Care Provision

134. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date on the 100 bed community nursing unit in St. Patrick's Hospital in County Waterford; if he will confirm that a design team has been appointed; the names of the persons on the design team; when the planning application will be made; whether money for the unit has been ringfenced as is indicated in the capital plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34780/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The design team for the new community nursing home to replace St. Patrick's Hospital in Waterford City, was appointed in Q1 2015. The design team comprises

- Architects – Coady Partnership Architects,
- Civil and Structural Engineers – O'Connor Sutton Cronin and Associates,
- Mechanical and Electrical Engineers – Varming Consulting Engineers,
- Quantity Surveyors – O'Reilly Hyland Tierney and Associates.

As this is a major development on a campus with listed/protected buildings the HSE has had extensive consultations with the planning authorities about the new facility and the treatment of the listed/protected buildings. The purpose of the consultation process is to ensure a successful planning application in so far as in possible. A design review has been completed recently. At this stage it is expected that the planning application could be submitted before year end 2015.

The HSE has identified this Waterford city location as a priority location for a new community nursing home. Nevertheless as with all capital projects, the CNU infrastructure programme which includes this project, must be considered within the overall capital envelope available to the health service. There will always be more projects than can be funded by the Exchequer. Therefore the reason capital funding is not ring-fenced by project is to ensure that the HSE has flexibility to manage within its voted capital allocation in the event that one or more of the hundreds of construction projects underway at any time do not progress as scheduled. This enables the HSE, to leverage its capital allocation more efficiently, so that it delivers the maximum number of priority projects for the funding available.

General Medical Services Scheme Administration

135. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Health the reason medical cards and general practitioner visit cards are not issued from date of receipt of application instead of from

date of completion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34788/15]

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 she should contact my Private Office who will follow up on the matter.

Drugs Payment Scheme Expenditure

136. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of reducing the €144 per month drugs payment scheme threshold to €125 per month. [34799/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the primary care schemes, including the Drugs Payment Scheme; therefore the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

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

Medical Card Delays

137. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is a continuous delay in processing a medical card for a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; if the application will be expedited due to the financial hardship the person is suffering; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34814/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which 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.

Youth Services Funding

138. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reverse the decision to cut the Health Service Executive funding for the Oasis outreach project in the Mounttown-Monkstown Farm area, an outreach project for young, vulnerable teenagers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34822/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct

reply to the Deputy.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days he should contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

139. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health for an update on the new patient accommodation at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda, County Louth, due to be completed in 2017; the number of patient beds it will provide; and if, in view of the Health Information and Quality Authority report on national standards for the prevention and control of health care associated infections of 1 October 2015, he plans to expedite its construction. [34854/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly. If he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

140. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health for information regarding the recruitment process for the two infection prevention and control nurse positions which are currently vacant at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda, County Louth; the length of time the positions have been vacant; and when he expects they will be filled. [34855/15]

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

Hospital Acquired Infections

141. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health when he expects to receive the legionella risk assessment report on Our Lady Of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda, County Louth, which an independent contractor commenced on 6 July 2015. [34856/15]

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

Hospital Facilities

142. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the cost of installing a new water treatment system circa April 2014 at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda, County Louth; the rationale for its installation; and how it has been performing since its installation. [34857/15]

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

Hospital Acquired Infections

143. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Health the course of action he is proposing to deal with the Health Information and Quality Authority report on the threat of legionnaires' disease to Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda, County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34861/15]

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

Health Services Funding

144. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health when he will respond to correspondence, dated 19 June 2015, from this Deputy's concerning the funding deficit at an organisation (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34862/15]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

145. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Carlow will have a hernia operation carried out in St. Vincent's hospital in Elm Park in Dublin 4. [34875/15]

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

146. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the number of dermatol-

ogy patients in County Donegal; the number of these under the care of a consultant from Antrim Area Hospital; Sligo General Hospital; the current waiting time to see a dermatologist in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34888/15]

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

Medical Card Data

147. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons over 80 years of age who do not have a medical card. [34890/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Neither the Department of Health nor the HSE records population data. I can, however, advise the Deputy that at 2 September this year, over 15,700 persons aged 80 years and over held a GP visit card.

National Children's Hospital

148. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Health his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding the national children's hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34891/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board is the statutory body responsible for planning, designing, building and equipping the new children's hospital. The new hospital will be co-located with St. James's Hospital, and ultimately tri-located with the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital, which will re-locate to the campus in due course. Satellite centres of the hospital, providing urgent and outpatient care, are to be built on the campuses of Connolly and Tallaght Hospitals.

The Government's decision that the new children's hospital should be co-located with St. James's on its campus in Dublin 8 was clinically led. In 2006 McKinsey report, Children's Health First, which recommended that the population of Ireland and projected demand could support only one world-class tertiary paediatric centre, that this should be in Dublin and ideally be co-located with a leading adult academic hospital, to ensure relevant sub-specialty and academic linkages. The McKinsey report recognised the importance for quality of healthcare of having a critical mass of sub-specialist skills in a tertiary centre and stated this could be achieved firstly, by serving a large enough population to support a full complement of sub-specialists and secondly by co-locating with an adult teaching hospital thus enabling access to specialties that encompass both adult and paediatric patients, facilitating clinical and academic "cross fertilisation", and attracting the top staff. A number of subsequent reviews and reports on this project over the years since 2006, most recently the 2012 Dolphin report, reaffirmed the importance of co-location with a major adult academic teaching hospital. This was a critical factor in the Government's decision in November 2012 that the new hospital should be co-located with St. James's, as the hospital with the widest range of clinical specialties and national services from an adult perspective, and an excellent and well established research and education culture and infrastructure.

On 10 August 2015 the NPHDB submitted a planning application to An Bord Pleanála and, subject to planning, it is hoped to be on site at all three locations in early 2016. During the design process, there were extensive consultations with families, young people and children

who are former or current users of the service, with staff of the existing hospitals, with clinical leads and with local residents. This process has led to the development of a world-class building which has been designed to enable staff to deliver the best possible clinical care for children and young people, while also seeking to provide a pleasant environment for staff and families. All in-patient accommodation will be in single en-suite rooms, with in-room parent accommodation, while the planning application also includes a family hostel to be located on the campus. The main hospital on the St. James's campus will have 1,000 basement car spaces as well as excellent public transport connections, and a Mobility Management Plan is being introduced on the hospital campus to manage the increase in traffic associated with the new children's hospital. A 3D walkthrough of the hospital can be seen on www.newchildrenshospital.ie while the complete planning application can be viewed on nchplanning.ie. There is also a drop-in centre at 568 South Circular Road where a 3D model can be seen.

Assisted Human Reproduction Services Provision

149. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to make the provision of fertility treatment, specifically in vitro fertilisation and intracytoplasmic sperm injection, more readily available; the provisions that he will introduce to lessen the financial burden on couples who find themselves in the position of seeking these types of treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34904/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In February of this year I received Government approval to draft the General Scheme of a Bill for assisted human reproduction, which will include provisions relating to numerous aspects from the beginning to the end of the assisted human reproduction process.

As I have previously stated it is currently not the case that the public funding of fertility treatments will be included as part of these provisions.

Although in vitro fertilisation (IVF) treatment is not provided by the Irish public health service, there is some support available in that patients who access IVF treatment privately may claim tax relief on the costs involved under the tax relief for medical expenses scheme. In addition, a defined list of fertility medicines needed for fertility treatment is covered under the High Tech Scheme administered by the Health Service Executive (HSE). Medicines covered by the High Tech Scheme must be prescribed by a consultant/specialist and approved by the HSE 'High Tech Liaison Officers'. The cost of the medicines is then covered, as appropriate, under the Medical Card or Drugs Payment Scheme.

Dental Services

150. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the proposals he has to ensure that all medical card holders, irrespective of their location, are provided with free dental benefit if they need to access dental treatment in the Dental Hospital; if this provision is already in place for medical card holders in the Dublin and Wicklow area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34907/15]

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 Eligibility

151. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Health for an update on the policy of means testing adult children for medical cards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34909/15]

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.

Mental Health Services Funding

152. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Health if he will seek extra funds (details supplied) for dementia in the forthcoming budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34912/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Irish National Dementia Strategy was launched in December 2014. This delivers on a commitment in the Programme for Government to develop a national Alzheimer's and other dementias strategy to increase awareness, ensure early diagnosis and intervention and develop enhanced community based services.

The Department of Health and the HSE have agreed a joint initiative with the Atlantic Philanthropies to implement significant elements of the Strategy over the period 2014-2017. This National Dementia Strategy Implementation Programme will represent a combined investment of €27.5m, with Atlantic Philanthropies contributing €12million, and the HSE contributing €15.5million.

This programme will promote a greater focus on timely diagnosis of dementia and on the value of early intervention, along with the long-term objective of making people in Ireland generally more aware and understanding of the needs of people with dementia, and of the contribution that those with dementia continue to make to our society.

Key elements of the initiative include:

- the rollout of a programme of Intensive Home Supports and Homecare Packages for people with dementia;
- the provision of additional dementia-specific resources for GPs, who are the critical and initial point of contact with the health system for those with dementia. The resource material will include training materials and guidance on local services and contact points, etc.
- Measures to raise public awareness, address stigma, and promote the inclusion and involvement in society of those with dementia.

A Monitoring Group, chaired by the Department of Health, has been established to assist with and advise on implementation of the National Dementia Strategy, including the National Dementia Strategy Implementation Programme. This Group includes health professionals, administrators, researchers, and advocates. The Group also includes a person living with dementia and a representative of those who care for people with dementia. The most recent meeting of this Monitoring Group was held on 24 September 2015.

The question of funding for dementia services next year is being considered as part of the Estimates Process 2016 which is currently underway, and the recommendations received have been noted in this context.

Hospital Investigations

153. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 878 of 9 June 2015, the details of an incident that occurred in St. Vincent's hospital in Dublin 4; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34915/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In relation to your further question about this incident, I have again asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Services for People with Disabilities

154. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding funding for vital services for persons with autism (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34932/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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.

As this is a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, he can contact my Private Office and they will follow the matter up with the HSE.

Home Help Service Provision

155. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding providing vital home help services for a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34933/15]

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

Departmental Staff Relocation

156. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form the total number of staff under the remit of his Department that have applied to be transferred to departmental or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35296/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Civil Servants who are interested in transfers to regional offices can seek such transfers through the Central Transfer Lists or the Central Applications Facility which was maintained in the context of the decentralisation programme. In addition Civil Servants can also seek transfers through their Staff Association for head to head swaps. More recently staff have also had the opportunity to apply for many redeployment vacancies in the Public Service as previously advertised by the Public Appointments Service.

This Department does not maintain a list of all such applications. Details of staff who have applied for such transfers to specific regional locations would be available from the Department currently maintaining the respective Central Transfer list for that location.

We are collating the information in relation to the non-commercial semi state bodies under my Departments aegis and will revert to the Deputy on receipt. With regard to HSE employees, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Departmental Staff Relocation

157. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide in tabular form the total number of staff under the remit of his Department that have applied to be transferred to departmental or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35295/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Two Executive Officers and four Clerical Officers from my Department have applied for a transfer to another Government office outside Dublin within the last two years.

Charities and Voluntary Organisations

158. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the Greater Chernobyl Cause may expect to receive follow-up action in regard to the provision of assistance (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34760/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department has recently been in contact with the Greater Chernobyl Cause who are organising a national competition for schools in 2016, in relation to any logistical supports that may be available to assist the project. I am pleased to inform you that my Department has agreed to assist the organisers in publicising the competition and has agreed to disseminate information about the competition to schools. My Department are awaiting the publicity information from the organisers which will be available shortly.

SOLAS Training and Education Programmes Data

159. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of

persons in County Kerry who have applied for the Momentum Ignite programme; the number who were successful and-or completed the programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34763/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): This is a day to day operational matter for SOLAS and I have asked them to reply directly to the deputy.

Schools Building Projects Applications

160. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the expected delivery date for providing a school building for a new school (details supplied) in County Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34769/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My Department is currently finalising the tender documents for the procurement of a Design Team for this project. Upon completion of these documents the Design Team appointment process will commence.

Due to competing demands on the Department’s capital budget imposed by the need to prioritise the limited funding available for the provision of additional school accommodation to meet increasing demographic requirements it was not possible to include this project in the 5 year construction programme announced in March 2012.

School building projects, including the project referred to by the Deputy, which have been initiated but not included in the current five year construction programme will continue to be progressed to final planning stages of architectural planning in anticipation of the possibility of further funds being available to the Department in the future.

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme

161. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way she can reconcile her reply to Parliamentary Question No. 1272 of 22 September 2015, that residents at Linden House were not entitled to redress under the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund as it was not an educational facility, with her reply to Parliamentary Question No. 150 of 30 September 2015 that her Department funded three teachers in the school. [34781/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The question of including Linden Convalescent Home was considered in 2005 as under the terms of the Residential Institutions Redress Act there was provision for additional institutions to be placed on the schedule provided they satisfy section 4 of the Act. Section 4 states:”The Minister may by order provide for the insertion in the Schedule of any industrial school, reformatory school orphanage, children’s home, special school which was established for the purpose of providing education services to children with a physical or intellectual disability or a hospital providing medical or psychiatric services to people with a physical or mental disability or mental illness in which children were placed and resident and in respect of which a public body had a regulatory or inspection function”. As Linden was a convalescent home (not a hospital) it was deemed not eligible under section 4 of the Act and was not included in the schedule.

Schools Building Projects Status

162. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the up-to-date position

on the provision of a new school (details supplied) in County Kildare; if all the impeding matters have being addressed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34790/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The school building project referred to by the Deputy is on the current 5 year construction programme announced in 2012. It is listed on the programme to proceed to tender and construction in 2015/16.

The project is at an early stage of Architectural Planning. Following the Pre Stage 1 meeting in February 2015, the project was authorised to progress to Stage 2A, which is the developed sketch design stage. The Stage 2A meeting was held in June 2015 and the Design Team was requested to complete and submit the Stage 2A report. This report was received in my Department on the 25th September and is currently under review. Issues relating to services to and from the site remain under discussion between the design team and the local authority. Upon successful completion of stage 2A and subject to no issues arising, this project will then be authorised to proceed to Stage 2B - Detailed Design Stage, which includes applications for Planning Permission, Fire Safety Certification, Disability Access Certification and the preparation of tender documents.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

163. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding large class sizes in primary schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34816/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Government’s approach to restoring the economy has helped Ireland to return to a position where we are seeing economic growth. It is a continuing improvement in our economic growth over a sustained period that will enable us to move to a point where we can look again at providing for additional teacher resources in schools which could bring about further improvement in PTR, class size and support for classroom teachers. I am determined that education should be prioritised for investment as our economy recovers and I will be seeking to agree a set of priorities for such increased investment into the future. In the last Budget, I was able to secure the first increase in education spending in recent years. I am determined to continue pressing the case for increased investment in education in the forthcoming budget.

The challenge for all schools is to ensure that they utilise their allocated resources to best effect to maximise teaching and learning outcomes.

Schools Building Projects Status

164. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide an update on the proposed extension for a school (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34868/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The building project referred to by the Deputy is included in the Five Year Construction Programme to proceed to Tender and Construction. Earlier this year, the Department met with officials from the ETB regarding progression of the project. Following this meeting, further information was requested from the ETB and its Design Team, which is currently under review by my Department. Upon successful completion of Stage 2(a) the project will progress to complete Stage 2(b), Detailed Design, which includes the application for Statutory approvals and the preparation of Tender

Documents for Contractors. Following completion of stage 2(b) the project will then be progressed to tender and construction.

School Transport Eligibility

165. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason that concessions do not apply on a service (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34878/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English): Children are eligible for Post Primary School Transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kilometres from, and are attending, their nearest education centre as determined by the Department/ Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

In general, transport services are not established in areas where suitable public scheduled bus services already exist. In such cases children who are eligible for school transport are facilitated with travel permits for these services.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may avail of transport on a concessionary basis only subject to a number of terms and conditions including that there are spare seats available on an existing school bus service and no additional cost is incurred by the State.

To facilitate children on a concessionary basis on scheduled services would involve additional cost and therefore it is not a feature of my Department's School Transport Schemes. However, reduced child and student fares and 10 journey tickets can be availed of on public scheduled services instead.

Springboard Programme

166. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of Springboard places, by year, since its launch; the average take-up rate of the courses; the number of specific courses available; and availed of, in County Galway. [34883/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Springboard, now referred to as Springboard+ to include the ICT skills conversion programme, was launched in 2011. It is a specific initiative that strategically targets funding of higher education courses to enable job-seekers to upskill or reskill in areas where there are identified labour market skills shortages or employment opportunities. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) manages Springboard+ on behalf of my Department. The following tables, provided by the HEA, outline the total number of approved Springboard+ courses and the number of specific courses available and availed of in Galway since 2011.

Springboard+ Galway PQ 5/10/2015

Springboard Places Approved by Year and Enrolment Rate

National Total

Initiative	Places Funded	Participants	Enrolment Rate
Springboard 2011	5,883	4,911	83%
Springboard 2012	6,074	5,610	92%

Initiative	Places Funded	Participants	Enrolment Rate
Springboard 2013	6,403	5,534	86%
Springboard 2014	6,104	5,515	90%
Springboard 2015	9,109	TBC	

Number of Springboard Courses approved in Galway

Provider	Total Courses	Courses 2011	Courses 2012	Courses 2013	Courses 2014	Courses 2015
Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology	55	7	26	6	3	13
National University of Ireland, Galway	36	6	14	5	3	8
Total	91	13	40	11	6	21

Number of Springboard Places approved in Galway

Provider	Total Places	Places 2011	Places 2012	Places 2013	Places 2014	Places 2015
Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology	710	84	146	120	70	290
National University of Ireland, Galway	548	140	172	75	60	101
Total	1,258	224	318	195	130	391

Number of Springboard Enrolments in Galway

Provider	Total Participants Springboard 2011 - 2014	Participants Springboard 2011	Participants Springboard 2012	Participants Springboard 2013	Participants Springboard 2014
Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology	354	38	132	120	64
National University of Ireland, Galway	350	127	103	65	55
Total	704	165	235	185	119

Schools Building Projects Applications

167. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress regarding a new school (details supplied) in County Longford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34893/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy has submitted an application for capital funding for a new school.

The school's request must be considered in the context of the financial constraints imposed

by the need, as outlined in the Five Year Plan, to prioritise available funding for the provision of essential school accommodation to meet demographic demand. The area where the school is situated has not been identified as an area of demographic growth and I understand that this is a two teacher school with an enrolment of 27 pupils.

My Department's over-riding objective is to ensure that every child has access to a physical school place and that our school system is in a position to cope with increasing numbers. This will continue to be the main focus for investment by my Department in the coming years. My Department is not therefore in a position, at this point, to indicate when a new school can be provided for the school in question.

Living Wage

168. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the discussions she or her Department have had with suppliers or service contractors to her Department or to agencies of her Department, to ensure that employees of such suppliers and contractors are paid the living wage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34901/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The introduction of the Living Wage Campaign is a voluntary initiative being led by Ged Nash, TD, Minister for Business and Employment at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.

For the Deputy's information, the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) is an office within the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform which is tasked with centralising public sector procurement arrangements for common goods and services. Government Departments are required to manage procurement processes in accordance with OGP guidelines. Accordingly, the Department's suppliers and service contractors are required to confirm that they have taken account of their statutory and legal obligations relating to the employment protection and working conditions of their employees, in the provision of goods and services sought for the Department through the eTenders website.

School Staffing

169. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set down the number of pupils required to gain an extra teacher; if this requirement is greater in smaller schools with a teacher principal rather than in larger schools with an administrative principal; if so, the reason this is the case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34923/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The staffing arrangements for the 2015/2016 school year are set out in Circular 0005/2015 which is available on the website. The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location. It currently operates on the basis of a general average of 1 classroom teacher for every 28 pupils with lower thresholds for DEIS Band 1 schools.

The Deputy will be aware that I announced some improvements in the staffing schedule for small primary schools in February 2015. These changes were introduced for the 2015/16 school year to better support the sustainability of small schools and particularly those in isolated areas.

These improvements are improved retention thresholds for the 2nd, 3rd and 4th classroom teacher and also the improved appointment and retention thresholds for isolated one-teacher schools.

These improvements particularly recognise the challenges faced by very small schools that are more than 8 km from the next nearest school of the same type.

This package of measures will provide rural communities with security about the future of their small schools, recognising the essential social function which small schools can play, especially in isolated communities.

Under the published staffing arrangements for the current school year a principal teacher attains administrative status on a minimum enrolment of 178 pupils (Principal plus 7 classroom teachers) on 30 September 2014.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

170. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to explain the reason the changes to the general allocation model have discriminated against some schools of a similar size; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34924/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the General Allocation Model (GAM) provides additional resource teaching, learning support, and English Additional Language support for all primary schools, and is updated annually based on the number of mainstream teaching posts in each school and in order to take account of updated enrolments.

Details of the GAM allocation process, and of GAM allocations for each school for the 2015/16 school year, are set out in DES Circular 05/2015, which is available on my Department’s website at www.education.ie.

Differing teacher allocation ratios are applied under the GAM in relation to boys, girls and mixed schools in order to account for differentials of prevalence of learning difficulty between boys and girls. In addition, schools in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Band 1 category also receive an additional base allocation of 0.4 of a post if the school has 200 or more pupils or an additional 0.2 of a post if the school has less than 200 pupils.

The objective of this differentiation is to ensure that resources provided to schools to support children who have additional learning needs are targeted to ensure that those children most in need benefit from these resources.

The rationale for the differing ratios is based on international literature on the incidence of disability as well as international and national surveys of literacy and numeracy which indicate that there is a greater incidence of disability/learning difficulty in boys than girls.

Whereas some enhanced allocations are provided to schools to account for gender and disadvantage differentials, schools of similar size, which have the same criteria, receive the same allocation rates and are not discriminated against.

My Department’s Circular 02/05 provides guidance to schools on the utilisation of resources allocated to them under the GAM. It is a matter for schools to monitor and utilise their allocation of additional teaching support to best support the needs of identified pupils, in accordance with my Department’s guidance. The teaching time afforded to each individual pupil is decided and managed by schools, taking into account each child’s individual learning needs.

Capitation Grants

171. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the capitation grant for primary and secondary pupils; the reason there is a differentiation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34925/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): It is extremely difficult to make precise comparisons between the levels of grants paid and the actual costs of running schools at primary and post primary levels. However it is self evident that the maintenance and running costs for second level schools are much greater on a unit cost basis than those in primary schools.

In general, second level schools are larger than primary schools and have a lower pupil teacher ratio resulting in more classrooms and specialist rooms such as laboratories, workshops and kitchens. This leads to higher unit costs in second level schools for heat, light, power, maintenance and cleaning.

I do recognise however the need to improve capitation funding for primary schools having regard to the reductions that were necessary over recent years. In the last Budget, I was able to secure the first increase in education spending in recent years. I am determined to continue pressing the case for increased investment in education in the forthcoming budget.

Schools Administration

172. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the number of administrative days that are allocated to school principals; her plans to redress the imbalance between administrative and non-administrative school principals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34926/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Principal duties in medium to large sized schools are carried out by administrative principals. Principal duties in small to medium sized schools are carried out by teaching principals.

Circular 25/02 which is available on the Department website outlines the number of days that teaching principals may take as release time in a school year in order to assist them fulfilling their principal duties. Under these arrangements my Department pays for a substitute teacher to be employed by a school to facilitate administrative functions to be undertaken by the teaching principal. Under the current arrangements the number of days that principal teachers may take as release time in each school year ranges between 14 and 22 days depending on the size of the school.

I am aware of the workload issue and the pressures on Principals teachers. My Department has done work at helping to ease the administrative burden on school principals. The development and introduction of the primary online database is a significant step forward in this regard. A further step forward was the publication of Department Circular 0033/2015 which updates and simplifies the manner in which primary schools can maintain pupil enrolment and attendance records following the introduction of the primary online database.

Economic constraints and the moratorium on recruitment, albeit alleviated to some extent for schools, have presented challenges within the education sector. They also provide an opportunity to review the role of the principal so that our principals are leaders of learning, and to reconfigure the middle management structure to support principals in their role, ensuring ownership of responsibility rather than tasks, thereby building expertise and supporting a career path within the profession.

The Department, in consultation with the representative management bodies has commenced an exploration of the opportunities to support and thereby advance our understanding of the needs of school leaders and how they might be addressed.

Pupil Data Collection

173. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the reason primary schools are required to make regular test result returns to her Department; the purpose of these results; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34927/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Data on pupil achievement are essential to inform the quality of pupil learning and national education policy so as to identify ways of improving the performance of our education system. All primary schools are required to report aggregate standardised test results for 2nd, 4th and 6th classes once annually to the Department of Education and Skills. Individual pupil results are not reported to the Department.

Standardised tests are available for reading (in English and Irish) and mathematics at primary level in Ireland. These scientifically constructed tests can provide teachers and parents with information about how well a child’s achievement compares with that of children at the same class level in Irish primary schools and the rate of progress that they have made over time.

Standardised tests are one important tool that teachers can use to monitor pupil progress. They do not measure the progress pupils have made in achieving many other important learning outcomes, including, for example, students’ oral language abilities or their ability to write creatively.

Aggregating standardised test scores for pupils within different classes can help to inform a school’s planning, self-evaluation and external evaluation. They can also help schools to gain a clearer understanding of trends in achievement and they can provide evidence about how well initiatives to promote better learning are working.

Teachers’ Remuneration

174. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline her plans to redress the inequity in teachers’ pay scales that were applied to recent new entrants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34928/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Since the beginning of the financial crisis, there has been a need to enact a number of measures to reduce public expenditure. The previous Government reduced the salaries and allowances payable of all new entrants to public service recruitment grades (including teachers) by 10% with effect from 1 January 2011 and required that such new entrants would start on the first point of the applicable salary scale.

Subsequently, following the public service-wide review of allowances and premium payments, the Government decided to withdraw or modify allowances for new beneficiary public servants with effect from 1 February 2012. Under this decision, certain allowances were withdrawn for new beneficiary teachers, including qualification allowances. However, the Government partially compensated for this by deciding that new entrant teachers would henceforth commence on a new salary scale which had a starting point higher than the starting point of the

old scale. These measures were implemented at time of very difficult financial and budgetary circumstances for the State.

Alleviation of the salary imbalance between those who entered the public service since 2011 and those who entered before that date began under the Haddington Road Agreement. Improved pay scales for post-1 January 2011 and post-1 February 2012 entrants to teaching were agreed and implemented under the terms of that Agreement. In addition, allowances payable to post-1 January 2011 entrants and such allowances as remain payable to post-1 February 2012 entrants were restored to pre-2011 levels.

The Lansdowne Road Agreement has, through salary increases and a reduction in the Pension-Related Deduction, begun the process of restoring the reductions to public service pay which were implemented over recent years. The issue of equalised pay scales was not one which could be resolved in the discussions which lead to the Agreement. However, the flat-rate increases contained in the Agreement will be proportionately more favourable to new entrants to teaching (who are lower on the pay scale) than to longer serving teachers. The LRA proposals have been accepted by the INTO and are currently under consideration by the post-primary teacher unions, ASTI and TUI.

Educational Disadvantage

175. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills for a list of the schools in counties Wicklow and Carlow participating in the delivering equality of opportunity in schools scheme; the entitlements of these schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34929/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The information requested by the Deputy is provided in the following table. The schools in question receive the following additional supports under DEIS:

- reduced class sizes in Urban Band 1 schools
- access to literacy and numeracy supports services for Band 1 and Band 2 schools
- enhanced capitation
- access to Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) - Urban and Post Primary
- access to School Completion Programme (SCP) - Urban and Post Primary
- access to School Meals Programme
- access to planning and professional development supports
- additional funding under school books grants scheme
- access to Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied Programme.

List of Primary DEIS schools in Carlow

Roll No.	Name	Address 1	Address 2	Address 3	DEIS Band
19478L	Holy Family GNS	Askea	Carlow	Co Carlow	Urban Band 2

Roll No.	Name	Address 1	Address 2	Address 3	DEIS Band
19477J	Holy Family BNS	Askea	Carlow	Co Carlow	Urban Band 2
20295K	Carlow Town Educate Together NS	Bestfield, Athy Rd	Carlow Town	Carlow	Urban Band 2
17127S	St Joseph's NS	Hacketstown	Co Carlow		Rural
17096K	SN Naomh Fhin-gin	Garryhill	Muinebheag	Co Carlow	Rural
17555Q	Scoil Naomh Ab-ban	Crettyard	Carlow	Co Carlow	Rural
18265M	Bhríde NS	Ard Duach	Carlow	Co Carlow	Rural

List of Post Primary DEIS schools in Carlow

Roll No.	Name	Address 1	Address 2	Address 3	DEIS Band
70420R	Carlow Vocational School	Kilkenny Road	Carlow	Co Carlow	Post Primary
70430U	Vocational School Muine Beag	Muine Beag	Co Carlow		Post Primary

List of Primary DEIS schools in Wicklow

Roll No.	Name	Address 1	Address 2	Address 3	DEIS Band
07246U	Sisters of Charity NS	Ravenswell	Bray	Co Wicklow	Urban Band 1
18464S	St Peter's PS	Bray	Co Wicklow	Wicklow	Urban Band 1
20278K	Newtown-mountken-nedy PS	Newtown-mountken-nedy	Co Wicklow		Urban Band 2
20466L	St Fergals NS	Ballywaltrim	Bray	Co Wicklow	Urban Band 2
00984V	Glenealy 1 NS	Glenealy	Co Wicklow		Rural
16874E	SN Naomh Iosef G	Rathnew	Co Wicklow		Rural
17669I	SN Treasa Naomha	Cill Teagain	Co Cille Manntain		Rural
18962L	St Ernans BNS	Rathnew	Co Wicklow		Rural

List of Post Primary DEIS schools in Wicklow

Roll No.	Name	Address 1	Address 2	Address 3	DEIS Band
70740M	Glenart Community College	Coolgreaney Rd,	Arklow	Co Wicklow	Post Primary

Roll No.	Name	Address 1	Address 2	Address 3	DEIS Band
70800E	St Kevin's Community College	Dunlavin	Co Wicklow		Post Primary
70810H	Avondale Community College	Rathdrum	Co Wicklow		Post Primary
91376L	St Killian's Community School	Ballywaltrim	Bray	Co Wicklow	Post Primary

Third Level Institutions

176. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the authority or legislation under which she or her Department can establish or order an investigation into the activities of universities, including the misappropriation of funds; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34937/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Higher education institutions, including Universities, are autonomous bodies and are responsible for their own day to day affairs. It is expected that if any issues arise in relation to the misappropriation of funds it is, in the first instance, addressed by the University authorities. As the Deputy is aware Universities are under the designation of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and should any issue arise in any University my Department would liaise with the HEA with regard to addressing the particular matter. The provisions for appointment by the Minister for Education of a Visitor to a University are set out in Sections 19 and 20 of the Universities Act, 1997. It provides that "where the Minister is of the opinion that there are reasonable grounds for contending that the functions of a university are being performed in a manner which prima facie constitutes a breach of the laws, statutes or ordinances applicable to the university, the Minister may, after first advising the governing authority of his or her opinion and considering any explanation given in response, and with the concurrence of the Government, request the Visitor to the University to inquire into any matter giving rise to the Minister's opinion".

School Accommodation

177. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made to date in the provision of a replacement primary school for a school (details supplied) in County Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34949/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I can confirm to the Deputy that the school in question submitted a major capital application to my Department to provide for an extension and refurbishment works.

Following a site visit in December 2014, my Department's technical staff revisited the schools earlier this year to gather further information. My Department is currently considering the options available to it in addressing the school's accommodation needs and in that context, it is my Department's intention to liaise with the school Patron. Following this contact, my Department will be in further contact with the school.

Schools Building Projects Status

178. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made to date in the provision of a replacement building for a school (details supplied); when will a contractor be selected for this project; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34950/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the school building project to which he refers is at an advanced stage of the tender process. Subject to no issues arising it is envisaged that a Contractor will be selected before late December.

Departmental Staff Data

179. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide in tabular form the total number of staff under the remit of her Department that have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35293/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): This Department does not hold records of staff who apply to transfer out to other Departments. We do hold records of staff from other Departments who wish to transfer to this Department. In this regard, applications for transfers to our locations outside of Dublin (i.e. Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar) are facilitated through the Central Applications Facility (CAF) which is managed by the Public Appointments Service (PAS). Likewise our staff can apply to transfer to another Department/Location via the CAF or to the particular Department directly for non-CAF locations.

Wind Energy Guidelines

180. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the discussions he has had on new planning guidelines for wind turbines; the scenarios examined for set-back distances between wind turbines and residential homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34812/15]

188. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when the new planning guidelines for wind turbines will be published; the scenarios examined for set-back distances between wind turbines and residential homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34813/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 180 and 188 together.

In December 2013, my Department published proposed “draft” revisions to the noise, set-backs 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. My Department is advancing work on the Guidelines in conjunction with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources.

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.

Mortgage Arrears Proposals

181. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will examine a submission on a proposal (details supplied) which offers a possible and affordable solution to the distressed mortgage crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34761/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Earlier this year and following an assessment of progress to date, the Government introduced a package of measures on tackling mortgage arrears. The aim of these measures is to ensure delivery of the Government's commitment to addressing the mortgage arrears challenge and in particular to make available a range of options to distressed borrowers and to keep as many people in their homes as possible. Measures announced include:

- Improvements to the operations of the courts both in terms of procedures and powers;
- Improvements to the operation of the Personal Insolvency Service;
- Ensuring that the necessary information is made available to those in mortgage arrears by strengthening the role of MABS and providing expert advice to borrowers;
- The introduction of measures to assist those in rented accommodation that is subject to a repossession order;
- A communications campaign to ensure that those in mortgage arrears are fully aware of their options;
- The strengthening of existing schemes including the Mortgage to Rent Scheme and ensuring that those in need of social housing have their eligibility assessed without delay.

While responsibility for these measures is spread across a number of Departments, the Mortgage to Rent Scheme falls under my remit. Improvements include a broadening of the property value thresholds to ensure that more properties qualify, introducing flexibility in relation to the size of properties that qualify and a changing of the rules with regard to negative equity to enable those with a marginal positive equity to also qualify.

With regard to the rent and purchase option put forward by the Deputy, while my Depart-

ment is now focusing on the delivery of progress under the new measures in place, there will be a need to review progress on a regular basis. I will ensure that the merits of the proposal offered are considered in the light of any future reviews.

Homelessness Strategy

182. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on the report he received entitled, Report to the Dublin Region Homeless Executive on Difficulties Accessing Child Protective Services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34771/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department’s role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities. The issues raised in the report referred to in the Question regarding the operations of the Dublin Region Central Placement Service are a matter for the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE), who operate the service on behalf of the four Dublin housing authorities. I understand that the report was an internal draft report prepared by Crosscare Information and Advocacy Services (CIAS), who provide homeless services on behalf of the DRHE, in relation to migrants presenting to the service and that the DRHE will continue to engage with them and other stakeholders on this matter.

Homeless Persons Data

183. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of non-Irish persons in 2013 and 2014 who accessed homeless accommodation in the greater Dublin area, as recorded by the Pass system. [34772/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Data on homeless households in emergency accommodation is provided through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). Quarterly reports from lead housing authorities are published on my Department’s website as soon as these are available. In addition, lead housing authorities provide monthly reports on homelessness which identify the number of people utilising State-funded emergency accommodation on a regional and county basis. These monthly reports also provide details of the breakdown of the individuals and the numbers of families and dependents that are in emergency accommodation. Both the quarterly and monthly reports are available on my Department’s website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/SpecialNeeds/HomelessPeople/>. However, details on the number of non-Irish persons who accessed homeless accommodation are not statistically maintained on the PASS system.

Social and Affordable Housing Maintenance

184. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on the 121 vacant council houses unoccupied throughout County Sligo; how and when these will be allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34777/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I am very conscious of the need to have all vacant social housing that is lettable made available to those on housing waiting lists. For that reason, my Department is providing funding support to Sligo County Council, and to all other local authorities, to return all lettable vacant social housing units that they have identified to productive use.

My Department has no involvement in the allocation of social housing; this is a matter for individual local authorities.

Social and Affordable Housing Maintenance

185. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the criteria that void housing units should meet to be considered eligible for void refurbishment funding from his Department, for example, the state of repair and disrepair the void would have to be in. [34779/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The current programme of funding support which my Department provides for local authorities to return vacant social housing units to productive use is directed at units where the cost of remediation greatly exceeds the cost of the normal end-of-lease maintenance. Support under the programme is capped at €30,000 of Department funding per unit and has a particular focus on increasing the energy efficiency of the remediated units.

The programme is not a substitute for the normal responsibilities of local authorities for maintaining their social housing properties and, therefore, the standard end-of-lease maintenance they undertake will be sufficient in some cases to prepare a unit for early re-letting. Given the need to respond to waiting lists, it is important that the time taken to return vacant units is kept to the minimum.

Water Quality

186. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34786/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Water Services Act 2007 provides that the owner of a premises is responsible for the maintenance and renewal of the internal water distribution system to ensure that water intended for human consumption meets required quality standards.

Responsibility for replacing lead pipes or fittings within the property boundaries, including within the house itself, therefore rests with the homeowner. In a joint position paper on lead published by the EPA and HSE in 2013, it is recommended that all lead pipes and plumbing in public and in private ownership should be replaced over time. The joint position paper also recommends that persons in premises with lead piping should, in the meantime, flush the supply at the kitchen tap first thing in the morning before using it. The full document is available to download from the HSE's website at: http://www.hse.ie/eng/health/hl/water/drinkingwater/lead/HSE_EPA_JointPositionPaperLeadInDrinkingWater.pdf.

On 9 June 2015, I announced a Government-approved National Strategy to reduce exposure to lead in drinking water. The Strategy was prepared by my Department and the Department of

Health in consultation with Irish Water, the HSE and the EPA, in order to map the scale of the problem and identify measures to mitigate any risks to human health posed by lead in drinking water. As part of the Strategy, I will be establishing a new grant aid scheme to assist low income households to replace lead pipes in their homes. Funding for the scheme will be finalised in the context of Budget 2016 and it is envisaged that the scheme will be administered by the local authorities. Income thresholds and other eligibility criteria will apply and the terms and conditions of the new scheme will be publicised as soon as they are finalised.

Seanad Reform

187. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to reform the by-election process for Seanad Éireann, whereby only Members of the Oireachtas have a vote. [34794/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I have no immediate plans to amend the provisions in the Seanad Electoral (Panel Members) Act 1947 relating to the arrangements for bye elections for the filling of casual vacancies.

Question No. 188 answered with Question No. 180.

Capital Assistance Scheme Applications

189. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government for an update and date for approval of an application for additional funding by a housing association (details supplied) in County Limerick under the capital assistance scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34824/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department wrote to Limerick City & County Council on 18 August 2015 informing them of the approval of a revised budget for this project.

Social and Affordable Housing Maintenance

190. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the reason ten of the 16 social housing units at St. Lawrence's Park in Stillorgan, County Dublin are empty and are not being considered or offered for social housing at a time of unprecedented demand for such units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34859/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The management and maintenance of the local authority housing stock is a matter for each individual local authority under section 58 of the Housing Act 1966. Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council has informed me that the site of St. Laurence Park, Stillorgan is identified for major development, which is intended to provide for a significant number of residential units in the area, including social units.

Capital Assistance Scheme Applications

191. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when an application by an organisation (details supplied) under the capital assistance scheme will be approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34863/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): This project was approved for funding under my Department's Capital Assistance Scheme in 2012 and is nearing completion.

My Department is working with Limerick City & County Council to agree the final account for the project and correspondence on this aspect issued to the Council on 25 September 2015.

Capital Assistance Scheme Applications

192. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when an application for a rehabilitation centre (details supplied) in County Limerick under the capital assistance scheme will be approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34864/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): This project was approved in principle in May 2014 under my Department's Capital Assistance Scheme, for the construction of 5 units for the homeless as an extension to an existing sheltered housing facility. Since then, my Department has been liaising with Limerick City and County Council to advance this project. Revised designs were submitted to the Department by the Council in September 2015 and these are now under consideration.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Provision

193. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government for the list of allocations of funding to local authorities in 2015 under the rural water programme for group sewerage schemes; the amounts originally requested by each local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34892/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Responsibility for the administration of my Department's Rural Water Programme, under which funding is provided for group water and group sewerage schemes, has been devolved to local authorities since 1997. The selection, prioritisation and approval of individual group scheme proposals for advancement and funding under the programme, within the overall priorities set by my Department and subject to the block grant allocations provided, is therefore a matter for the local authorities. Details of the Group Sewerage Scheme allocations notified to local authorities under the 2015 Rural Water Programme are outlined on my Department's website at: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Environment/Water/WaterServices/RuralWaterProgramme/>.

Living Wage

194. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to outline the discussions he or his Department have had with suppliers or service contractors to his Department, or to agencies of his Department, to ensure that employees of such suppliers and contractors are paid the living wage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34899/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): No discussions have taken place with suppliers or service contractors to my Department to discuss the Living Wage. Matters of employee payment rates are a matter for the employer and employees concerned, subject to compliance with employment legislation. Engagement with contractors and service providers to agencies is a matter for the agencies concerned.

Leader Programmes Expenditure

195. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government The funding under the Leader programme in each year from 2010 to 2014; the projected expenditure in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34916/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): It is expected that expenditure under the LEADER elements of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 will be in the order of €370 million by end 2015. The following table sets out the funding provided under the programme to end 2014 and also sets out details of projected expenditure in 2015.

Year	Programme Expenditure
2009	€19.6m
2010	€44m
2011	€47.5m
2012	€53m
2013	€82.6m
2014	€92m
2015 (projected expenditure)	€30m

Leader Programmes Funding

196. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of Leader funding allocated by Mayo north-east Leader partnership each year, pursuant to the rural development programme 2008 to 2013; if he will provide a breakdown of the various measures thereby supported; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34930/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): Under the LEADER elements of the Rural Development Programme 2007 to 2014, Mayo North East Leader Partnership has committed €7.4 2m to projects and over €4.2m has been paid to completed projects to date. I can advise the Deputy that funding under the LEADER programme is not allocated on a calendar year basis and therefore the table below shows the funding committed and paid to projects on a measure basis over the lifetime of the current programme. The following table also shows outstanding commitments for each measure.

Measure	Revised Public Commitment(€)	Expenditure - (€)	Outstanding Commitments - (€)
Adding value to agricultural and Forestry products	40,947.55	0	40,947.55

Measure	Revised Public Commitment(€)	Expenditure - (€)	Outstanding Commitments - (€)
Basic Services	2,386,513.65	1,173,134.62	1,213,379.03
Business creation and development	1,172,678.27	712,088.33	460,589.94
Conservation	958,180.60	523,563.44	434,617.16
Cooperation	63,774.91	50,012.94	13,761.97
Diversification	131,493.17	74,202.65	57,290.52
Skills	68,322.95	68,322.95	0
Tourism	682,401.64	572,885.89	109,515.75
Training	207,354.09	188,083.09	19,271.00
Village Renewal	1,708,288.39	915,287.47	793,000.92
Total	7,419,955.22	4,277,581.38	3,142,373.84

Irish Water Remit

197. **Deputy Shane Ross** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will amend the 2013 Irish Water Act to allow Irish Water or the local authority to accept responsibility for all sewage mains and infrastructure, that is manholes and interchanges, including those running through non-public property, where these networks were historically maintained by the local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34938/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): With effect from 1 January 2014, Irish Water is responsible for public water services. Irish Water is responsible for water services infrastructure including water supply pipes or sewers extending from a waterworks or waste water works to the curtilage of a private property. Under sections 43 and 54 of the Water Services Act 2007, responsibility for maintenance and replacement of any water or wastewater pipes, connections or distribution systems which are located within the boundary of their property rests with the owner. There are no plans to amend the 2007 Act to provide that Irish Water become responsible for the maintenance of pipes on private property.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

198. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if all second level schools under the national broadband plan attained the 100 Mbs Internet download speed target by the end of 2014; if he will provide a list of all such schools that have not yet reached this target on a county basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34811/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): All second-level schools in Ireland have received 100Mbps broadband connectivity under a programme funded jointly by my Department and the Department of Education and Skills. The national rollout of services commenced in 2012, following a successful pilot project, and was completed in 2014. Services were rolled out incrementally, as follows:

2012 - 14 Western and Midlands Counties

2013 - Dublin, Meath and Kildare

2014 - 9 Southern Counties.

Some 780 schools (including all post-primary, post-leaving certificate, hospital schools, as well as special schools with post-primary students) across the country have a 100Mbps connection. Additionally, 20 Educational Centres have been facilitated with a 100Mbps connection under this programme to help assist with the delivery of Continued Professional Development (CPD) for teachers.

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) is a Government initiative which aims to deliver high speed broadband to every citizen and business in Ireland. This is being achieved through a combination of accelerated commercial investment by telecoms operators, and a proposed State intervention to provide high speed broadband to those parts of the country where the commercial sector will not invest.

On Tuesday 29 September last, the Government approved an allocation of €275m for the National Broadband Plan, which will provide the initial stimulus required to deliver the Government's intervention. Combined with commercial investment, this will ensure that 85% of Ireland's premises have high speed broadband by 2018, with 100% coverage by 2020.

The NBP proposed Intervention Strategy document, which was published on 15 July last, sets out a series of detailed proposals by Government in respect of the proposed State intervention. It sets out the key elements of the intervention - what services are proposed and how they will be delivered. It outlines various aspects of the proposed intervention including the type of network envisaged, the minimum speeds being demanded, the length of the contract for services, and whether the network should be public or privately owned. There are over 1,500 schools in the target area for the intervention, most of which are primary schools.

It is intended that the network will be built out as quickly as possible and engagement with industry stakeholders has indicated that this could be achieved within 3-5 years of the contract award. This will allow us to ensure that every home, school and business in Ireland will have access to high speed services, by 2020 at the latest.

Gas Networks Ireland

199. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he is aware of any disruption to emergency cover for maintenance of the Irish Gas network in the past six months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34889/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): This is an operational matter for Gas Networks Ireland and not one in which I, as Minister, have any role or function. I understand however from the company that there was no disruption to emergency cover for the maintenance of the gas network in the past six months. If there was a specific incident the Deputy wishes to discuss, he can contact Gas Networks Ireland directly. Gas Networks Ireland has a 24 hour emergency line - 1850 20 50 50. Anyone who has a gas emergency to report should ring this number immediately.

Living Wage

200. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural

Resources to outline the discussions he or his Department have had with suppliers or service contractors to his Department, or to agencies of his Department, to ensure that employees of such suppliers and contractors are paid the living wage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34900/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The Minister of State for Business and Employment at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation recently hosted a forum on the Living Wage in Dublin Castle. At the forum, the Tánaiste signalled that her Department would fund the next stage of examining the process which involves setting up a working group. Neither I, nor my Department, have had any discussions with suppliers or contractors to date as the living wage is a voluntary concept at this time.

Better Energy Homes Scheme

201. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if window upgrades have been considered in the context of improving the energy efficiency of homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34908/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The Better Energy Programme is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) on behalf of my Department. Since 2009, the programme has supported the renovation of nearly 300,000 homes in Ireland. The upgrade of windows is not currently supported under the Better Energy Programme due to the need to balance the limited budgetary resources available with the demands for the schemes delivered under the programme. Therefore, the measures currently supported are those that can deliver the most energy savings at the lowest cost. While window insulation does improve the energy efficiency of a home, the cost of such a measure is high in relation to the energy efficiency gains made. Information on the grant support available under the Better Energy Programme is available on the SEAI website at www.seai.ie.

National Car Test

202. **Deputy Shane Ross** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to deal with the current backlog in available appointments for the national car test; the current average waiting time for an appointment; his plans to increase the number of test centres, or to follow the United Kingdom model and authorise local garages to undertake the testing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34773/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The RSA has statutory responsibility for the supervision and oversight of the National Car Testing Service (NCTS). While I am informed that there is currently no NCT appointment backlog, I have asked the RSA to respond directly to the Deputy regarding any particular concerns he may have, as well as in relation to current average waiting times. I am advised that new test centres at a number of locations are due to come into operation in the first half of 2016 and that 18 additional vehicle inspectors will be employed bringing the total number to 591 - the highest number ever employed.

Provision of the NCTS through a single provider is considered the most effective model as it offers a uniform testing service across the country, is fully independent of the motor industry and is highly regarded in terms of international benchmarking.

With the majority of vehicles registered and consequently due their NCT in the first few months of the year, this period will always be the busiest time for testing. To mitigate this, the NCTS is advising anyone due a test in January, February, March or April next year to avoid the risk of a delay and book their test now. A car may be tested up to 90 days early without affecting the expiry date of the certificate issued.

Additionally, notifications have also been issued to the owners of all overdue vehicles advising them to book a test immediately. Owners of overdue vehicles have been advised that they will not be prioritised at busier times of the year over those who are NCT compliant.

Public Transport

203. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the full cost of providing an additional 80 buses to the Bus Éireann fleet. [34801/15]

204. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost of providing an additional 80 buses to the Dublin Bus fleet. [34802/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 203 and 204 together.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for developing public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). In addition, its functions have been extended to include securing or providing bus stops, bus shelters, bus stations, stands and bus fleets throughout the country.

Therefore, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Departmental Agencies Reports

205. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will conduct a business impact analysis on the proposals contained in the Dublin transport study; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34820/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Dublin City Centre Transport Study is a study that was jointly carried out by the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Dublin City Council (DCC) to assess transport related issues in the core city centre area in light of changes resulting from the Luas Cross City project, in particular. The study covers all modes of transport including walking and cycling as well as car and public transport.

The study was published by the NTA and DCC in June and there was a significant public consultation process on it over the course of the summer which generated very substantial interest from stakeholders. I understand that more than 7,700 submissions were received in response to the consultation process and that a factual report on the submissions received has been submitted to DCC's Strategic Transport Policy Committee.

I am advised by the NTA that, along with DCC, it is now engaging on an individual basis with some of the key stakeholders concerned, notably some of the large retailers and car park operators in the city centre. A number of meetings will be taking place with these stakeholders over the coming weeks before NTA and DCC report back to DCC's Strategic Transport

Policy Committee.

I welcome the comprehensive and positive engagement that is taking place on this important issue and I am assured that all key stakeholders are being given the opportunity to have their views and concerns known and understood.

In light of the responsibility of the NTA and DCC for the study and their current engagement with key stakeholders, it would not be appropriate for me to conduct a separate analysis on the proposals contained in the study.

Road Network

206. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the preferred route for the Adare bypass will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34895/15]

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 - formerly known as the NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 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.

Public Transport Provision

207. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures being taken to resolve the issue of overcrowding on commuter routes where passengers are often refused admission to buses or are required to stand. [34913/15]

208. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will introduce an express bus services from Dublin to major commuter towns to expedite travel time for commuters. [34914/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 207 and 208 together.

The issues raised are matters for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Leaganacha Gaeilge d'Fhoirmeacha Foirmiúil

209. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Iompair, Turasóireachta agus Spóirt céard iad na socruithe atá déanta chun a chinntiú go mbeidh na foirmeacha dá dtagraítear in Ionstraim Reachtuil 398 de 2015 ar fáil i nGaeilge ar éileamh i gcomhréir leis an mbreithiúnas sa chás sa Chúirt Uachtarach a ndéantar tagairt dó mar Ó Beoláin v Fahy; an bhfuil socrú déanta gur féidir leis na gairis anála agus na hionstraimí a ghabhann leo foirm Ghaeilge a chur ar fáil ar éileamh; cé na socruithe atá déanta le freastal ar dhuine a dhiúltaíonn an leagan Béarla a shíniú i gcomhréir lena gcearta bunúsacha mar a sonraíodh sa Chúirt Uachtarach iad agus chun

a chinntiú go mbeidh leagan Gaeilge den fhoirm ar fáil i gcónaí; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [34920/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Níl cúram oifigiúil agam don Dáil mar gheall ar an ábhar seo. Níl le reachtaíocht atá an cheist seo bainte ach le nós imeachta na nGardaí agus, mar sin, tá an Roinn Dlí agus Cirt agus Comhionannais freagrach as.

Departmental Staff Redeployment

210. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide in tabular form the total number of staff under the remit of his Department that have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35301/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): To date in 2015, two members of staff of my Department have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region. One was an internal transfer from our Dublin to Shannon Offices and the other from our Shannon offices to another Department's offices in the region. Both transfer applications were approved. Where possible, my Department accommodates such applications from staff to move to offices located outside the Dublin region.

Scéim na bhFoghlaimoirí Gaeilge

211. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cén méid airgid a íocadh amach faoi scéim na bhFoghlaimoirí Gaeilge gach bliain ó 2009 briste síos de réir contae; cén líon scoláirí ar íocadh deontais ina leith briste síos ar an mbealach céanna; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [34921/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Tá an t-eolas atá iarrtha ag an Teachta tugtha i bhfoirm tábla thíos. Áirítear anseo líon na bhfoghlaimoirí a bhí ar iostas le teaghlaigh Ghaeltachta agus i mbrúna sa Ghaeltacht agus i dtí cinn de choláistí cónaithe seanbhunaithe taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht. Áirítear anseo fosta na hábhair oidí agus daoine fásta eile a d'fhreastail ar chúrsaí sa Ghaeltacht. Baineann an t-eolas faoin mbliain 2015 leis na híocaíochtaí atá déanta go deireadh Mheán Fómhair 2015. Tá roinnt íocaíochtaí eile le déanamh go fóill faoin scéim i mbliana.

2009	Líon scoláirí	Caiteachas faoin Scéim
Co. Dhún na nGall	5,803	€949,636.65
Co. Mhaigh Eo	2,930	€463,690.00
Co. na Gaillimhe	12,546	€2,835,404.15
Co. Chiarraí	2,804	€603,710.75
Co. Chorcaí	1,746	€360,213.00
Co. Phort Láirge	1,343	€289,285.50
Co. na Mí	198	€42,409.50
Co. an Chláir	216	€49,108.50
IOMLÁN	27,586	€5,593,458.05

Questions - Written Answers

2010	Líon scoláirí	Caiteachas faoin Scéim
Co. Dhún na nGall	5,141	€762,845.20
Co. Mhaigh Eo	2,786	€381,728.00
Co. na Gaillimhe	11,961	€2,548,891.00
Co. Chiarraí	2,279	€442,014.85
Co. Chorcaí	1,393	€273,630.00
Co. Phort Láirge	1,144	€231,660.00
Co. na Mí	195	€40,820.00
Co. an Chláir	221	€46,260.00
IOMLÁN	25,120	€4,727,849.05

2011	Líon scoláirí	Caiteachas faoin Scéim
Co. Dhún na nGall	4,675	€660,225.50
Co. Mhaigh Eo	2,874	€367,250.50
Co. na Gaillimhe	12,311	€2,472,176.50
Co. Chiarraí	2,331	€470,503.05
Co. Chorcaí	1,031	€190,218.50
Co. Phort Láirge	1,017	€194,290.50
Co. na Mí	279	€52,953.00
Co. an Chláir	196	€38,541.50

2012	Líon scoláirí	Caiteachas faoin Scéim
Co. Dhún na nGall	4,737	€664,350.75
Co. Mhaigh Eo	2,936	€318,810.50
Co. na Gaillimhe	11,668	€2,352,816.00
Co. Chiarraí	2,146	€407,881.35
Co. Chorcaí	1,019	€120,441.00
Co. Phort Láirge	893	€119,051.00
Co. na Mí	278	€51,129.00
Co. an Chláir	163	€16,945.00
IOMLÁN	23,840	€4,051,424.60

2013	Líon scoláirí	Caiteachas faoin Scéim
Co. Dhún na nGall	4,702	€629,770.20
Co. Mhaigh Eo	2,957	€311,049.50
Co. na Gaillimhe	10,995	€2,199,580.00
Co. Chiarraí	2,092	€365,220.05
Co. Chorcaí	877	€106,337.00
Co. Phort Láirge	648	€83,021.00
Co. na Mí	342	€62,092.00
Co. an Chláir	170	€15,685.00
IOMLÁN	22,783	€3,772,754.75

2014	Líon scoláirí	Caiteachas faoin Scéim
Co. Dhún na nGall	4,057	€624,682.00
Co. Mhaigh Eo	2,742	€267,792.50
Co. na Gaillimhe	11,040	€2,023,207.50
Co. Chiarraí	1,687	€290,634.50

Co. Chorcaí	777	€89,254.50
Co. Phort Láirge	687	€76,097.00
Co. na Mí	345	€56,924.00
Co. an Chláir	174	€16,480.00
IOMLÁN	21,509	€3,445,072.00
2015	Líon Scoláirí	Caiteachas Faoin Scéim
Co. Dhún na nGall	4,737	€639,509.00
Co. Mhaigh Eo	2,699	€264,995.00
Co na Gaillimhe	11,191	€1,985,907.00
Co. Chiarraí	1,921	€285,569.00
Co. Chorcaí	708	€78,187.00
Co. Phort Láirge	776	€75,407.00
Co. na Mí	344	€57,000.00
Co. an Chláir	32	€9,380.00
IOMLÁN	22,408	€3,395,954.00

Calafóirt agus Céanna

212. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil airgead curtha ar fáil sa gClár Bun Structúr agus Infheistíochta Caipitil 2016-2021 d'fhorbairt an Chéibh in Inis Oirr; má tá, cé mhéid agus cén uair atá i gceist tairiscintí a lorg don obair seo, ó tharla go bhfuil cead pleanála ann cheana don obair; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [34935/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Dírím aird an Teachta ar an bhfreagra a thug an tAire Comhshaoil, Pobal agus Rialtais Áitiúil, Alan Kelly, T.D., ar Cheist Dála Uimh. 703 agus 716 inné.

Hedge Cutting Season

213. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht further to Parliamentary Question No.666 of 10 February 2015, if there is an update from the working group regarding possible changes to hedge cutting; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34936/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Vegetation such as hedgerows and scrub is important as wildlife habitat and needs to be managed in the interests of both farming and biodiversity. In that regard, a review of the current legislative provisions was initiated to ensure that they remain both effective and balanced. The submissions received, during a public consultation process on the matter, have been published on the website of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department at <http://www.npws.ie/legislation>.

Following the end of the public consultation period, I established a Working Group, consisting of officials from my Department, to consider the submissions received and to report back to me with a range of proposals. I expect to announce the outcome of the review in the near future.

Any changes to the closed period for cutting, grubbing, burning or destruction of vegetation, as provided for in section 40 of the Wildlife Acts 1976-2012, would require amending legisla-

tion.

Island Communities

214. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the reason a 100% grant was not provided for the provision of the school bus link from Cleggan to Galway, given the principle of providing equality of access to education to persons in peripheral areas and islands; the saving involved in looking for a local contribution; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34951/15]

215. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the reason funding is no longer being provided to the minibus service that used to link the early sailing from Inishbofin to Cleggan, to Clifden, County Galway on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays to enable persons to do business there or link with the bus service to Galway; the method of travel she expects persons from the island who do not have cars on the mainland to use to get to Clifden in the absence of this service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34952/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 214 and 215 together.

As with all other road transport services subsidised by my Department, a maximum fare has been stipulated for the Cleggan to Galway school bus service. The maximum fare is not considered to be unduly onerous given that the service involves a twice-weekly round trip of some 180 km.

In relation to the early morning minibus service from Cleggan to Clifden, to which the Deputy refers, my Department understands that this service was being provided at the discretion of the ferry service operator. It was not funded by my Department.